Empowering engineers through tailored training

TOA UK's Managing Director, Ian Bridgewater, highlights the importance of tailored training sessions and their impact on safety and technical proficiency



After 30 years with the company, Ian Bridgewater was promoted to Managing Director of TOA Corporation (UK) Ltd in 2024. In this interview, Ian discusses TOA's diverse training options, which include both online and face-to-face sessions. These programs are designed to be accessible and flexible for all participants, catering to the specific needs of various roles—from product sales to installation engineers—making them an invaluable resource for any team.

Can you provide an overview of the training programmes offered by TOA UK?

Technical support and training go hand in hand at TOA UK. On a day-to-day basis our tech team offer advice, system design and technical assistance for projects and products. Our full day training courses focus on two key subject matters: Understanding and installing 100V line systems and designing public address and voice alarm evacuation systems and the regulations that apply. As these subjects must adhere to EN-54 and BS standards and ultimately concern evacuation and people's life safety we are passionate about training engineers to understand the implications and responsibilities involved to use audio in this field.

To support online training we have the European TOA Online Academy which allows us to broaden the availability of product and application training. Participants can sign up to the Academy for one of the bite-sized

courses. Academy membership also gives access to our filmed archive so if someone misses a course or wants to go back to it at all, as a reference, they can.

What are the key advantages of online and in-person training programs?

Online training is an excellent solution when time and distance is a problem and allows us to reach out to more engineers in the field than ever before. It was a key method of communicating and assisting with installations during the pandemic when building construction was one of the few industries allowed to continue.

TOA online training follows the same format as face-to-face training with small groups so that attendees have the chance to discuss their individual needs with our technicians and gives ample opportunity for Q&As. They cover all the same aspects of 100V line and public address/ voice alarm, so the trainees have the same knowledge with both options.

The advantage of face-to-face training is that it allows delegates to have the opportunity to be tactile with products. Our training facility has fully functioning voice alarm systems to allow for a complete product overview and hands on approach to product understanding.

Both methods of training have their advantages, so it is important to provide multiple training options to suit all client needs such as time, location and project.

How do you customise training sessions to meet the specific needs and expertise levels of participants?

In our TOA UK courses every participant is asked to fill in a pre-training questionnaire so we can determine the level that the course needs to be delivered at and how much experience they have. We don't have specific course dates as we think it is more productive to work with individual companies so that we can discuss particular projects with them.

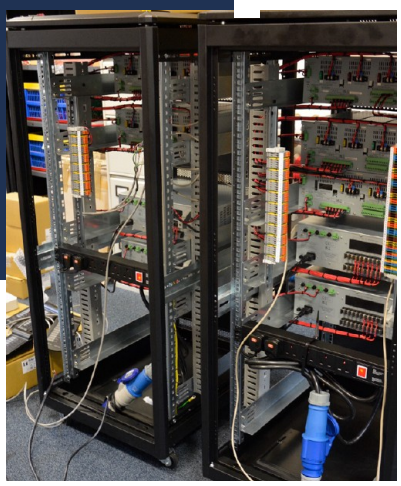
This gives them the opportunity to bring plans and diagrams specific to them to the table and ask questions to our technical team about finding the best solutions for their project. This also gives them the flexibility to work around their timetable rather than one we have set, and we will happily train on a 1:1 basis if that is the need or in larger groups depending on the size of the company.

Who are the primary audiences for your training programmes?

The primary audience for our training is engineers and system installers who want a deeper understanding of public address and voice alarm systems. Our training is very individual and often project related. Once we have the client questionnaires back we evaluate them and offer advice on how we can tailor-make the course for that group. We also advocate small groups to allow the scope to revisit topics and have extensive Q&As at the end. ▸



> "OUR PRIMARY AUDIENCE IS ENGINEERS AND SYSTEM INSTALLERS WHO WANT A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF PUBLIC ADDRESS AND VOICE ALARM SYSTEMS."







Once training is complete, they can follow up with our technical team by phone, email or teams. We aim to be as flexible as possible to give the highest standard of training. It is important to TOA that our systems are installed correctly and meet the required standards in voice alarm because you are ultimately providing equipment that helps keep people safe in the event of an emergency.

How do you ensure that both newcomers and advanced professionals find value in the training?

As we offer bespoke training specific to a company's needs, we are able to discuss this at the initial stages to ensure we capture as much information as possible before they attend. Especially with voice alarm, each system is unique, so it is important to us that current or potential installers understand the principles of the design and build and how important the standards are.

Our voice alarm and public address courses are split into three sections: PA 100V Master Class, Voice Alarm Systems, which covers legislation, and product specific about the VX-3000 Series so they can pick and choose which aspects they need to know and what knowledge they have in each section - New to PA/VA, some experience or experienced.

Generally, we find that engineers that want more knowledge on this subject have either been tasked with supplying a new system or with maintaining or upgrading an existing system, so we work with them to ensure they are fully up to speed on this and offer future technical support where need be. We follow up training sessions with copies of any materials used as a reference point and each attendee is issued with a certificate.

> **"FACE-TO-FACE TRAINING ALLOWS DELEGATES TO BE TACTILE WITH PRODUCTS, PROVIDING A COMPLETE PRODUCT OVERVIEW AND HANDS-ON APPROACH."**

What are the benefits of attending face-to-face training sessions?

Face-to-face training has the advantage of being hands-on and tactile working directly with the products. Our voice alarm rack builds are custom-built in our workshop in the UK so trainees get to see this process and how rack builds are designed to the individual building specification. It also enables them to see working interaction between a custom-built VX-3000 system teamed with VX-3308WM wall mount system and how both racks and wall mounts can be connected together and how we design this.

The flexibility of the VX-3308WM provides this solution and can work in conjunction with larger racks. Being able to demonstrate the connection and how different microphones and speakers work within this system gives trainees a better insight into how to build a multifaceted PA/VA system.

How do you envision the role of training evolving in the fire and safety industry over the next few years?

We expect to see growth in face-to face training as new products, that are currently in development, come to the market and more companies see the value of hands-on experience to learn about changes in technology. The development of digital products over analogue and the expansion of IP in our market will require installers to have new knowledge, skills and competencies.

As a manufacturer we have already focused on the importance in investing in our own training to enable us to pass on our expertise and to share industry developments to greater effect. In December 2020 the TOA 'Knowledge Square' was opened. A new concept for a business base it brings together our research and developers with end users, business partners and institutions such as universities. This global facility allows partnerships to flourish and knowledge to grow. ▪



Ian Bridgewater