

The Icon Venue Group is shopping for a video display board for the new facility in Newark, N.J., seen in an artist rendition.



Courtesy of Morris Adjmi Architects

BUYERS TAKE IN ALL THE ANGLES

Buying a spectacular video display system for some new stadium or arena isn't exactly like picking up a TV for your family room ... is it?

"Well, the bottom line is still getting the best product at the best price," says Tim Romani, president of Icon Venue Group and now principal in charge of development for a \$310 million Newark arena for the New Jersey Devils. "As fast as technology changes, there's no single way to go about buying a system."

Michael Hallmark, another development guru who recently was named director of arena development for the NBA Nets' new facility in Brooklyn, N.Y., espouses a similar philosophy.

"In some ways, it's the same as computers, plasma TVs, all those types of things," Hallmark says. "The more common something becomes, the less expensive it's going to be. In the LED (video board) market, prices keep dropping."

"You wouldn't rush out to the store and buy something if there was going to be a newer version available for less money in three months. In the world of electronics, you probably want to wait for what you want."

Neither man, however, will dawdle long on the planning end.

"That starts right at the outset, with concept drawings," Hallmark says. "You're always thinking about fan experience. Our intent (when designing) Staples Center (in Los Angeles) was to have one whole wall be an LED board, but it was too expensive at that time."

"But the video companies are always in touch from the beginning. They call us, we call them. There are always technical questions."

Romani and Hallmark have slightly different challenges — and different roles — in their quests to bring audio-visual excitement to the New York area.

In Newark, for instance, nearly one entire outside wall of the arena will become an LED spectacular that could

be more than 60 feet high.

"That system naturally will have to be designed specifically for this project and purchased as part of the contractor's work on the building," Romani says. "The interior systems will be handled separately."

Romani says that it was possible different LED board manufacturers could win contracts for the inside and outside displays and that if the situation called for it, he might consider buying various components of a video system individually.

Hallmark doesn't have an LED exterior wall to consider as the Brooklyn project rolls toward a fall 2008 opening, but he has another issue on the agenda that won't trouble Romani.

The Brooklyn arena eventually will be run by a professional management company, so Hallmark and the Forest City Ratner Cos. ownership group will have to hire one, then consult with their new managers on the purchase and operation of the video displays. Romani has AEG and its vast operational expertise set to run all facets of the buildings he's steering toward completion.

One thing both development experts preach, however, is patience when purchasing technology.

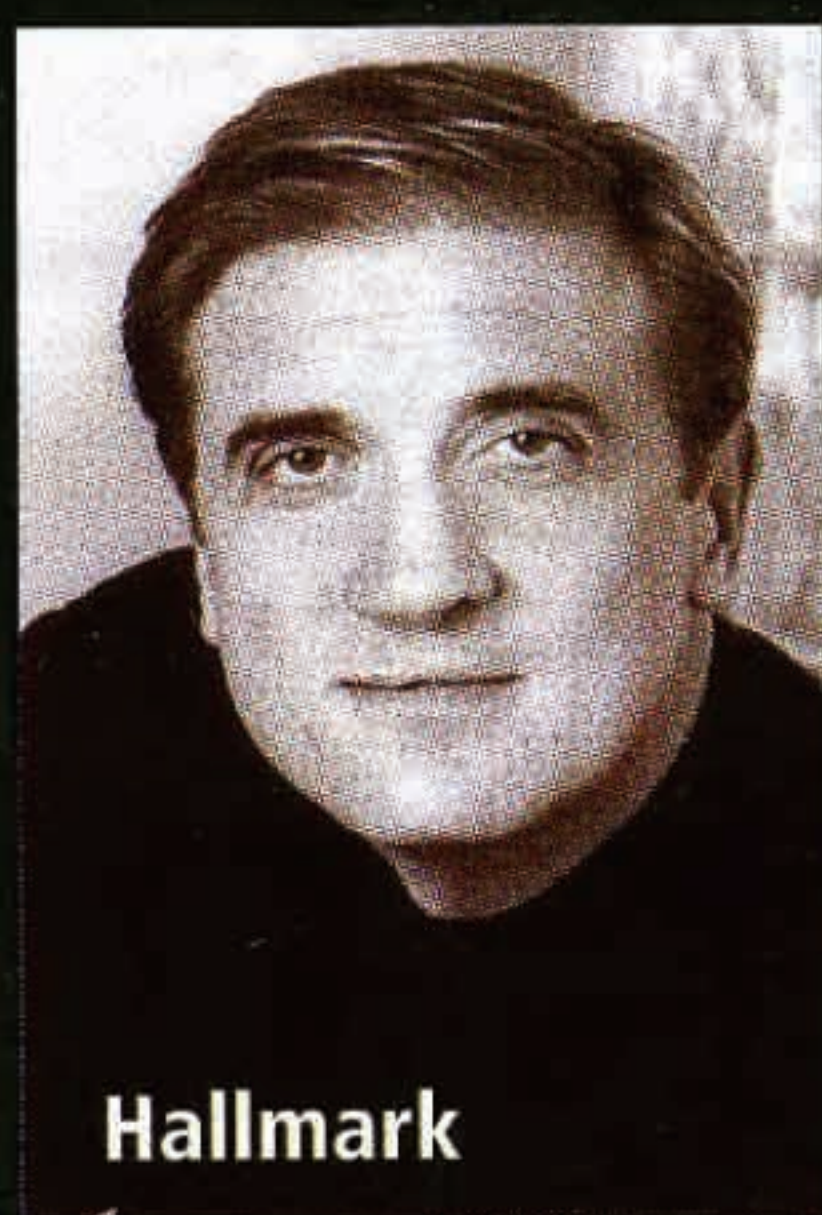
"Look at the history of it," Romani says. "Sony was the first, then you could say Mitsubishi leapfrogged them. And it's kept on changing. Daktronics has been successful offering a turnkey operation. There are other companies and so many options. The competition puts you in a good position as a buyer."

So how do you reach a decision?

"During the renovation of America West Arena in Phoenix, we wound up getting a \$5 million system," Hallmark says. "We had a 'shootout,' with three companies setting up displays at the old arena (Veterans Memorial Coliseum)."

"You can't get in a position where you're only thinking of one group, even if you've had success working with them on another project. Every deal is different, so you don't ever get too close to any particular company."

"It's the same thing as farmers not giving names to their animals," Hallmark adds, "in case they have to eat one for dinner." — S.C.



Hallmark