

Cooper B-Line's F.A.S.T. underfloor cable support system combines cable tray, support stands, and accessories in a single component.



## Growth underfoot

*Robust data center construction and increased security applications are creating a boom in underfloor cable management.* by **Dan Carazo**

**The primary growth area** for underfloor wire basket cable routing systems is for data center applications, according to Andy Chaloupka, business development manager for Panduit. "Underfloor cable management solutions are used to route and support high-performance data communications and power cables under the raised floors found in the majority of data centers," he noted.

"With communication cabling and high-speed networking increasing the use of cable tray systems, the underfloor cable tray market has grown more than 20% over the past two years," said Dallas Kellerman, wire mesh product line manager for Cablofil/Legrand.

Another trend seen in data centers is the increased use of power cabling and larger-diameter cabling installed in

cable trays. "Lately we're seeing cable trays carrying more power via standard MC," said Roger Jette, president of Snake Tray. "This eliminates the need for more expensive liquid-tight extruded plastic conduit, which historically was used to protect power cables against moisture on the floor. On a major data center this solution can save several hundred thousand dollars."

Increased use of Cat 6A cabling is also having a big impact, Jette added. "Larger-capacity cable tray systems are being specified more frequently to accommodate the larger-diameter cabling and denser runs," he noted. And while underfloor style seems to be the most specified system, the specific underfloor system often varies because of obstacles trays sometimes encounter.

"Deeper wire mesh cable tray systems seem to be the main specification change. With 2" deep trays being common for years, 4" depth is now the common tray required to carry the larger cables and capacities," said Kellerman.

## CABLE MANAGEMENT PRODUCT TRENDS

Over the past year, several strong trends have impacted the VDV cable management product category—the greatest of which has come from the growing demands for increased cable capacity, and the ability to handle cables with a larger outer diameter.

“Cable management products are now accommodating higher cable densities and higher-performance cables,” said Clark Kromenaker, business development manager for Panduit. “They are being utilized to manage higher usage of mixed media such as fiber and copper in the same pathways.”

As with the cable tray category, data centers are generating strong demand for a host of products. “An increasing number of applications is being sourced from the data center,” explained Kromenaker. “For example, traditionally disparate functions like telephone [telco], security, and HVAC are finding linkage to the data center, which is requiring new cable management techniques in more typically a mixed media environment. Also, information demands are driving the adoption of higher-bandwidth cable, which also requires new cable management techniques.

“With telco, security, HVAC components and other services becoming Ethernet enabled, many enterprises plan to leverage their IT investment beyond just the data center and use the same resources for other services,” he continued.

According to Mike O'Brien, director of product marketing for Wiremold/Legrand, the market for poke-thru devices as an open-space solution continues to grow, with expected growth in 2008 projected at 6% to 8% and sales split 70% commercial and 30% institutional.

“A poke-thru device provides a unique solution to the marketplace due to the fact that it is a UL Fire Classified product,” said O'Brien. “With the growth of open-space office environments over the last few decades, it has become increasingly necessary to access the concrete floor slab to provide wire and cabling to devices in these open spaces.”

He explained that older poke-thru prod-

ucts only provided for devices to be mounted on the surface of the floor. “New poke-thru devices allow for retrofitting existing open-space areas by core drilling through the concrete slab and bringing the wire and cabling from below, and yet still maintain the fire rating of the floor,” said O'Brien.

### NEW MATERIALS

Sometimes new materials improve product performance and change buyer preferences. Clearly, this has taken place as manufacturers create a new generation of nonmetallic cable management products.

“The ability to offer molded plastic vs. extruded plastic allows us to deliver more features and reduced product weight,” explained Gary Bernstein, director of product management for Leviton Network Solutions.

Kromenaker pointed out that early cable management products were made of metal and that some have evolved into cable-friendly plastics.

“Buyer preference has moved to more advanced cable management products because the new high-bandwidth media require it,” said Kromenaker. “Current product innovations include highly tooled plastic-molded solutions that are specifically designed for the horizontal and vertical cabling applications. Also, cable management products that support mixed media applications are helping customers achieve higher performance in less space within the data center and reduce the cost of ownership.”

Bernstein suggested that distributors can increase their sales by recommending always using horizontal and vertical cable management on every rack, as dollars add up quickly with two vertical managers per rack and a 2U horizontal manager for every patch panel.

“Distributors can also increase sales by helping their customers understand the value that new cable management solutions offer by better managing, protecting, and showcasing their investment,” added Kromenaker. —D.C.



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## THE METAL MOVE

According to Gene Hancock, general manager Cope Cable Tray Systems/ Allied Electrical Group, more facilities are using aluminum cable tray rather than steel.

"Aluminum is lighter, is easier to install, and holds up in many environments," he said. "And, with the recent increases in the cost of steel, aluminum could become an economical choice."

Rodney Rouleau, product line manager for Panduit, acknowledged increased security for the strong demand for the company's metal raceway products. "The continued attention to safety and security in schools and the workplace are the primary drivers that have led to a greater demand for the use of metallic routing solutions. Two top-of-mind issues that are contributing to the growth of metal raceway are electrical bonding and the deployment of 10Gb

copper connectivity," added Rouleau.

Hancock pointed out that although larger cable tray orders are usually procured through a formal bid process and are subject to pre-engineered specifica-

B-Line. "Distributors should be well positioned to grow their business in the data center market segment if they think in terms of providing complete solutions and educate their customers on how

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—Dallas Kellerman, Cablofil/LeGrand

tions, there are opportunities for distributors to stimulate increased sales.

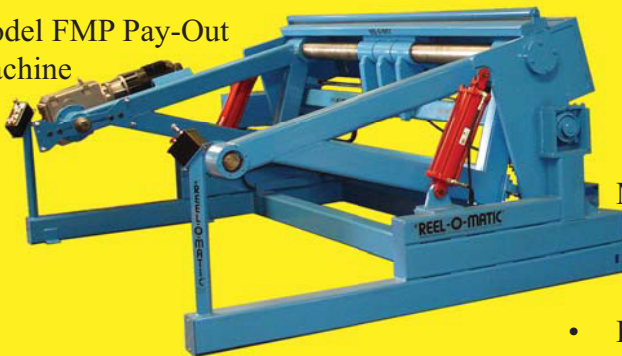
"Cable tray is almost always installed by electricians who buy their products from distributors," said Sean Cheatham, product line manager for Cooper

those solutions can benefit electrical contractors." ■

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