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Installing the paging system at San Diego International Airport's expanded Terminal 2 is a déjà vu type of project for Pete Spencer.

"Our first contract with the airport was 25 to 30 years ago," said Spencer, owner of La Mesa-based Audio Associates. "We put in the first professional paging system at the time. Before that, they had a piecemeal system that didn't work very well and had a lot of complaints. They decided to move ahead and put it out for bid, we were successful and got the contract.

"It was the first fully automatic digital sound system on the West Coast, cutting-edge technology back then. Now we're installing even more cutting-edge technology (at Terminal 2) that's never been done anywhere else in the country."

Spencer offered some comparisons: The first system at SAN required about a dozen 7-foot-high by 2-foot-wide equipment racks. The new systems take up three equipment racks, including one component box the size of a VCR that replaces 40 to 50 inches of equipment. Audio Associates is installing a digital paging system at Terminal 2 expansion.

Among the newest features is text to speech. Flight changes entered via computer are automatically recorded and announced over the system, such as "United Air Lines flight 123 to Chicago's O'Hare International Airport will now depart from Gate 2 at 1:35 p.m."

Maintenance of the massive audio system — about 1,000 speakers and 100,000 feet of speaker wires — will be easier than ever. Staff can use iPads to service the system over a private IP network for issues such as volume level and message-board routing. Amplifier diagnostics and emergency paging can be handled from Audio Associate's office before determining if a service call is needed.



Spencer, whose firm is creating the public-address system at the new Central Library in downtown San Diego, has installed paging and audio systems at other airports including Palm Springs International and John Wayne in Santa Ana, recognizes their importance in the nation's daily air traffic movements.

"They're designed with travelers in mind because they need to hear the messages about when they can board their planes," he said. "I never realized how important this is to the public until a Southwest Airlines flight manager said, 'If these people don't hear the announcement that the plane's departing, I can't get them on board. If I can't get them on board, they're going to miss their flight, which means they're not going to fly Southwest. In the meantime, the plane is going to depart late and arrive late. So it becomes a domino effect across the nation.'"

~ By Glenn Grant, The Daily Transcript