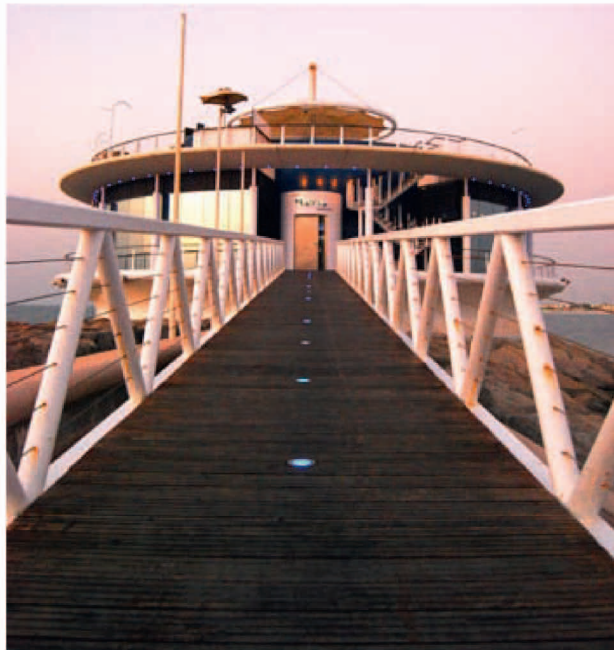


INSTALLATION

Funktioning in 360

Few Dubai venues offer the atmosphere of 360, taking in panoramic views of the Jumeirah Beach hotel, the Burj Arab and miles of ocean. As **Barney Jameson** discovers, a new Funktion-One system is adding superb sound as well



A walk across the water – the bridge to the 360 Bar



The 360 dancefloor, as the sun sets

EVEN IN DUBAI, A CITY

renowned for its spectacular nightspots, the 360° bar is impressive. It is set 200m from the shore and connected to the Jumeirah Beach resort by a seawall walkway. With access limited to just 250, the bar – which is set atop the Marina seafood restaurant in a rooftop terrace – offers its guests a laid-back party on the ocean, with breathtaking panoramic views over Dubai's ever-changing coastline. That now includes the adjacent Burj Arab seven star hotel, which customers can admire from the oversized sofas soothed by sea breezes.

But with a location as distinctive as this comes a challenge that few venues around the world have to meet quite so dramatically – its environment. For audio professionals, 360° is unique not only for its appeal as an after-dark destination, but for its potential to destroy loudspeaker systems in record time. From an audio perspective, 360° might just be the toughest gig in Dubai.

Firstly there's the temperature to contend with; no small problem in an Emirate where the majority of music-based systems are installed in air-conditioned rooms. There's no such luxury for 360°, where the

humid Dubai heat bakes its sound system as relentlessly as the rest of the coastline. Secondly, and more destructively, there is the ocean, its salinity insinuating itself into the most robust of systems, corroding them beyond use.

Finally, even if an audio install survives the weather, there are the neighbours to consider. The bar is part of the Jumeirah Beach resort, with its famous wave-shaped hotel a mere stroll away. The Burj Al Arab makes for a stunning view, but its customers don't want to hear the 360° audio spilling across the water. With VIP guests in close proximity, the system has to contain its sound

within the decked club area, but without lowering the volume to levels that could lose clubbers to another Dubai hotspot.

All of these issues came to the fore in June of this year, when the bar closed for refurbishment during the summer months. Despite having only debuted its last sound system two years ago, 360° was deemed in need of a new audio install, the environment having rapidly taken its toll on the existing speakers. As part of the consultation process, 360° bar manager Andy Erokhin and his team turned to local supplier AMB Group, the UAE distributor for Funktion-One, which recommended

an F88-based system capable of localising the sound, while withstanding the environmental challenges – thanks to some clever customisation.

The Funktion-One F88 is a direct radiating loudspeaker, comprising two custom 8-inch drivers and a diffraction slot tweeter. The 150W rated speaker differs from most enclosures in that it exerts horizontal dispersion in excess of 120°, and offering high output with clear vocal intelligibility. Not surprisingly, both the bar's management and AMB Group immediately recognised the speaker's potential for creating a



In the shadow of the Burj Dubai – one of the pole-mounted F88s



The outer ring of Funktion-One F88 cabinets angled to confine the sound to the bar area

strong audio system within 360° that wouldn't spill out of the venue's confines.

However, that still left the humidity, salinity and heat to withstand. The 15mm birch plywood housings of the 16 cabinets were extensively treated by Funktion-One's team in the UK, as were the cones and components, safeguarding them against the corrosive environment. Further modifications to eight of the F88s, used in the bar's most exposed locations, saw new rear panels fitted during manufacturing, allowing the back of the speaker to be hard wired and flush mounted to custom made poles, eliminating back panel connections and any possibility of corrosion at the speaker connections.

It's a bold solution to the problem. To contain as much sound where needed as possible, eight stainless steel poles have been installed around the bar's circumference, all angled inwards, with F88s flush-mounted at their tips. This outer ring is then augmented by a further six F88s, which are dedicated to the bar area, while the dancefloor uses four dedicated F88s controlled by the DJ mix, and which are focused on the dancefloor. The result is tightly concentrated coverage that ensures the systems' energy, which is powered by Funktion-One amplifiers, is kept within the club, thus containing the decibels. Conversely, the innovative mounting-solution ensures that the environment is kept out of the loudspeakers, creating what may be 360°'s best hope of an enduring audio install.

Meanwhile, to ensure that DJs don't exceed sensitive level limits, the installation team has added a Formula Sound limiter, which restricts the level to a maximum 96dB. The DJ area, which is furnished with a Pioneer CDJ800 mixer, is also served by two Funktion-One F81 monitors.

Two 600W rated Minibass 212 subwoofers, floor mounted under the DJ area, provide a further bass extension down to 40Hz. However, while AMB Group may have come up with a neat solution

to the difficulties of installing a new system within 360°, it was inevitable that further problems would arise, especially with a tight deadline that would enable the bar to re-open as Ramadan ended and Eid began. 'Due to reduced working hours over Ramadan there was a backlog at Dubai Port and delays in customs clearance,' explains Peter James, general manager of AMB Group's Projects and Rental Division, remembering that finishing the 360° project required more than just technical expertise. 'We had allocated three days to do the installation and tune the system. Although the ship docked on June 19 we didn't receive the stock until 6.30pm on June 29, leaving us only two days to install, test and commission the system. That day was spent on the phone with various people pulling strings wherever they could...'

As if the pressure of mounting a customised install into one of Dubai's most prestigious and challenging venues was not enough to make AMB feel a chill despite the desert heat, the supplier also

had to deliver on the promise of one of its most creative projects during Ramadan, working to a tight schedule, and all in the knowledge that one of the first guests of the newly reopened 360° would be Mr Funktion-One himself, company founder Tony Andrews.

Even worse was the prospect that the customised system simply wouldn't arrive in time. 'We initially had a tentative delivery of 2pm and decided if it was later than that we would have to install a temporary system from our rental dept for the opening night,' remembers Mr James. 'It was far from what everyone wanted but there appeared to be no other option.'

With short days and long delays, many installers are familiar with the peculiar challenges that can occur during the Islam Holy Month. Having created such a carefully crafted solution to the difficulties of the 360° install, however, the prospect of having to rely on a makeshift system for the bar's reopening was unpleasant.

Faced with what seemed like the inevitable, the AMB crew settled

on a 2.30pm cut-off for making the tough decision. But even the worst-case scenario presented new technical hurdles. 'The hardware and mounting poles were all designed for the Funktion-One F88, so we had a couple of technicians frantically fabricating adaptor plates and brackets just in case,' explains Mr James.

Thankfully, word came that the F88s were en-route, and though the 2.30pm deadline soon passed, the crew decided to wait patiently for the system proper. 'We decided we would go with the Funktion-One system and pull and all-nighter if necessary,' he continues. 'Nobody imagined the truck would take so long and there were some very nervous people watching us sitting there twiddling our thumbs. Finally we got word the stock had arrived and a well choreographed plan began.'

In the end, the panic was averted regardless of Dubai traffic issues. With the outer ring of F88 speakers mounted to their poles by late Monday night, news arrived that due to uncertainty over timing



Funktion-One F88 mounting

of the declaration of the end of Ramadan, the bar's opening night had been postponed by a day. But with time suddenly to spare, the AMB team concluded the project on time anyway. 'Final adjustments were carried out and the system finally powered up on Tuesday night, coinciding with the formal announcement of Eid,' says Mr James. 'Out of the box, with factory settings and no fine-tuning, the system sounded amazing. The most obvious comments were on the detail and clean sound. The coverage was evaluated and minor adjustments to aiming points carried out and finally, exhausted, we called it a night.'

Preliminary adjustments to the XTA processor were made during the day on Wednesday, before the grand reopening later that night offered the chance to properly evaluate the system's performance with a full house. 'I was surprised when we saw the levels on the SPL meter,' enthuses 360° promoter Alex Bracken. 'Although the system is loud, we can still carry on a conversation, which is most important for the bar staff. In addition the installation looks sensational and truly compliments such a unique venue.'

With the Funktion-One system now fully installed and operational, positive reactions from 360°'s staff and patrons have been plentiful, and AMB Group is celebrating the success of its plan to contain the SPL produced by the F88s within the bar itself. Mr James is certainly delighted, reporting that the system 'is now optimised and working perfectly with great numbers of customers commenting on the quality of the sound'. While minor adjustments are sure to follow as the bar's staff becomes more accustomed to the technology, he adds, the 360° install is fast becoming a flagship project for Funktion One.

Even the bar's DJ is full of praise for the new system, declaring it: 'so clean and detailed. Plus we can now deliver the experience to the whole venue, rather than just the dancefloor.' As for whether the new install will survive the harsh environment into which it has been placed, 360° is likely to find that for some time to come, its more audio-inclined visitors won't just be admiring the spectacular view; they'll be keeping an interested eye on the pole-mounted loudspeakers too.

www.ambgroupuae.com
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The Marina seafood restaurant, with 360 Bar above