



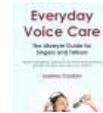
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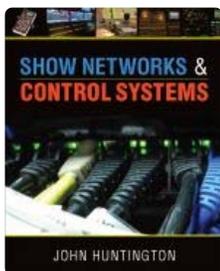
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## October 2012 Issue

### Off the Shelf Still Definitive



**Show Networks & Control Systems, by John Huntington, continues to be an indispensable guide to networking and control systems for entertainment**

When you search out books on technical theatre—let's say on lighting—you will find quite a few that cover lighting design, but not very many that really cover putting a lighting control system together. Yes, some may discuss or give a basic explanation of DMX, but let's face it, with today's control systems, understanding networking is an imperative to anyone who wishes to advance in the field. It's not uncommon for lighting systems

to require quite a few DMX and Art-Net universes now, and they require enough switches and routers to make your average IT person quake in their boots. On many shows these days there are also control networks for audio, video, automation, etc., in addition to the lighting network. And it's technicians and production electricians who pull everything together and configure the various control systems that make a production actually work. Today, having a knowledgebase in networking and control is an essential skill.

Since 1994 one book has become the standard text for systems integrators, technicians and professors who teach technologies for production: *Control Systems for Live Entertainment*, by educator, author, blogger and industry veteran John Huntington. He has recently released a fourth edition of the book that offered such a significant expansion on the subject of show networking it also warranted a title change. The book is now known as **Show Networks & Control Systems**, and it remains simply the best, most comprehensive book on the topic.

Huntington has expanded *Show Networks & Control Systems* to keep up with the state of the entertainment technology industry and the increasing demands of today's control technology. For example, the first edition had only five pages on networking itself; there are more than 80 pages on the topic in this edition. No other text compares to the depth of information so clearly and understandably shared here. Huntington again keeps his book relevant to the actual state of the industry while foreseeing the direction it is heading.

This fully revised fourth edition has a unique focus that encompasses control technology for all kinds of productions including theatre, television, concerts, theme parks and special events as well as related areas like themed retail, museums and cruise ships. Basically anywhere entertainment technology is used. He includes in-depth examination of control for lighting, audio, video, lasers, pyrotechnics, special effects, stage machinery and animatronics, along with other areas. What I particularly like is that Huntington focuses less on equipment, which goes obsolete quickly, and pays more attention to standards and techniques as well as good working practices. He hasn't written a manual, he has written a book that imparts knowledge, builds a foundation, and gives the reader a strong understanding of the subject.

This edition adds 30 new pages to the text, and has been given a major reorganization, which makes it clearer to use as both a reference or as a textbook. Whereas in the previous editions the book was broken down into sections by discipline (the lighting section covered DMX, audio covered MIDI and CobraNet, for example), in the new edition Huntington gives an overview of different disciplines at the front of the book, then breaks down distinct control systems in depth later. This new organization is a great way to get an overview for people who might be new to these concepts, but it is also an effective way to reflect the complexity of control today. Networks for different production elements are very interconnected—DMX is now being used to control video as well as lighting,

Written by Michael S. Eddy  
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for example.

Another thing that I like about the book is that it is both useful and understandable to new students starting to explore the topic (though he does expect readers to have a basic understanding of electricity and computers) while still speaking effectively to working professionals as an authoritative reference. He's added a glossary, which many people had asked for, as well as many cross-references to help support understanding a technology in its many permutations. Both of these make it very easy to jump around to the section that is applicable to you at the moment. He has added more relevant real-world examples to illustrate the technologies. Quite a few graphical aids help readers navigate through the information and do a good job of highlighting areas to which the reader should pay particular attention.

If you work with control systems and networks in any kind of entertainment technology application, I highly recommend this book. Even if you have one of the older editions, this is a significant update, well worth putting on your shelf as the go-to reference for networking and control. I also highly recommend this book for use as a textbook to college educators that teach theatre technology, and I think that motivated students who want to pursue this field of endeavor would be well served by getting a copy of *Show Networks & Control Systems*.

While this edition is not available as an e-book just yet, I would not put it past Huntington to put together an electronic version, which will allow for easy updating as well as links to supplemental material for further study and reference. He is, however, posting supplemental video lectures for each chapter on his website, [www.controlgeek.net](http://www.controlgeek.net).

*Show Networks & Control Systems* retails for \$50 (U.S.) and is available through John Huntington's website at [www.controlgeek.net](http://www.controlgeek.net) as well as at the PLSN Bookshelf: [www.plsnbookshelf.com](http://www.plsnbookshelf.com).

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