

A Case Study of Modular vs. Stick-Built Elevators

We are often asked how the cost of a modular elevator compares to the costs of a stick-built elevator. This can be a hard question to answer, because each elevator is custom and unique, and we rarely have an exact apples-to-apples comparison. Additionally, some of the elevator-related site work eliminated with a modular elevator is difficult to extract from the total costs of a large project.

However, in 2016, the stars aligned, and two elevator projects with very similar specifications were completed in Southern Illinois. Both were retrofit elevators attached to two-story brick buildings. One was stick-built and one was modular, and we were privy to the total project costs on both.

The table below summarizes the specifications, costs and timeline of both elevators.

	Modular Elevator	Stick-built Elevator
Location	Centralia, IL	Mt. Vernon, IL
Type	Hydraulic	Hydraulic
Exterior Finish	Brick	Brick
Number of Stops	3	2
Travel Distance	11 feet	10 feet
Time	2.5 months	10 months
Cost	\$150,000	\$249,998
Parts	Non-proprietary	Proprietary

The first, a traditional stick-built elevator, took 10 months to complete. Significant site work had to be done before the elevator could be installed. And it cost a quarter million dollars.

The second project, a church, opted for a modular elevator. Both time and cost were huge factors for this customer, because they were replacing an aging, noisy vertical platform lift, and wanted accessibility restored as quickly as possible. The GC dug the footings and poured the pit while the modular elevator was manufactured offsite, so total project duration was only two and a half months.

It's clear modular was the right choice for the church and would have been for the traditional project as well. Not only did modular save a large amount of time, but also a large amount of money.

In addition to the \$100,000 construction cost savings, the modular elevator used non-proprietary parts, while the stick-built elevator had a proprietary controller. Because that manufacturer won't provide the diagnostic tools for its elevators to other companies, the customer is locked into using them for maintenance, which takes away the customer's leverage to get competitive pricing. So they will be paying more every month for the life of the elevator.