

The Future of Professional Practice Conference: A Preview

by Michael Bordenaro

After a dramatic 12-month period of industry change, the **Future of Professional Practice** conference promises to be both an exciting year-in-review and a look at what is to come through technology-enabled process evolution.

The ability to base near-term decisions on recent successes will afford attendees confidence when facing the inevitable business process changes enabled by advanced technology.

Since the November 2006 launch of the first unified building industry process change initiative, the concept of “change” has been in the title of many building industry conferences held and planned. Last November, a multiassociation group named 3xPT (Three Times Process Transformation) was formed by the AIA, the Association of General Contractors (AGC) and the Construction Users Round Table (CURT) to indicate the obvious industry transformation in place.

Since then, AIA National, the AIA California Council, and the AIA Technology in Practice (TAP) Knowledge Community have embraced the concept of change in their events. Now that change is being endorsed by building industry leaders, it is possible to form a consensus on what to change.

At the Future of Professional Practice conference, to be held December 2–4, 2007 at the Capital Hilton in Washington, D.C., architects and allied professionals will present a diverse view of recent issues and case studies. These will point to the upcoming technology and process changes that will impact the art and business of architecture in a dramatic way.

From university curricula to large-firm management to small-firm case studies, the eclectic interests of the building industry will be addressed by architects...and architects representing owners, engineers, contractors, and manufacturers.

The concurrent tracks are

- Leading the Business
- Developing the People
- Delivering the Work
- The Range of Technologies for Your Firm (basic)
- Leveraging BIM and Integrated Practice (advanced)

Presentation titles include The Transitional Small Practice, Resolving the Dilemmas of Cooperation, and Quantifying BIM—Benefits for the Architects, CM, and Owner.



In The Transitional Small Practice, Daniel Garber, AIA, Fergus Garber Group, says he will offer directly applicable experience and advice. "For example, in a small firm, it is a struggle for principals to find the time to learn new processes, so having someone sit at your elbow for two hours a week can make more sense than taking a technology seminar."

Cliff Moser, MSQA, AIA, LEED AP, of CADFORCE Inc. will draw on his past experience with RTKL and Perkins & Will and his current position assisting architectural workflow distribution approaches to show how it is possible to implement change. "There will be some shared frustrations and suggested improvements in design standardization to ensure as much quality as possible when implementing new technologies and processes," says Moser, who is slated to speak on The Distributed Workforce with Mario Sanchez, AIA, of RTKL Associates.

Construction is where process change hits the road, and this nexus will be represented by architects who work for construction companies. Jim Berick, AIA, of Webcor Builders, will be part of a panel exploring return on investment in process change and advanced technology.

In a different exploration of this important financial issue, Michael LeFevre, AIA, with Holder Construction Company, will join others to outline the benefits not only to architects but to contractors, construction management providers, and most importantly, building owners. "Certainly within our own company, we have to show people the money," LeFevre says. "Because we are in our second and third wave of projects, we can offer advice on what to model and what not to model and when to model even just to gain understanding," LeFevre says. "I will show a 'scorecard' that helps present benefits in a clear and tangible manner."

The workshop on Rethinking Architectural Curricula is the third event in a series involving Chuck Eastman, FAIA, in a key leadership position. The AIA, the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB), the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), the American Collegiate Schools of Architecture, (ACSA), and other organizations have participated in the series.

According to Eastman, "The workshop will move beyond the earlier workshops by starting with a white paper addressing the problems faced by architecture education, and the possible moves to address these problems." The workshop will distribute this paper and use it as a starting point for the workshop. It is hoped that the workshop will address such questions as

- How will architecture schools address the trends toward collaborative design as a mode of practice?
- With the rapid acceptance of building information modeling (BIM) and the need for employees with BIM skills, how are the schools embedding BIM into their curricula?
- With growing outsourcing of the more labor-intensive aspects of design, how will schools train students to serve in the new entry-level positions—and what will those new positions be?
- How might schools of architecture and practices work closer together in this time of change to both provide better services based on BIM, and better training of future practitioners, through education, possibly collaborative?

Steve Hagen, FAIA, is co-chairing the workshop.

The workshop will also include David Scheer, AIA, of Scheer & Scheer Inc., who uses BIM in his office and teaches the subject at the university level in Utah. Additionally, Scheer will speak on BIM training of professional staff.

"How you model something is related to what you are trying to accomplish," Scheer says. "How do you model a cornice? Is it an add-object, is it parametric?" Scheer notes that computer-aided design (CAD) and BIM support two distinctly

different approaches to design. First understanding the philosophical design concepts allowed by BIM can help maximize success with the tool set.

The importance of process will be shared by Dianne Davis, president of AECinfosystems in discussions of BIM implementation. While lessons learned from case studies will be a major element, Davis says her talk will be based on three underlying principals:

1. Understanding the need for a common a language that allows data sharing
2. Defining responsibility for project information creation, sharing, and analysis
3. Standardization of workflow processes that ensure repeatable success and reduced cost of BIM implementation

Process change enabled by technology even impacts architectural marketing. Rich Friedman, of Friedman & Partners, will explore how technology is revolutionizing marketing and business development in the design and building industries.

"Sending HTML newsletters via Constant Contact enables you to know who opened your newsletter, when they opened it, and what links they accessed," Friedman says. "This data can prove very useful in the business development process," he adds.

"There are also client sector-specific listservs and chat areas that you can monitor to keep tabs on issues that are keeping your target audiences up at night, industry trends and drivers, and more. Responding to specific questions that are raised can help position your firm and jumpstart the business development process," says Friedman. He adds, "The big challenge is getting firms to leverage these opportunities."

The specific difficulties for small firms to leverage process change driven by technology will be addressed in a number of presentations. As part of his presentation Daniel Garber, AIA, Fergus Garber Group, will focus on how they are managing the transition from two-dimensional to BIM software. "It has been a struggle," Garber says.

"We have a lot of work and trying to get up to speed with a new program and getting projects out the door at the same time has been a significant challenge for us," says Garber. He also says, that as technology enthusiasts, the firm likes to teach itself about software, "but figuring out how and when to employ seminars, tutoring, and/or phone support to get the most bang out of our buck has been an education."

Seemingly simple, but ultimately complex, the multifaceted issues of art and business facing practitioners at this dynamic time promise to make the Future of Professional Practice conference a beneficial event.

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