

Structures

Web-based construction management keeps data flowing

BY TONIE AUER

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When Robinwood Baptist Church Pastor Wes Brown and his congregation decided to build a family life center they narrowed the field of architects and builders to three companies.

Then, the choice was simple to select Fort Worth-based G.L. Barron Construction, Brown said. Barron was selected because of its "clicks and mortar" approach to construction.

"From the very beginning, one of the features and deciding factors was the Web site that allowed us to go in and keep us updated on what was happening," Brown said. "It allows our members to go online and see what was going on without having to call us for progress reports."

Brown and his congregation can log on at www.glbarron.com and enter a password-protected area to view the e-project management system.

"Our clients can view an online project management tool we use called Prolog," said Mark McElroy, G.L. Barron vice president. Also, on the home page you'll see a button for the Web cam that demonstrates one aspect of the system. We feel this is one of several systems we use that sets us apart and enhances our true design/build capabilities. We have the architects on staff and housed in the same building.

"We have the left and right brain working in unison to develop projects, which creates a synergistic atmosphere that enables us to provide a very high quality service to the construction buyer," McElroy said.



Mark McElroy (left) and Greg Barron of G.L. Barron Construction review plans while looking at construction site scenes downloaded from a Web cam.

"This technology is worthless if we don't have people in the field who know how to build buildings," said Greg Barron, president of the company.

The concept of the Web site and live Web cam was born to serve clients from all over the world, Barron said. "We have one client who is based in Austria and is

here only once every six to eight weeks. With this tool, it allows our clients to stay immediately informed with what is going on in the field," he added.

Barron developed the process over several years, which also required a significant investment. About 400 contractors across the nation use the "clicks and mor-

tar” system, he added.

The company has about eight to 12 projects underway simultaneously, Barron said. The system allows field managers to go through the Web site to an interactive database to make updates, Barron said. Posted on the Web site are meeting minute notes, updated three-week schedules and more.

Through the password-protected environment, clients can log on and pull up reports beneficial to them, he added.

“This provides us with the ultimate confidence and trust gained through the fact that they have access to the same information as the contractors,” he said. “We face the challenge of trust. It is like taking a car to a mechanic. He may tell me it costs \$500 to fix it, but I may not have the confidence in him. But, I don’t have all the information at my hands either.”

Barron said he feels the Web site allows his company to build relationships with its clients and opens a new channel of communication.

“This helps us to know what they want to see and how we can help them. As design builders, we take clients from cradle to grave and with this tool we can collaborate via the Web, from the architectural engineer to the construction, Barron said.

Barron employees continually update and post progress, he said.

The client can pull up a site plan and then make any suggested changes by writing on top of it with notes, he said. When a project gets to the progress stage, the client can go into deeper and deeper functions, he added.

“Hopefully we’ll work in concert with one another and develop a clear set of documents,” Barron said. “This is the meat of our collaborative process.”

Web cams on the sites snap photos every 15 minutes from three cameras, which can pan the area.

“This creates a sense of confidence and trust while allowing us to manage more efficiently,” Barron said. “We can look at the photos and make a phone call and the

staff knows we’re watching.”

Barron said the measurement of success of the e-management tool will come in time.

“Work is plentiful now. The real litmus test will be when the work starts to dry up and we have to stand apart from competition. This ability to communicate may work to our advantage,” he said.

Barron said it may be a tool for churches, too, which are constantly working to raise more funds. “This may create more ownership to the members of the congregation,” Barron said.

For Robinwood Baptist Church in Seagoville, it has done that.

“They’ve been excited,” the pastor said. “Our members have access 24 hours a day to progress reports and are able to see an artist rendering. They really like the access to it and the ability to be updated. Communication is a big thing and with this system, it is simple, fast and easy access.”

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