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Building Online: How Architects Use Extranets For Online Collaboration

By Rick Mosenkis

Traditionally, architects are a conservative bunch who fiercely guards "company secrets." As a result, the idea of using an extranet to share documents and collaborate with others has been totally alien.

But tradition is rapidly changing. Increasingly, architectural firms are using extranets to share documents in a secure environment. Why? Because projects move faster, clients are happier, and everything - from schedules and budgets to CAD drawings and renderings — is more accessible.

An extranet allows engineers and construction companies to immediately access all pertinent information about a project. It eliminates the frustration of waiting until the architect decides to share his plans.

Client relationships are enhanced through the faster and easier access to the vast volume of documents. Approvals are made more quickly, and the client has the comfort of knowing that they can review anything, at anytime.

What is an Extranet?

An extranet provides a secure workspace for clients, vendors and business partners. It is an area where all the pertinent information for a project can be made available to all of the parties involved in the project.

Studies show that almost 50% of architectural firms have used an extranet. Some firms have resisted using the tool due to the high cost of implementation and maintenance. It is true that the cost of setting up an in-house extranet can be expensive. It requires the purchase of equipment and software, and hiring or training personnel to setup and maintain the system.

However, hosted extranets have become a popular alternative to in-house solutions. They can be purchased for a monthly fee from an application service provider. This approach eliminates the need for hardware and software, and requires no internal staff to maintain the system. In fact, most hosting

companies provide training for your staff.

Today, as people become more accustomed to doing most of their business over the internet, clients are requiring that architectural firms use extranet technology. The good news is that extranets have become affordable. More importantly, they make the complex task of collaboration more efficient, enhancing the relationships with clients and partners, and accelerating project completion.

Rick Mosenkis is CEO of Trichys, providers of WorkZone extranet and intranet

<http://www.trichys.com>

solutions for online document sharing

<http://www.trichys.com/professional/document-sharing.vm>

Architect or Building Designer - Who Do You Choose?

By Glenn Murray

Thinking of building a new home or complex? Will you use an architect or a building designer?

Both are involved in the design of buildings - their appearance, layout, structure, and so on. But what's the difference?

The simplest difference is a legal one. To be called an "architect" in NSW, you have to be registered with the Board of Architects of NSW. The title "building designer" can be used by anyone designing buildings.

But that's hardly even scratching the surface. Brian Basford is a building designer and treasurer of the Building Designers Association of NSW. He suggests that building designers are generally less expensive, and mostly involved in less flamboyant buildings. "It's horses for courses. Most architects probably wouldn't want to design a single bedroom extension for a pensioner, whereas I've done a lot of that."

Brian also stressed that there are quite often overlaps between what architects do and what building designers do. There's no simple rule. "But no matter what the job, good building designers and good architects both produce quality work", he says.

Architect Gary Kurzer agrees that architects are more likely to be involved with more distinctive, "up-market" buildings. But not because of cost. "Architects work to your budget just like building designers. The real reason is that architects are a little more likely to stretch the boundaries and challenge convention."

According to Gary, you should generally choose an architect if you want more than just a literal translation of your brief. "My clients normally have a rough idea of what they want. I take that idea and transform it into something they love, but could never have imagined themselves."

The most important thing is knowing what you want from the service, and choosing someone that suits your job.

And whether you choose an architect or building designer, remember, qualifications are no guarantee of quality. Always ask to see previous examples of their work. Ask for references from previous customers. Ask to see their qualifications. Ask how long they've been working. Do they have professional indemnity insurance? Are they a member of an accredited body?...

In the end, it's like anything else... there's no substitute for common sense.

Thanks to Gary Kurzer, Architect, 0411044448, and Brian Basford, Building Designer.

FAQs

Q: Are architects and building designers the same thing?

A: No. Architects must be registered with the Board of Architects of NSW.

Q: Will I get a better design from an architect?

A: Not necessarily. The only guarantee is a minimum level of qualifications. Architects must have a Bachelor of Architecture degree (5 years) as well as the demonstrated ability to deal with clients and satisfy their requirements. Generally this means at least a couple of years experience in an architect's office.

Q: Are building designers more in touch with builders and other trades?

A: Not necessarily. Architects are trained to deal with and manage all aspects of the building project. It all comes down to the individual's experience and abilities.

Q: Are Building designers "would-be" architects?

A: No. Building design is a recognised profession with its own national body (the BDAA) offering 3 levels of accreditation based on experience and quality - but registration isn't compulsory. Many building designers have the qualifications to register with the Board of Architects but they choose not to because they don't think the name "architect" is worth the ongoing cost of registration.

Q: Are architects more expensive?

A: Not necessarily. An architect will work to your budget like a building designer. They can do anything from a simple design to very complex interior and exterior detailing to superintendence of the building

process. Your building costs and ongoing running costs may also be less. For example, find out if your architect is incorporating cost-saving measures into the building process. They may also design to take advantage of natural lighting, ventilation, heating, cooling, etc. which will save you less in electricity.

Q: How do I tell if they're really an architect?

A: Call the Board of Architects of NSW - (02) 93564900 or visit

http://www.boarch.nsw.gov.au/f_consumer.html.

Q: How do I look for an accredited building designer?

A: Call the Building Designers Association of NSW - Sydney (02) 49264855 or visit

<http://www.bdansw.com.au>

or

<http://www.bdaa.com.au/index.htm>.

Q: Where else can I go for further information?

A:

<http://www.architecture.com.au>

– Royal Australian Institute of Architects

<http://www.bdansw.com.au>

– Building Designers Association of NSW

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