

Marketers Need to Understand BIM

Business Development Best Practices Series

November 2016

The acronym “BIM” is showing up more and more in our industry. Owners are requiring it on projects, countries are setting standards for it, and firms are touting expertise in it. But what is Building Information Modeling (BIM) and, as marketers and business developers, why should we care?

What is BIM?

First, let’s educate ourselves. BIM is the graphical representation of architectural design, engineering components, structural loads, construction sequencing, facility management, and historical project data. It is the culmination of every detail within a project. BIM tells the story of a complex, tangible product. While a digital model looks very impressive, the robust data behind its creation speaks more than the eye-catching visual.

Second, let’s drop all redundancy. Saying “BIM model” is redundant. It is the same as saying “ATM machine”.

Third, technology is rapidly changing our industry. BIM is a portion of the technology machine helping to revolutionize the built environment. Smartphones, tablets, video conferencing, social media, virtual project teams, etc., are forcing the design and construction industry to adopt technology because society as a whole is evolving into technology super-users. Whether your firm has BIM experts in-house or you outsource that scope of work, as a marketing and business development professional, you must be knowledgeable about what BIM is and what it can do.

BIM in Business Development

Forward-thinking firms are utilizing BIM in project pursuits as well as after the projects are won. Having a platform for project data capture—from the pursuit and planning phases through design and construction—reduces knowledge gaps during handoffs. With the rise of public-private partnerships and integrated project deliveries, the need to showcase a collaborative project team is more paramount than ever. BIM encourages communication, collaboration, and efficiency.

One firm I worked with went into a project interview with three BIM scenarios for a single project. One was for the cheapest option, another was for the fastest option, and the third was for the least amount of risk. If their competitors were trying to do it faster or cheaper, they showed they could do that as well. However, they showed the owner they not only had the knowledge to construct those alternatives, but had carefully thought through the option. The client chose to go with the least amount of risk and awarded that project to that firm. Their decision to award them the project was, in part, based on the skill they saw in the information held within the modeling alternatives.

BIM is no longer just for clash detection (identifying design problems). It has evolved into design exploration while reducing value engineering. It gives the project team the foresight to look at “what-if” scenarios and brings the project owner into the discussion in a visual way that was not attainable in decades past. BIM is the new educational tool for project stakeholders. No longer do teams have to explain a project issue, they can now show how a specific issue would affect the entire project.

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The Future of Construction Technology

Technology continues to evolve rapidly. Digital pre-fabrication is leading to modular construction so projects that once took years to construct are now being snapped together within months and getting online quicker than ever. Virtual reality is already being utilized in the design industry that allows project teams and owners to “walk” through their projects before ground is broken.

Design exploration has evolved into having one BIM file morph into millions of project design alternative models focusing on altering specific design variables while capturing a project’s initial costs, lifetime costs, and energy usage. And those millions of BIM files are being produced by server clusters within a single work day then incorporated into an interactive scatter plot where designers can pick and choose which models to review in detail.

BIM is a small fraction of the technology utilized in the A/E/C industry. However, the future of technological advancements is very bright in our industry. It is imperative you become familiar with these advancements in order to personally grow within the industry, as well as showcase your company’s knowledge base to your clients. Technology alone is not very impressive. Once it is combined with the expertise of architects, engineers, and contractors, it becomes noteworthy and a useful differentiator in our industry.

Technology is here to stay in the design and construction industry. Become familiar with it and learn to speak intelligently about it.

Here are tips to learn more about A/E/C technology:

- Ask your in-house virtual design group (or find a third-party BIM designer if your firm does not have in-house resources) to showcase a project to you.
- Attend conferences or Webinars about A/E/C technology.
- Read articles and blogs about new, innovative tools.

Enjoy the process of learning about the many attributes of BIM technology. This will help you be a better marketer and an enthusiastic promoter of this helpful resource for your clients.

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This article first appeared in Marketer journal, courtesy of the Society for Marketing Professional Services.