

UNTANGLING CONSTRUCTION

A BOTHELL COMPANY'S BUSINESS IS HELPING BUILDERS AND DESIGNERS WORK TOGETHER AND SAVE MONEY. **BY ROBERT S. LINDSAY**

A BUILDING IS never as simple as its exterior may appear. Some joke that a synonym for "contractor" is "cost overrun," but the truth is that major construction projects are often too complex for any one person, or even one company, to fully comprehend. There will always be something that someone overlooked, somewhere, adding to the final cost.

One small Bothell company hopes to significantly reduce those inefficiencies by bringing architects and builders together to resolve design conflicts before projects get off the ground.

Basepin Inc. makes an innovative project management system for the construction industry that allows architects and mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and structural (MEPS) contractors to work together to create more complete, more accurate building plans.

This approach is important because on many construction projects, time constraints prevent architects and contractor engineers from producing the complete, highly detailed building plans they need. When construction begins, architects and contractors often find numerous

is already being put to use as Vulcan Inc. juggles the complexities of pursuing multiple construction projects in Seattle's South Lake Union neighborhood.

"We provide an underlying set of rules and tools for architects and contractors to collaborate more efficiently," explains Tim Luke, CEO of Basepin. "It's a combination of technology and a more effective management system."

Basepin's software allows the architects and contractors to work together on plans, share designs and eliminate as many conflicts as possible before construction begins. They also agree to use certain standards, such as common file formats, to exchange information easily. A tie-in with the gotomeeting.com web conferencing system keeps the parties involved and talking with each other. On one recent project in Hawaii, the web conferencing element alone cut travel costs in half, Luke says.

"The Basepin system is non-adversarial," Luke adds. "The people I've worked with tell me they appreciate that the system allows them to focus on finding solutions to problems, rather than on disputes over the cost and impact of resolving issues."

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—ANDREW CLAPHAM, VULCAN'S SENIOR DIRECTOR OF CONSTRUCTION

design conflicts between their separate plans (e.g.: "Hey! On Floor 6, Water Pipe No. 3 is occupying the same space as Air Duct No. 12!"). The extra labor required to correct hundreds of design conflicts can result in significant cost overruns.

The Basepin MEPS Coordination System, as the company's product is called,

The company also provides a series of high-tech collaboration tools. A Basepin coordinator creates a Superplot, a computer-aided design file for each floor of the building, in which the architectural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing and structural plans are laid over each other. The Superplot allows architects and contractors

to identify design conflicts on each floor.

When contractors find a conflict in the Superplot, they note it in an issues log, a web-based tool that sends an automatic e-mail to all participants, notifying others of the problem. Resolving the conflicts are the impetus of architects and contractors, who typically hold web conferences to coordinate efforts to resolve conflicts, Luke says.

Basepin was founded in 2007, although Luke developed the first version of the software in 1982 while he was a project manager on a construction project in Alaska. Over the years, he has used and refined the software while working on numerous construction projects for other companies. Basepin is still small, with just five employees, but pulled in \$150,000 in revenue in 2008, which Luke hopes to substantially exceed in 2009.

The Basepin System, when used correctly, helps architects find and eliminate up to 90 percent of design conflicts prior to construction, and has the potential to deliver significant cost savings by eliminating extra labor hours that would be needed to resolve these conflicts. By using standardized protocols, organized file management, quality control checking and other technological tools, the software has saved up to 1 percent of a project's total cost. While not sounding like much, that portion amounted to more than \$2 million in savings on one \$200-million construction project alone.

Vulcan Inc. uses Basepin's system for its South Lake Union projects. And while the economic downturn has made new construction projects harder to find, Basepin still has an edge.

"It's just a tremendous collaborative tool," says Andrew Clapham, Vulcan's senior director of construction. "We're finding that Basepin is saving us time, and obviously, dollars."

The biggest cost savings come in the form of streamlined problem solving.

"We have been able to ensure that the work we're doing, we only have to do it once," Clapham says.

"Although there are fewer projects out there, construction people are looking for ways to be more efficient, and to save money and time by eliminating problems," Luke says. "That makes Basepin more attractive." **SB**



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