

RIGHT | NOW

What has tech done for you lately?



“One of the largest considerations in the investment of technology should be focused on the users of the applications. If there is very little commitment to the application and its management then firms should reconsider the investment.”

opment and marketing for **Dekker/Perich/Sabatini Ltd.** (Albuquerque, NM), a 130-person architecture firm, says that their leadership and market-

ing teams consider four key questions first. The team at D/P/S will initially look at whether a new purchase will “help our practice area studios and offices compete at a higher level than our competitors,” by possessing better marketing tools. It is also important to identify if the technology will be effective as “a key tool for our support of sales,” Solis says.

Solis will also ask, “Does it do something for us that we can’t do as well, quickly, or efficiently with our existing technology?”

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Firms look at managing and measuring technology for marketing.

By ANDRA MILIACCA
Correspondent

High tech offers a vast and glittering field of options to those who market A/E/P and environmental consulting firms, but decisions to acquire new technology are not made lightly.

Alberto Solis, director of business devel-

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

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SUBMISSIONS SOUGHT:

Do you have something that's working in your firm? Let us know! Submit to this feature.

Tech

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They use a PC *Windows* platform supporting Delttek *Vision 5.0*, Adobe Suite (*InDesign*, *Illustrator*, *Acrobat*, *Photoshop*), Microsoft *PPT*, *Word*, and *Excel*.

In the end, the investment must be measurable. For any product, Solis and the D/P/S team require the ability to “measure the technology’s value in tracking RFPs, organizing our leads and opportunities, producing quality marketing/sales collateral or an appealing and relevant online presence.”

Karen Compton, principal of **A3K Consulting**, a six-person firm in Glendale, CA, cautions that the decision to invest in technology is often more reactive than proactive. “One of the largest considerations in the investment of technology should be focused on the users of the applications,” Compton says. That is, who will input and manage the powerful content and what processes are in place to insure its integrity. “If there is very little commitment to the application and its management then firms should reconsider the investment.”

Do not omit this critical step

Compton points out that technology changes about every 18 months and yet “most firms consider the investment in technology to be a ‘long-term’ capital investment depreciated over seven years.” While that can be true for hardware technology, “software investments should be assessed on their ability to advance one within the marketplace based on a short-term (18+ month) investment.”

A3K develops an annual technology plan as a critical step to manage investment in new equipment like laptops and projectors, or software such as *Revit*. Many times these plans will overlook sales applications, so Compton recommends “that the IT department work with marketing and business

development to assess and recommend new technologies based on the ability of the application to increase sales or research—not just generate leads.”

Each recommended technology that emerges out of this analysis should then be supported with a return on investment (ROI) statement, “a case statement that outlines the cost of the technology versus the monetary benefit to the firm.” Compton says, “Then, and only then, should technology priorities be considered.”

ROI and defining success

Kelly Teenor, director of marketing for **Hall & Foreman Inc.**, looks at three factors when making technology decisions, with ROI leading the lineup.

This 40-person firm in Tustin, CA will first assess the cost of a technology as it relates to increased productivity and quality of output.

Second, they pinpoint the training time needed to ramp-up for deployment of the technology. Third, they lay out the costs of ongoing maintenance, such as service and upgrades. Teenor defines a successful technology as “one that allows you to produce quality deliverables more efficiently than you did before you started using the technology.”

A3K’s Compton uses her firm’s ROI statement as a defining metric where “following the implementation and training of any software or hardware application, the users of the system and the system itself should be bench-marked to ensure the achievement of the metric.”

She admits that while this is often hard for firms to do, the same performance standards should apply to staff as well as to the technology being measured. The result of ignored metrics is that “most technology ‘fails’ to live up to the users expectations because the parameters for success were never established.”

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Necessary objects

For Teenor, technology is ever-evolving with constant upgrades and improvements that “change our work processes.” Hall & Foreman’s current toolbox includes the use of client relationship management (CRM), graphic design software such as *Photoshop*, and *InDesign*, digital cameras, video recorders, and webinar conferencing software. Compton, principal of a consulting practice for the A/E environment, relies on an ever present BlackBerry. Communication vehicles, e-mail, web sites, and social networking should be in every firm’s “kit-of-parts,” she says. These tools “represent the ongoing direction in which people will read, analyze, and convey information about the AEC industry.”

Compton’s firm has set a goal “to increase our research function in order to provide clients with better economic and trend information” in its 2012 IT plan.

The best way to avoid a technological buyer’s remorse is to “look to the future for new applications and solutions by developing a technology plan that assesses the needs of business development/sales.”

Beyond high tech, Solis of D/P/S, finds that the most effective tools are “to greet, listen well, and ask questions that help us understand problems, opportunities and needs. Personal interaction with our design teams and our clients requires no technology, just intention to learn how to deliver value to them.” ▲▲

ZWEIG MARKETING

320 Rollston Avenue, Suite 102
Fayetteville, AR 72701
Tel: 800-466-6275
Fax: 800-842-1560
E-mail: info@zweigwhite.com
Web: aemarketingnow.com
Twitter: twitter.com/zweigwhite

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Mark Zweig publisher
mzweig@zweigwhite.com

João Ferreira managing editor
jferreira@zweigwhite.com

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