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that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

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Leonard Buzz is CEO of On Center Software.

Digital Video Cameras – Someone’s Watching Your Work

By Leonard Buzz

How do you monitor progress on your construction projects? Until recently, all companies did it the same way – they jumped in the truck or hopped on a plane and looked things over. When executives at contractor Fredrickson/KRJ Inc. of Chicago want to keep an eye on a long-term project, they don’t need to send a team across town or across the country to check the progress. All they have to do is log on to the projects website and watch the construction work through live digital video cameras set up to scan ongoing work. And if something interesting occurs, you can use your cursor to pan the camera across the site, and then zoom into the exact spot you want to view. Finally, you can snap a shot and e-mail it to your customer.

The whiz-bang technology sounds right for Fredrickson/KRJ, one of the Midwest’s leading contractors. Fredrickson/KRJ has ties to Sears, Roebuck and Co. and the contract for fix-ups at the country’s tallest building, the Sears Tower. But if you think a small construction company can’t afford technology to view a site remotely over the Internet, just add up your plane tickets and the cost of employee time spent on management-by-walking-around. Then add the costs of bringing the team of owner, architect and subcontractors to the construction site to solve a problem.

Fredrickson/KRJ uses digital Web cams for a number of its long-term projects. “We incorporate the camera’s image into our web portal,” explains Chris Chapel, VP of information services for Fredrickson/KRJ. “When you go to the portal, you go right to the project and the camera is there.”

According to Chapel, the company is able to control who sees what on a given project based on web security tools that

allow different team members access to various cameras. Even the camera angles and zoom capabilities can be tailored for specific individuals involved in the project. “The web portal has a secure log-in,” explains Chapel. “You can configure it to restrict your pan and zoom level.”

Once the site is set up with cameras, Fredrickson/KRJ can offer access to all of the project’s participants who can gather by phone to view and discuss the work on the job. “It gives the entire team access, including owner, architect, subcontractor,” says Chapel. “It’s a good way for everyone to view progress without having to travel to the job site. We can resolve issues remotely.”

Fredrickson/KRJ works with Digital Solutions Inc. in Crown Point, Ind., a company that specializes in providing hard-wire and wireless camera systems that send their images to the Internet 24/7. “We’ve had the systems out for about three years,” says Mark Carroll, president of Digital Solutions. “At first, customers didn’t understand the technology, but now the benefits are becoming obvious.”

According to Carroll the benefits go beyond simply allowing the project’s team members to see construction progress remotely. There is also potential savings companies can take by giving managers more projects since they can make many of their construction site visits via the web. “Project managers can manage more than one or two jobs. They can go to a website and have their managers do a one-minute video clip explaining how much drywall they’ve done for the day.”

Carroll lists a number of other benefits delivered by digital video cameras, including increased site security with fewer security personnel and reduced

travel to sites. Another big gain, according to Carroll, is improved safety. “The safety director can go to the site to check scaffolding or to see if anyone is smoking,” says Carroll. “It can be a watchdog operation.”

The development of digital video cameras is an evolving technology for Digital Solutions. Carroll began by offering still cameras at construction sites. “Our initial installations were snapshots of job sites,” explains Carroll. “Then we offered a link to a website with the image. Then we did a snapshot every 15 minutes, then every five minutes, then every minute. Then we moved to live cameras and later added the ability to manipulate the cameras from the website.” Now you can even snap a shot from a live digital camera and send the still image via e-mail.

According to Chapel, Fredrickson/KRJ uses the live video cameras to create still photography. “You can set a location and take a time lapse of still images,” says Chapel. “Then at the end of a project you can create and send out time-lapse photography for the owner.”

With all the benefits of digital camera technology and web-based connectivity, Carroll still found it was an uphill selling proposition for the construction industry. “At first they didn’t understand the technology,” says Carroll. “They said, ‘Just give us our pencil and paper.’” He notes that ultimately the cost-benefit of the technology was convincing.

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