

## Case Study IT031



# Exchanging design information via the internet

## The achievement

The Martin Centre, a university department undertaking academic research for the built environment, established a web-site and a feedback communication channel to enable future users of the new Computer Laboratory at the University of Cambridge to be kept informed about the emerging design and to provide on-going briefing to the design team. The web-site contained various media formats, ranging from conventional building plans, elevations and perspective drawings through to dynamic simulations of diurnal patterns of interior daylighting. A virtual reality walk-through was constructed and an electronic discussion group established.

## Key benefits

- ★ Clients had early knowledge of critical design issues with the opportunity to give rapid and detailed feedback about the emerging design proposals.
- ★ Full involvement of the client in the design process, leading to a feeling of “ownership” of the project.
- ★ Development of mutual respect between architect and client.
- ★ A building that more closely meets the needs of the client, and therefore increased client satisfaction.
- ★ The foundation of a system for conveying electronic information about building design on other sites, with potential for continuous updating.

## The background

The London architects RMJM were responsible for designing a new Computer Laboratory for the University of Cambridge. The Computer Laboratory staff involved in the commissioning of the building wished to receive project information from the architects primarily through electronic means rather than in face-to-face meetings. They also wished to communicate with the architects electronically, and to exploit IT generally to the full in the project.

## The approach

Key steps in their approach were:

- Establish web-site structure.
- Load it with design documents as they arrived from the architects.
- Establish discussion groups for feedback in the form of a bulletin board.
- Supplement the design documents with expert material on key issues.
- Measure the effectiveness by checking how the web-site and the electronic discussion groups were used.

Electronic distribution of information has the potential to facilitate open and effective communication. Privacy and control were both key issues in this project. A strategy was devised to ensure that privacy requirements of those involved were met. Five levels of privacy were established starting with a private web site available only to the Martin Centre and the architects. In addition to this, some material was available to anyone and some was password protected to limit access.

Similarly the release of design information was controlled in accordance with the architect's requirements. Feedback from user clients to the designers was moderated by a co-ordinator to ensure consistency.

## Key lessons

It is important to establish:

- ★ controlled and phased release of information, with appropriate checks, from the architects to the project team, to end users and to the general public.
- ★ appropriate levels of privacy for electronic discussion groups.
- ★ systems to moderate and to structure feedback from user clients to the architects.

## Further information

For information on other case study summaries please contact:

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The original studies were conducted jointly by BRE and Eclipse Research Consultants as part of the IQIT project (Improving Quality through integrated IT), funded by DETR under the Partners in Innovation programme. Advice for design teams proposing to use electronic exchange can also be found at the BRE web site: <http://helios.bre.co.uk/iqit/main.htm>