

USER'S GUIDE TO SPECIFYING A PROJECT WEBSITE FOR ELECTRONIC CA PHASE SUBMITTALS

Most of us have had some really bad project websites forced on us in the past, but in the Leo A Daly Omaha office we have discovered a project website service that is far more user-friendly than those other painfully inflexible systems we have all suffered through. It is also a vast improvement over both the old slow, multiple-paper-copies-in-the-mail submittal process and the frustrating do-it-yourself ftp site for e-mailed electronic submittals. We are now specifying it for our projects whenever we can.

On many projects in the past couple of years we have had great satisfaction using a service called Submittal Exchange. Here's a link: www.submittalexchange.com. Its founder is an architect who understands the needs of designers and builders in the construction phase submittals process—a welcome change. Virtually everyone in our office has now had a project using Submittal Exchange, and we had no trouble learning the simple, intuitive procedures—neither have the contractors or their subcontractors. The website's staff has been quite willing to adapt their entire interface to meet any Leo A Daly preferences and terminology, and they have made every project-specific adjustment that we have asked them to do.

But it is not just our A/E staff that finds this service valuable. Our first use was because a general contractor brought it to one of our projects and begged us to use it and let them pay the cost of the Submittal Exchange service that they had adopted as their company standard because it saved them so much time and money. Since then, every one of the contractors we have introduced to Submittal Exchange has subsequently used it on their non-LAD projects as well. Even on a remote rural hospital project we found all the local subcontractors and suppliers eagerly adapted to the all-electronic web based submittal process. There may be other good project websites out there, but we—and the contractors we have subsequently introduced to Submittal Exchange—have not encountered them.

At the beginning of a project the list of specified submittal is entered into the web log by the GC/CM, but Submittal Exchange staff can do it for them from a file extracted from our MasterSpec files. The "Date Expected" column is a tool that finally gets the GC to do an actual submittal schedule for our review and concurrence, as specified! Markups can all be done paperless online with Adobe Acrobat or BlueBeam PDF software or can be printed/marked-up/scanned if desired. All of our LAD submittal forms and procedures remain unchanged. Having one secure central 'file cabinet' accessible by everyone for all pdf drawings and CA phase documents enables only the affected people to do their own printing, too. In the end, the Owner, the Contractor and the A/E get permanent disks as a record of all the website's CA phase activities, documents and submittals, saving even more trees, file cabinets and warehousing.

The key is to write the project website process into the front end of our specifications (*especially **Supplementary Conditions Section 007300—see our suggested master edit language in MasterSpec***). The website service fee should be specified as a General Conditions project cost, which is completely valid since the submittal process is, after all, of, by and for the support of the contractor's own work plan. An efficient website service saves the GC, their subs and us, and thus the Owner, a lot of job-chargeable and/or reimbursable printing, shipping and handling costs alone—to say nothing of all the time it saves everybody by not losing track of things and not having to constantly reconcile various logs. It also vastly improves tracking and speeds up our response time (to the great delight of all contractors and owners) with user-determined e-mail notices and daily reminders both ways—and it allows instant access to everything at any time by everyone from anywhere. Electronic speed and accuracy benefits everyone on the project. And yes, it kills far fewer trees, too.

In short, this is one major modern improvement that has no real down side. Let's make it our standard way of doing business on all projects that we can.