

## WEBSITE HELPS BRIDGE COMMUNICATION GAP IN LONG DISTANCE CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Long distance has a way of complicating everything from telephone calls to romance. Most especially, it complicates construction projects.

"It's difficult for homeowners to be several hundred miles or more away and yet still feel comfortable with a major renovation or remodeling project being done in their absence," said Michael Menn, AIA, partner with Andrew Poticha in Design Construction Concepts, Ltd., a Northbrook-based firm that specializes in high-end remodeling and renovation projects.

To bridge that communication gap, the Design Construction Concepts partners last October decided to mount an Internet experiment of sorts involving John and Kay Serratelli of Midland, Michigan.

A retired Dow Chemical executive, John and his wife have owned a getaway condominium on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago for the past three years. Big Chicago Bears fans, they largely used the condo on weekends. However, in anticipation of moving to Chicago full-time in about two years, the Serratellis recently decided to undertake a major rehab of the 1,800 square foot unit. Design Construction Concepts was the architect on the project.

"It was basically a gut rehab. We took out everything down to the common walls and, in some cases, even rebuilt those," John Serratelli explained.

"We thought it might be helpful for the Serratellis if we established a password protected Web page they could use to follow the project from demolition through to completion," Poticha said.

The "test case" experiment began during the design stage.

"We posted 'before' photos, existing floor plans, alternate floor plans, construction documents, even our bid to them. They also received hard copies of all documents later," Menn explained.

Not only were the Serratellis able to keep up via communications from Design Construction Concepts, they were able to communicate back.

"It was a phenomenal tool. They'd post things, we'd run the information off on our end, study whatever they sent us and then respond to them, also via the Internet," Serratelli said.

In fact, having used the Web site in this way to monitor a project in progress, Serratelli said he couldn't imagine not using it again in similar circumstances.

"Because it was introduced after we contracted with Design Construction Concepts, it was not the reason 'why' we signed on. It is, however, a big selling feature in terms of recommending Design Construction Concepts to other people. There are lots of talented contractors around, but this added service coupled with the quality of their work most definitely puts them in the lead," Serratelli concluded.

What the "experiment" taught Design Construction Concepts is that the potential applications of the Web pages could easily surpass simply aiding in long distance projects.

"It could also be used for a client building a spec home, to help realtors trying to pre-sell the property. It also has potential for people who travel a lot or in situations where it's not physically safe to visit the construction site," Poticha said.

Especially nice, Menn added, is that clients can get the vast majority of their questions answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week on the Internet from the comfort of their own home.

“That not only reduces the number of questions we have to answer, it reduces a lot of anxiety for the clients. If they really want to know something, they can find out instantly without having to wait for Monday morning to call about it,” said Menn.

Currently, Design Construction Concepts knows of no other comparable design group doing the same thing. That being said, potential clients are reportedly going “wild” when they hear about the firm’s new Web connection.

“One gentleman – an investment banker – said his company has the same capabilities but doesn’t use them enough either, that we’re way ahead of them. If we get that job, I’d have to say the Web page would be a big reason why,” said Menn.

For more information about Design Construction Concepts, Ltd. phone the firm’s corporate offices in Northbrook at (847)498-1676. Additional information is also available on the Internet at [www.DCC-LTD.com](http://www.DCC-LTD.com).

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