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New perspective

AN UPSTART PHOTO documentation business is helping commercial developers keep tabs on projects through a service that not only allows progress to be tied to blueprints and monitored online, but may lessen the odds and costs of construction litigation.

BY SCOTT RAWDON | FOR BUSINESS FIRST

The X-ray vision in the New Albany Medical Center II isn't limited to radiologists.

"You can't put a screw in the wall without hitting something behind it," said Andrew Johanni, executive vice president of construction for health-care developer Equity Inc.

The complexities involved with building a medical center are many, he said. Each wall hides a maze of tubes and wires, and change orders following construction are extremely difficult if a contractor doesn't know exactly what's behind the wall.

So Equity, in building the 60,000-square-foot medical center, hired a Phoenix-based company with a Central Ohio franchised division to provide a detailed photographic record of construction creating, in essence, X-ray views of the walls.

That means modifying medical office space or tracking down problems can be accomplished with little damage to the walls and in little time. The company, Multivista Construction Documentation Inc., uses digital photography that interfaces with construction plans and computer-aided design files to create real-time documentation of what has been

Multivista photo documented the construction of New Albany Medical Center II, an Equity project. Mark Oldenquist of Multivista, right, shows the mechanicals behind a ceiling on his iPad. He's pictured with Andy Johanni of Equity.

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PHOTOS: *Make subs accountable*

built and when. The photographic record can be viewed from the Internet.

The service is designed to offer several benefits: Simplify a remodeling or expansion, establish facts in construction litigation cases, assist a construction project if a contractor leaves and another one is called on to complete it, and aid in long-term maintenance. The service also means engineers and inspectors don't have to go between offices and construction sites numerous times to check on details. They can simply access what's happening via the Internet.

"It's easily accessible," Johanni said. "Consultants can sit in the trailers and discuss the project instead of wandering the site."

LIFELONG VALUE

The concept of photographing the construction process is nothing new, Johanni said, but digitally arranging the photos to make a permanent record is.

Johanni expects to use Multivista on the "backside" of projects as well. "We constantly go back in and renovate older buildings," he said. "We're looking forward to using it."

Multivista has grown to more than 25 markets including in Columbus, Cleveland and Cincinnati. In 2010, it documented more than 200 million square feet of construction, up more than 60 percent from the prior year.

Mark Oldenquist, Multivista's managing regional partner, franchises the Ohio locations and said the company is documenting several construction projects including the \$140 million Hilton Columbus Downtown and the \$1 billion OSU Medical Center expansion. He said the Ohio franchises should pull in \$1.5 million in revenue for 2010 with \$1 million of that coming from Central Ohio projects.

Multivista started in 2002 out of Vancouver, British Columbia but didn't start franchising in the U.S. until 2007. Multivista has been operating in Ohio for two years and is documenting 75 projects.

The photos are tied directly to project blueprints. Users log in, hold a mouse over an area of the prints and then view a photo of that location. The photos are time-and-date stamped. Oldenquist said Multivista uploads architectural drawings to a secure website and sends photographers who have construction experience to the sites regularly, snapping hundreds of photos per visit.

"We'd rather take a construction guy and teach him photography," Oldenquist said.

The number of photos and frequency of site visits depends upon the scope of the project. Multivista offers three types of photo shoots: exact built, progression and slideshows. The exact built are milestone one-time shoots that document exactly what is built prior to covering wall space. They provide views of the mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems and act as a permanent facility management tool.

Progression shoots capture 360 degrees around the building's perimeter – and the interior – at different stages of construction. Slideshows are photos taken that aren't directly tied to blueprints.

Mark Welling, director of development at Quandel Construction Services in Westerville, is sold. "The return on investment is truly unlimited," he said.

His company contracted with Multivista on several projects including an assisted living center in Willoughby and Miami Trace Middle School. Other school projects are being discussed. Multivista charges 30 to 35 cents per square foot.

Welling said the expense ultimately saves countless hours in researching mechanical, electrical and plumbing problems, can prevent costly claims, avoid system shut-downs, limit the amount of maintenance supplies needed and provide for immediate location of hidden utilities.

"All throughout the life of the facility," he said.

Welling said Multivista allowed him to gain access to the projects remotely to track progress, while also documenting progress for the project owners.

"In addition, we've been able to document congested wall space at Miami Trace," Welling said.

Maintenance crews can easily locate a desired utility without guesswork, providing for less deferred maintenance, schedule flexibility and minimal rework.

REDUCING DEFECTS

Corna Kokosing Project Manager Jim Valentas said Multivista made work on a high-end residential project in Bexley more cost efficient.

"Having the pre-drywall pictures was a life saver," he said. "We were able to adapt to changes very well by pulling up these pictures and knowing exactly where the electrical plumbing items were."

Valentas said rather than removing large

GAINING TRACTION

While Multivista is new to the construction industry, the company has gained several clients. Here is a partial list of Ohio projects for 2010:

- Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Castalia Fish Hatchery
- Ohio State University, Kennedy Commons renovation; Williams Hall
- Cuyahoga Community College, Brunswick College Center
- Ohio Air National Guard, supply warehouse
- Kroger Co., 1350 N. High St.
- Hilton Columbus Downtown
- Kent State University, Lowry Hall College of Public Health renovations
- Franklin County Courthouse
- Springfield Regional Medical Center
- Defense Supply Center of Columbus warehouse
- City of Columbus, Olentangy-Scioto intercepting sewer
- Miami University, Armstrong Student Center
- Wright Patterson Air Force Base security facility

Source: Multivista

sections of the walls, the project superintendent could review the pictures on site. "He could then make a small hole to add an outlet, for example," he said.

Multivista acts as a third-party contractor and works to hold subcontractors accountable. Oldenquist said a typical defect claim costs \$250,000 on a \$20 million project and can be considerably more to litigate.

Defect claims typically take two years to resolve, during which time the owner may lose rent.

Oldenquist said a quality assurance control program can reduce defect rework by subcontractors by an average of 70 percent. Multivista, he said, can account for up to 33 percent of that.

"We like to think we also can prevent litigation," Oldenquist said.

Mark Decker, principal with Decker Vonau Seguin & Viets Co. LPA, a Columbus firm that specializes in construction issues, said no one at his firm is familiar with Multivista, but the concept is sound.

"Anything that accurately documents the progress of a construction project will reduce and help to resolve construction claims and problems at the negotiation stage of the dispute," he said. "The net result would be to reduce litigation over construction-related issues."

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