
Good Planning

A Web-based service helps Hovnanian save time and money on blueprint costs.

*Source: BUILDER Magazine
Publication date: 2007-04-01*

By Steve Zurier

One positive aspect of the housing slowdown is that home builders now have the time to evaluate and ultimately deploy technology that can make their operations more efficient.

One good example is Hovnanian Enterprises, which has been rolling out a Web-based plan and blueprint service from Memphis, Tenn.-based Plan Express at Hovnanian's 30 divisions. Hovnanian first started using the service for architectural drawings in its San Diego, Los Angeles, and Orange County, Calif., divisions.

“We've spent a lot of time looking at process improvements,” says Paul Doherty, Hovnanian's vice president of land development and home production.

“When we took a look at the numbers, we realized we were spending tens of millions of dollars a year on blueprint costs,” Doherty says, adding that the process was also very inefficient for both Hovnanian and its subs.

Before Plan Express was brought on, subs would go to Hovnanian job trailers and request the plans, the supers would call an administrative assistant in a regional office, who would then call the blueprint shop to get the plans made. The blueprint shop would send the plans to the regional office, and the administrator would then send them out to the jobsite—for final pick-up by the sub—or directly to the sub's office, which increased mailing and courier costs.

“All of this was only for the bidding process,” says Doherty. “When we released work orders and were ready to start building, we went through the same thing,” he explains.

The solution was to require all subs to access plans over the Web via Plan Express. Subs can either access the Plan Express service online at planexpress.net or on a special vendor portal Hovnanian set up for its subs on its own Web site.

According to Doherty, having plans reproduced typically costs about 30 cents per square foot of print paper. Hovnanian's subs are printing out plans via Plan Express for roughly half that price. Subs can print out plans in 11x17,

which is the standard format used in residential construction. For those who don't have access to a PC with a Web browser, the subs can go to a local Kinko's, present the sub's Plan Express number, and have the plans printed there.

Another important feature the Plan Express service offers is that subs can print out precisely the sheet they need. It's no longer necessary for the electrician or plumber to wade through an entire set of plans to get to the specific detail that relates to their part of the job.

“While we've asked the subs to pick up this cost, printing out plans over the Web saves our subs millions of dollars in time and travel costs,” Doherty says. “Our subs used to have to drive several miles to go to our local offices or job trailers just to pick up plans. We've eliminated all that,” he explains.



WEB PLANS: Hovnanian's subs can view and print out plans over the Web using the architectural service from Plan Express.

It's Virtual

Graphisoft, makers of ArchiCAD, has released its Virtual Construction suite, software that combines modeling, scheduling, estimating, and financial analysis in one package. The software lets builders manage the entire job from start to finish, including estimating and releasing work orders. The full package with the modeling software based on ArchiCAD 10 costs about \$8,000, which makes the software a likely prospect for a larger builder or a builder of multifamily projects. Visit www.graphisoft.com for more information.

Smart Merger

Builders looking to expand the use of wireless applications in the field will like Corrigo's latest acquisition. The leading provider of wireless customer service systems recently acquired Aligo, a move that opens the doors for Corrigo to begin offering wireless labor tracking systems. Terms of the deal were not disclosed. Visit www.corrigo.com for more information.

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