

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR



Scott L. Melnick

Allison Schwartz, AISC's meeting planner, much prefers meeting with me in her office rather than mine. And it's not just because she has a candy dish filled with chocolate. The truth is that my too-often messy desktop is distracting—and perhaps even a bit disturbing—to her. In a flippant moment I might claim that my lack of a coherent filing system is a mechanism to keep the compulsively neat at bay, but the deeper question is, "What impression does my office make on first-time visitors?" Do they come away thinking that I'm exceedingly busy? Or do they think I'm simply disorganized?

First impressions are very important. According to some researchers, clients often make a decision on hiring a vendor within the first five minutes of meeting with them—and that decision is difficult to sway regardless of the rest of the vendor's presentation. And given the importance of first impressions, it behooves every organization to occasionally review their points of contact with the outside world.

These points of contact are not just the obvious—your receptionist, your salespeople, your website—but also your voice mail system, your stationery, and every employee with a phone or email on their desk. Here's a fun but simple exercise: Next time you're out of the office, call your main switchboard. Does your receptionist sound friendly? How long does it take for the phone to be answered? Here's another fun one: Think about the type of information a customer might want to find on your website—and then ask your best friend to log on and see how long it takes him to get the information.

First impressions are not just the venue of your sales team. It's important for your entire operation to know that they are, in essence, part of the marketing department for your company. Everyone should remember that outbound letters and emails reflect on the entire company.

At AISC, we're working to make sure that every contact with us is a good one—and we've even created a one-stop resource center. The AISC Steel Solutions Center resides both on the web at www.aisc.org and in our Chicago offices. On the web, we've added a myriad of information sources—ranging from an extensive FAQ section to free downloads of MSC articles and AISC specifications. You also can call 312.670.2400 (press one for the Steel Solutions Center) and get answers to both technical and scheduling/cost questions. We're also restarting our popular on-line chat series. Every

Tuesday at 2 p.m. CDT we host an on-line chat. The second Tuesday of the month is reserved for outside experts on specific topics while the remaining weekly chats (starting July 16) feature the AISC Steel Solutions Center staff, who will be available to answer questions on any topic of interest.

Upcoming chats include:

July 9: Electronic Data Interchange (EDI). Design and detailing programs are increasingly taking advantage of the CIMSteel Integration Standard to allow data to be passed seamlessly from one application to another. July's e-panel will include: Barry Butler, Development Management for Design Data; Brian Quinn, National Sales Manager, Ram International; Charles M. Eastman, Professor of Architecture and Computer Science at the Georgia Institute of Technology and the Director of Development for CIS/2; Mark Holland, Chief Engineer, Paxton & Vierling Steel Company; and Rich Schaefer, a consultant working with AISC on EDI. Participants in the chat will have the opportunity to speak with experts who can answer questions about how EDI works and how you can take advantage of it on your next project.

August 13: Low Floor-to-Floor-Height Systems. Whether it's a staggered truss, girder slab, or an in-wall beam system, steel designers can easily and economically produce projects with less than 9' floor-to-floor heights. August's e-panel will include experts on the most popular systems to answer questions about design, cost, speed, and erection considerations. E-panelists include: Robert McNamara from McNamara/Salvia, Inc.; Rimas Veitas from Veitas & Veitas Engineers, Inc.; Don Davies from Skilling Ward Magnusson Barkshire, Inc.; and Tom Faraone from AISC Marketing.

September 10: AWS D1.1:2002. The latest version of the welding code features numerous changes that affect the design of welded connections. September's e-panel includes: Donald D. Rager, president of Rager Consulting Inc., and current chair of the AWS D1.1 Committee; Dave McQuaid, president of D.L. McQuade Consultants and immediate past chair of the AWS D1.1 Committee; Duane Miller, manager of The Lincoln Electric Company's Welding Technology Center; and Robert E. Shaw, president of the Steel Structures Technology Center.

To participate in an on-line chat, visit www.aisc.org/chat.html. You can also read edited transcripts of past chats. Hope to see you on-line (where you can't see my messy desk) on July 9!

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