

# editor's note



## FOR SOME PEOPLE, GREAT IDEAS COME ONLY AFTER LONG AND CAREFUL PREPARATION.

For me, ideas (great or otherwise) usually come tangentially. About 10 years ago, a few of us were shooting the breeze and one person mentioned how much easier it would be if someone would write a simple routine to automate some task or other he was working on. Someone else in the group mentioned they happened to have written one a few months before and would be happy to share.

And that was a lightbulb moment. We started wondering how often one designer wrote a simple routine that would be handy for someone else. Maybe it was a way to quickly compute the required reinforcement for openings in girders. Or maybe a tabular analysis of beam end connections using double-clip angles. Or maybe even an analysis of ice loading on structural steel. (Yes, people have written utilities for all of these!)

From that, we built a really simple website called Steel Utilities Online, where visitors could post these programs and others could download them. It was an ugly but functional site and it proved wildly successful, with some of the utilities being downloaded more than 1,000 times.

A few years later we decided to upgrade the site and renamed it [steeltools.org](http://steeltools.org). We went from a simple site to a much more elaborate one that not only allowed you to post and download the tools, but also rate them. And in

keeping with the growing popularity of social media, we focused the site on allowing visitors to post messages to each other—sort of a Facebook just for steel designers.

But while the utility portion of the site remained popular, the social aspect was a failure and actually made the entire site more difficult to use.

Last month, the company hosting the site was updating their software and gave us the opportunity to update the site at the same time. Our response was to strip out the social media portion of the site and make it a pure library of steel utilities. You can now click on tools ranging from an educational utility to help with crane beam design (3,103 downloads) or a grating worksheet (1,864 downloads).

There are hundreds of utilities to peruse, and you can also search for specific topics or posters. Registration is required to upload or comment on files, but all of the sharing is free.

Check out [www.steeltools.org](http://www.steeltools.org). Post a file. Download a file. And let me know what you think!

  
**SCOTT MELNICK**  
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