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# Seeing more clearly through animation

## Technology aids architects in collaborating with clients



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After all of the architectural drawings are done and construction has begun on a project, the last thing anyone wants is to find out an HVAC vent runs directly into plumbing.

That problem is becoming less prevalent, thanks to animation programs that are being used by more architects. Those programs are also helping potential and existing clients see the possibilities of a project more than even the best paper drawing ever could.

For Self+Tucker Architects, which is working with developers on Heritage Trail, a master plan that incorporates parts of Downtown Memphis into a coherent design including the **National Civil Rights Museum**, redevelopment of the Hotel Chisca and the redevelopment of Cleaborn Homes, portraying the vision of the overall project is important in several ways.

The project's developers are planning to apply for a federal Choice Neighborhoods Grant that could bring in an estimated \$30 million to help the project move forward this fall.

[Jimmie Tucker](#), a principal with Self+Tucker, says animation takes viewers through a virtual walking tour of the Heritage Trail and mixes what currently exists with projects that could be done if the grant is won.

"You can have renderings, site plans and elevations, but the animation helps the layperson understand the improvements that are being proposed," Tucker says. "You have so many different constituencies that you want to support a project that you have to identify pieces that are the most representative of what you're doing."

In addition to a proposed project that needs public and financial support, animation helps clients for other projects like the Memphis Downtown Athletic Club, which Tucker's firm designed, see what the finished product will look like.

"We had a knowledgeable set of clients and they could see clearly how we were reflecting some of the ideas they had," he says. "They could see the heights of counters and the colors of walls. They are seeing what they expect."

While digital animation helps bring a client's ideas to life visually, another digital animation called Building Information Modeling, allows architects and engineers to make sure different portions of a building don't clash. That ranges from lighting fixtures going to the right location, to making sure doors are where they're supposed to be. If those issues aren't discovered until construction starts, contractors have to file change orders, which can add more to the project's cost.

[Logan Meeks](#), principal and vice president of A2H Inc., says working with technology like BIM "involves all of the stakeholders" early in the process.

"Good building design is a process of problem-solving and innovative thinking," Meeks says. "If you have a beautiful building that's not operational, you really don't have a happy client."

BIM also allows for quick turnaround times on projects with short timetables.

Meeks says a project for Ohio-based MTD Products, which is investing \$8 million in a 130,000-square-foot expansion of its manufacturing facility in Martin, Tenn. that will add 225 jobs, had an accelerated schedule.

"On February 1, I didn't know the project existed, but they wanted it to be operational by the end of October and producing product by November 1," he says. "The visualization aided the process and helped them sell it to their corporate office in Ohio."

While utilizing digital animation has given project design a new dimension, having people in place who can operate the software is just as important. Meeks says A2H has a full time BIM manager on staff who runs information on projects constantly.

[Mario Walker](#), project designer for Self+Tucker, says during the design phase, making sure you show only what the client wants and needs to see is almost as important as the images themselves.

"We won't model the entire street if you only need to see a building," Walker says. "We develop separate models and link it all together into one movie. That way, if something has to be edited, we can edit just that model instead of having to redo everything."

[Mikal Stevenson](#), project coordinator for Self+Tucker, says often designers can lose track of what they're actually doing for clients until they see the clients' reaction.

"I spent all night working on a piece of animation, so I was used to seeing it," Stevenson says. "When we showed it to the client, he was surprised and glad about what he saw. That puts it into a different perspective."

What clients see is a major departure from showing plans on paper rolled out on a desk, but also an effective way to get the job done.

"This isn't George Lucas-type material, but it's a start when you're talking to engineers and industrial people," Meeks says.

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