

Building information modeling gaining traction in industry

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Mike Krentz remembers when AutoCAD software — now ubiquitous among architects and planners — was considered by many to be a “flash in the pan.” But Krentz, a principal with Davis RKP Architects, is fairly certain that the latest revolution in design software won’t be so easily dismissed, and that it is already changing the way professionals from architects to contractors work on projects.

That revolution is building information modeling, or BIM, and Austin construction and design experts say it’s rapidly taking hold in Central Texas. While BIM was created several years ago, it’s only recently that it’s been truly viable, said Chris Tisdel, director of BIM for the Texas Facilities Commission.

BIM is software that allows different parties involved in a project — such as structural engineers, contractors and architects — to collaborate at different phases of a building and see changes as they’re made in one master model. Before BIM, Tisdel said, the process of getting all stakeholder ideas and corrections into one format was disjointed and prone to plenty of human error.

In September, the Texas Facilities Commission, the agency in Texas that oversees the state’s real estate development as owners and operators of state facilities, adopted BIM for all future design and construction projects. Tisdel said Texas is the second state, after Wisconsin, to take that step, although the U.S. General Services Administration and the Army Corps of En-



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Mike Krentz, a principal with Davis RKP Architects, thinks building information modeling will change the way the construction industry works.

gineers are also requiring the use of BIM. One reason the state adopted BIM for its projects is that it can save taxpayer money, Tisdel said.

“The state uses tax dollars to build infrastructure, and the more collaboration we can have, ... the more time or dollar amounts we can save and still get a high-

quality building,” he said. “BIM [is] an integral part of that.”

Austin companies are adopting it rapidly, too. SpawGlass, which does general contracting, construction management, design-build services and civil contracting, is among the local companies working with BIM. Mayur Sethi, a BIM engineer

at SpawGlass, said it enables structural engineers, contractors and architects to remove potential conflicts between different models from the start. Sethi said he sees more companies adopting it locally and on a national scale.

“It saves a lot of time and money for the owner and the contractor,” he said.

For the consumer, BIM can also help a building owner save time and money in

‘The more collaboration we can have, the more ... we can save.’

Chris Tisdel
Director of BIM
Texas Facilities Commission

the long run, Tisdel said, because the model becomes a database with all the building’s information in one location. That means if an owner wants to make changes or do an energy analysis later,

being able to pull from that repository of information makes it easier to accomplish.

Krentz said Davis RKP is using BIM in Austin and Phoenix, and anticipates using it even more in Austin once building picks up with the economy.

While Krentz believes BIM will change the way his industry and the construction world works, he said there are some kinks to be worked out. For example, when BIM is used to check for conflicts, it sometimes identifies problems that don’t exist, he said. Also, the program contains a lot of information — more than some computers can handle. But in today’s high-tech world and especially in Austin, Krentz said, there’s little doubt that machines will soon catch up.