

LAWRENCE STREET PUBLICATIONS

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA HEALTHCARE CONSTRUCTION EXECUTIVE REVIEW



innovation





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Casa De Manana

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The project team for Casa De Manana's latest expansion is finding out that popular technology can be the key to success.

Marc Strange of Intelisyn Corp., a construction management firm in Manhattan Beach, has taken everyday technology like e-mail and made it an integral part of the construction process. According to Strange, whose company represents the La Jolla development firm Internext, owners of Casa De Manana, his web applications are not just fancy window dressings.

"I'm not into having something for just buttons and whistles," he declared. "It only matters if it can be used, if it can be efficient and if it can provide accurate information. To me, the most current and accurate information is the power you need to

make decisions out in the field, especially when you have 100 to 150 employees standing around with equipment awaiting a decision."

To hear Strange explain it, he has merely taken an existing technology and applied it to a field that is arguably resistant to technological advances. Strange is quick to note that there are technologically sophisticated construction firms, but generally they are the last field forced into application.

Simply said, Strange creates individual web sites for the developers his company represents. On the surface, the web site he set up for Internext's Casa De Manana project looks like any stop on the information highway; however, this isn't about keeping up with the Joneses.

"It's almost like a calling card anymore, you almost have to have a web site. It's become a layer of credibility almost. But I'm not fond of having things just because it establishes you as a player. So my more important focus is, 'How can I use this? What is the proper application?'"

"If you go to this web site there is a section called 'downloads'. Clicking on that section will bring up a page that lists all the current projects," Strange explained. "So we go there, and say we click on Casa Norte. It comes up and within it you have the ability to retrieve the two-week look-ahead schedule, the most current budget report and the most current meeting minutes."

Strange is quick to point out that while most anyone can



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access the site, accessing information is another matter.

“For instance, if you click on meeting minutes, you’ll have to enter a password. Obviously any information there is legal record. However, there is also cost information there, there are action items for employees to follow and, sometimes, information that could be used embarrassingly. Bottom-line, it is passworded. And we can go to whatever level of security a client wishes.”

However, as Strange reiterates, making information available isn’t the issue. The issue is getting people information so they can apply it to cost-effective ends. He likes to use this example: “Our owners are all over the place. They might be in Washington, D.C., for a conference and want to know exactly what is happening now. The situation might be, ‘I’d like to read meeting minutes and see how the project went,’ or ‘I missed the meeting, what’s the

two-week look-ahead schedule,’ or ‘I have a report I have to write and send up the ladder to corporate, but I don’t have that information.’ Without this, they’re calling around at all hours and fighting time changes and everything.”

Strange admits that a few more-sophisticated construction firms post information on the web. “But I don’t know of any that are using it as the project information hub, if you will,” he said. “What we’re doing is just trying to raise the bar a little bit.”

Strange is also applying this to other Internext projects, including the Claremont Manor retirement facility.

Of course, the irony lies in where this new technology is being applied. Structures on the campus of Casa De Manana, an ambulatory care provider, date back to the turn of the century. They were designed by the late Irving Gill, a renowned local architect whose creations fill the

San Diego Historic Register. This means that preserving the past at Casa De Manana is as important as stepping into the future.

One landmark receiving specific treatment is an arcade designed by Gill. According to Robin Tsuchida of SGPA Architecture and Planning in San Diego, architects for the project, the arcade has been removed and will be incorporated back into the site after construction has been completed.

“Certainly we had to break it into pieces,” said project manager Tsuchida. “We got it into two pieces. We used a crane to lift it out and then had it trucked off site. We’ll be putting it back in a slightly different location, but it will be integrated back into the original structure.”

The 39-unit expansion is actually being conducted in an area of the campus known as Casa Madre. Originally a hotel dating from the 1920s, the building is being partially demolished. So

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and Planning**

are two other nearby structures. The new portion of the facility is named Casa Norte. Workers are building Casa Norte over one level of subterranean parking. One of the toughest challenges the project team has had to face is keeping existing facilities operational during demolition.

"They need to keep their telephones, their sewer and their water. In addition, we're not only demolishing and rebuilding, but we're putting in a parking structure," Tsuchida explained. "We had to get down in the soil deeper than the existing building's footings. So we had to shore right up next to those buildings. We went down probably another 15 feet and had to support the existing structure or it would have been undermined."

Existing structures, which make up almost 200 units, are not the only thing team members are trying to leave undisturbed. There are seniors currently living on campus, and the campus itself is located in one of the more pristine and panoramic areas of coastal San Diego. Tsuchida said communication is the key on both fronts.

"We have regular meetings with the residents, since [Casa Norte] is a facility they use and see all the time," she remarked. "They have a lot of questions and concerns, so what we did during the design process was set up regular meetings with the residents and answer any questions, any fears that they might have."

Steve Rogers is project manager at Casa De Manana for Ninteman Construction Company Inc. in San Diego. Rogers said the project team decided that the meetings worked so well they would continue to have them.

"We let them know about the construction schedule, of any major impacts it may have on them," Rogers said.

"And then we just try to take time for them during the day," he added. "A lot of them go out for a daily walk and if we see them leaning up against a fence, for instance, we take the time to talk to them. We try to be positive, we try to encourage their participation, and if they do have a complaint, we try to respond as quickly as possible."

Since the retirement facility is located on some of Southern California's better real estate, the project team has encountered a lot of logistical challenges.

"It is a gorgeous piece of property," Tsuchida said. "We went a long way to be sure that all the units have balconies with French doors that open out to them, and that each unit is situated so that it is orientated to the ocean."

"But in addition to that, you're working on a facility that is right on the beach. It is a beautiful location with a nearby lifeguard station. People come out there to paint, they come out to look at the seals....," she continued. "This poses a lot of challenges for the contractor. There is no room for what we call mobilization, or lay-down. He's got to, basically, do a lot of that away from the site."

For Rogers this means long hours trying to coordinate material deliveries and places for his crews to park.

"We're trying to coordinate it so that when the deliveries come in we can accept them and get them in place immediately," Rogers explained. "In the case of the framing lumber, we are going to phase deliveries so they can use it up as they go. We've got

the scheduling pretty tight, so when it comes in we can get it into place. It's just the nature of the beast."

Another big challenge facing the project team is the strict height restriction imposed by the city of La Jolla. The codes demanded that Tsuchida not exceed a new or pre-existing grade by more than 30 feet. Getting three floors within that limit meant that Tsuchida had to design 9-foot-floors.

"Tough, real tough," she said. "We've worked with that challenge through the design phase and we continue to work with it." "What we did," Tsuchida explained, "is we kept the nine feet, floor to floor. We set up the structural system so that we had shorter spans and we used a TJI system that allows us to have mid-floor depth for the spans we were looking for."

Rogers agreed that the height restrictions are a very big challenge.

"There is only a nine-and-a-half-inch space between each floor. As a contractor our biggest challenge is making sure we get all that stuff in there," he added. "We spend a lot of time with our subcontractors trying to coordinate that so we don't have a big mess on

our hands when it comes time to fit all that stuff in there. We have weekly meetings to try and iron it out. We've got most of the bugs out of the garage level and now we're working up to the unit level."

One interesting feature at Casa Norte is a hot/cold water, four-pipe HVAC system. Found more often in commercial buildings, this system might offer the units a more efficient climate control and also require less maintenance.

Another unique aspect of the design is what planners call "residents' square." This is a portion of the building that will house many of the activities you would find in a community square. According to Tsuchida, this area will include mailboxes, a beauty salon, meeting and board rooms, a receptionist's room, and additional space for a television or demonstration room. Across from the mailroom, a section of clerestory windows will offer residents the opportunity to view their mail and converse in a naturally lighted area.

As projects become high-tech, it's these little things that are still important in the development of Casa De Manana. ■

—J.A.

FACTS & FIGURES

Name: Casa De Manana

Location: LaJolla

Owners: The Internext Group, Burbank

Type of Project: New construction

Architect: SGPA Architecture and Planning, San Diego

Construction Manager: Intelisyn Corp., Manhattan Beach

General Contractor:

Ninteman Construction Company Inc., San Diego

Size: 60,000 square feet

Cost: \$11 million (construction costs)

Construction Time:

July 1998 -

September 2000