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## **Is it a double dip recession or a slow climb back? Should I expand? Hunker down? Go on vacation?**

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The news everywhere is full of conflicting information. The Globe ran an article of rising foreclosures in downtown residential units one day and the next told of 20% increase in sales in that very same market. The Sunday Globe ran a feature in their magazine section on "Demolition Fever" citing the increase in demolition of small homes on lots in higher end suburbs for McMansions. Meanwhile there were news reports of home sales slacking, office vacancy increases as well as a story expressing concern over the lack of large blocks of class A office being available.

Where does this leave us, the people involved in the real estate industry? How do we plan for the next six months or year with our own business? Do we look to expand? Do we hunker down and prepare for the second dip recession? Or do we just give up thinking about it and head for a vacation? I think the truth of the matter is, experts are willing to support almost any opinion, unless of course you are thinking we will have a huge period of growth in the immediate future.

We believe in the steady progress forward approach and time will tell on its success. That does not mean expanding the business, hiring new employees, spending on lots of equipment. Our approach is to prepare for expansion if the work warrants it but not to sit back and let the market do what it does. We have spent considerable energy in positioning our company to take advantage of new opportunities, through the use of technology, staff education and improved management systems. This should allow us to be efficient and to be of better service to present and future clients.

Some examples of this are occurring now with our flexibility in dealing with construction issues for a client. He has found himself too busy to handle some tasks needed to construct the buildings. In lieu of him expanding his staff and adding overhead, we have been obtaining sub-contractor and supplier bids, distributing information to these trades and acting as a contracts administrator to support him and his efforts. Our staff knows the drawings well and are able to respond faster to questions and inquiries than an administrative person can. We in turn get our employees to better understand the whole process of design and construction. It has fit in well with our workload which tends to have smaller blocks of work on more diverse projects than in the past.

The information explosion has overwhelmed many of us. In the past design and codes were simpler and choices for materials were fewer. Now with advances in energy efficiency, green products, technology, innovation in materials, and LEED requirements, the administrative tasks for the architect and builder have grown. To assist our clients in this complex maze we have improved and added checklists, created code review summaries and helpful tips. This is an effort on our part to take some of the burden from our clients which in this economy are making due with less staff. As a business, this is the type of value added services that make you more competitive and ahead of your peers.

As we look for additional areas where we can improve it is important to understand the role

advances in technology are playing. It will allow better, faster and clearer communication among all parties. It can bring about efficiencies in the ordering of materials and the scheduling of staff. We as architects see the improvements software has had in time and accuracy in our work of drawing preparation and now we need to extend that to suppliers and contractors in the field. New software, referred to as BIM in the industry, allows contractors and suppliers to see quantities and individual components which make up the building. There are consulting/estimating firms that are making this available to small builders as well. It is an education process for us and our clients and looks to transform project delivery.

Adapting and finding better ways to share the resources is the type of thing that transforms an industry. The ability to send drawings instantly to the field and working together using technology prepares both us and our clients for the future. No matter what way the economy goes over the next year, being prepared and flexible are the important things to being an innovator and successful.

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