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An architect's view of the construction industry: Our perspective looks positive

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The world of architecture and design is never static. Boston has just finished hosting the American Institute of Architects (AIA) national convention. This brings together thousands of architects to learn, network and discover new things about their profession. Professionals and product manufacturers from all over the world come together to provide seminars show their product and hold events.

The foreigners

The good news is that overall; architects are upbeat about the industry. Many firms, at least the larger ones, have a global practice and find that our expertise is in demand as countries in the Far East and Middle East build and expand. The value of dollar is favorable to these firms and their foreign clients. Architects are able to export their ideas and building practices. For the local economy and smaller firms that work locally being in Boston is not a bad thing. Firms operating in the Mid West, California, Nevada, Florida and parts of the south have seen residential work dry up and are not seeing commercial work slow as the business world goes into a holding pattern with the current economy. Many Boston architects have seen a slow down locally as projects run into financing issues or demand problems. But overall we should be glad we live here with our diverse economy and strong institutions. There are predictions of slowing down for the retail sector as people tighten their spending and feel budgets squeezed due to rising prices for fuel and food.

The industry is changing and adapting to new world awareness of global warming and the need for energy efficiency in design and construction. Americans are already reacting to rising fuel with rethinking certain aspects of our lives. Will it pay to buy that new smaller more efficient car? Do I need to have a vehicle which can carry anything and anybody at any time? Do we need that bigger house, that new lawn sprinkler system? These are all thoughts I have heard expressed among people as they wonder what the future has in store. It is no longer okay to ignore how efficient the building is, if you have not dealt with LEEDS certification, you are behind the industry. Life cycle energy costs have been given new consideration. Payback for alternate energy such as wind, solar and geothermal are all being investigated and explored by architects and engineers. Developers know that if they do not respond to this new awareness, they run the risk of having developments which will not be prepared to face the future.

So what is the outlook as we approach the summer? There seems to be a general holding pattern in the economy as business and consumers wait for major decisions. Things move up and down with each new piece of news or each new action of the government. How do we prepare our business to move forward and be positioned to deal with the fluctuations and uncertain which does not appear to have an end? Certainly education in all forms is important. The more knowledge you have the better prepared to act. We all can position ourselves to make better decisions. Get out of

the office, expand communication, get more involved in our professions are all ways of educating ourselves and preparing for the future. Look at how we present ourselves to our peers, clients and public. It is time to update that goal statement, refine the systems we use, look into new innovations and really examine how we work. Employee efficiency has been improving and been a driving force behind our economic growth in the past. Do not miss the potential now for the future. By being out and visible it will serve to enhance other people's awareness of who we are and what we do. Maybe a client did not know you had the ability to do certain work, because they have rethought the direction they need to take their business.

As we move towards the summer, now is not the time to put aside our business and let it run in the same old direction and continue to do the same things. Let's all move forward and bring ourselves up to a new level of service, professionalism and education to prepare for what the future holds. Once you feel that you are set upon a correct course, maybe then you will be able to enjoy a summer vacation knowing that your business is ready too.

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