



Innovations and Inspirations: **Alberta LCAs Tackle Pre-bid**

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Embrace Change

As I begin my term of office, I can't help but reflect on the twists and turns of life and how they often lead to places we never planned or expected to go. Such is the case with my serpentine journey from association staffer to the co-owner of a builders exchange and up through the ranks of the BXNet Board of Directors. I didn't plan this particular route, but it wound up being far more interesting and invigorating than anything I could have envisioned.

It's funny how we desperately cling to a picture of how things should be rather than embrace the opportunities hidden in how they actually are. Builders exchanges are wrestling with that dilemma today as we struggle to adapt yet again to changes swirling around us. How things are is not how we imagine they should be.

There is simply no way to describe how radically different the landscape is today compared to the one in which I began my career nearly 40 years ago. The need for our services was never in question when I started out, but it is far from certain today. In private moments most of us have contemplated the unthinkable, "do our members need us anymore"? It's a scary question that makes it tempting to play ostrich and bury one's head in the sand until the storm passes. Unfortunately, the winds of change are not going to die down any time soon. Waiting things out means suffocating in the sand.

So what can we do? We can begin by acknowledging how things are, not how we believe they should be. We can accept that we are standing on shifting ground and start considering the opportunities this presents to build a new and stronger foundation. Throughout our long history of service to the construction industry, the times have demanded that our business model be reinvented and reinterpreted countless times. Our predecessors succeeded in doing so despite the obstacles. We can too.

Every journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. With that in mind, we are launching a new section in this newsletter called "Innovations and Inspirations" to bring you details about what your fellow members are thinking and doing to keep their organizations vibrant and relevant to their members. The idea is simple: take what works and build on it. Please let us know if you do something new, something scary or something that fails spectacularly. Share it all so others can learn from it.

As we move toward a new vision of ourselves, there will undoubtedly be unexpected twists and turns, and we will probably wind up in a place we never planned or expected to go. That's okay. Based on my experience, we may find that we like the view even better.

Goings-on Aplenty!

Happy spring, everyone! The weather here in parts north is starting to improve. (Temperatures are above freezing, anyway. For us, that's progress.)



There's a fair bit of information to catch up on since we last spoke to you right after our annual conference in Texas in February. The first is the conference itself, which was a great success. We had a fantastic turnout and great presentations from across our membership base. Thanks again to everyone who attended, to everyone who presented, and to all our members who sponsored the convention or otherwise provided support. It was great for us to finally meet you all.

We've drafted a short summary article about the highlights of the conference, and we'd like to welcome our president Brenda Romano to the head of BXNet. We dare say Brenda needs no introduction. She's been involved in BXNet and IBEE before it for years. It's a privilege for Angela and me to work with Brenda and harness the value of her (many) ideas to make this a greater organization for all of us.

Less than a month on the job, Brenda spearheaded an initiative to confer honorary BXNet membership status on Dave Smith, the former director of the Calgary Construction Association (and of IBEE/BXNet). The motion passed with unanimous approval from the membership, and Dave received his honor on March 22 at the Calgary association's annual conference.

By the way, if you didn't attend our BXNet conference – and even if you did – we've posted the presentation materials in The Vault section of the BXNet website. Check them out. We've also appended them to, and this is the next subject for discussion, our Slack channel.



For anyone who doesn't know, Slack is an online instant messaging tool that teams across offices – even across countries – can use to share information with each other in real time. It's our hope to stand up Slack as the year-round communications forum for BXNet members. Use it to catch up with peers, ask questions and share ideas with fellow users – all things that we don't do nearly enough in the months between our annual conventions. Check out our article on Slack and let us know if you'd like to join.



The last thing we'll draw your attention to is a profile of the work being done by the eight local construction associations in Alberta, Canada to break into the world of pre-bid reporting. In itself, that doesn't sound like a significant effort. Lots of BXNet members do pre-bid. Look deeper. You'll see that these folks are being incredibly strategic in their efforts. This isn't just a spur-of-the-moment decision to jump into a complicated market. The LCAs are taking the time to understand the size and scope of the effort in front of them, and they're putting the systems and processes in place to make this endeavor work. Have a look!

That's it from us for now. As always, if you have any ideas to share – whether for this forum or in any other way – please reach out. We are always willing to serve and happy to help.

Wrapping Up the 2018 AGM



BXNet held a fantastic annual general meeting in San Antonio, Texas in February. It was one of the best attended sessions in many years, and while delegates enjoyed a range of informative presentations from across the BXNet membership base, their guests had a chance to explore and experience the best the River City had to offer.

The meeting began with a series of get-to-know-you sessions, including the Exchange Your Exchange discussion where representatives from each BXNet member exchange introduced themselves and spoke about the challenges they face in their businesses every day. From there, Brenda Romano of the Virtual Builders Exchange introduced and moderated a panel discussion among several prominent San Antonio contractors and designers. The participants discussed plan rooms – which ones they use and how often – as well as what kinds of return on investments they consider when choosing among the many organizations and groups that offer similar services.

Afterwards, discussions shifted to internal matters. Delegates broke out into groups for a series of executive breakout sessions. Each group of six or seven was given a topic to discuss for 20 minutes, then asked to present their findings to the group for discussion. Topics included pre-bid as a member service, sourcing bid opportunities with full sets of plans and specs, the state of competition in the market today, and key services and value propositions for BXs in the next five to ten years.

The first day of the conference concluded with a presentation on plan room metrics – which are most important to track, and why – and what to consider when diving into deeper forms of data analysis, and how to turn that intelligence into revenue dollars.

After the sessions, we enjoyed a private tour of The Alamo and dinner on site.

The morning of the second day was jam-packed with information on marketing. Our first session covered many of the marketing basics – what is it and how to succeed – and offered tips and suggestions to make members' marketing and communications materials more effective. The session that followed dug deep into work being done by BXNet members to enhance their profiles on electronic media. Just after lunch, we convened the 2018 annual general meeting of the Builders Exchange Network where the members of the board of directors updated the network



Brenda Romano thanks John DeVries for his service as BXNet President in 2017.

on the status of recent developments. Last year was characterized as a year of transition. A new management team was hired to run BXNet, and the network absorbed several costs as part of that transition. The good news is that BXNet membership rose in 2017. We were pleased to report the addition of 10 new member organizations – nine of whom attended the conference.

The formal meeting concluded with the confirmation of the 2018–19 board of directors, and the election of Brenda Romano as the BXNet President for this coming year. Our second day concluded with two final presentations: one on technology trends in our industry; the other on how to develop and sustain effective relationships with your executives and volunteer board members.

Thanks to everyone who attended the 2018 annual general meeting, and to all the members who sponsored the event.

All of the presentations from the sessions have been uploaded to The Vault page on the BXNet website and to the AGM2018-materials on our Slack page. Check them out!



Introducing slack

BXNet goes digital with a new platform for sharing ideas and information among members in real time.



Networking and communication cuts right to the heart of everything the Builders Exchange Network stands for. It's even in our name!

Unfortunately, apart from our annual conventions, which offer members the opportunities to catch up with their peers and discuss successes and challenges, information sharing has generally been sporadic. Surely we should have other, more immediate ways of networking with peers beyond our once-a-year conferences.

As of now, we do. It's called Slack. Join us.

Introducing Slack

Slack is an online, instant messaging forum where users can chat with one another in real time. (If you're not familiar with the idea of instant messaging, think of it as text messaging, but from your computer. At its core, Slack is that. It's a lot more, too.)

This is a serious, professional forum for work. It's a place where people in teams in an office, across the country or around the world can communicate with one another on private, semi-private and open channels (open, that is, to all team members, as opposed to open to anyone on the Internet) to share ideas, information and files on any subject at all.

Siloed information

One of the fantastic things about Slack is that it enables users to organize information into channels. These are discrete categories created for specific subjects. This way, conversations stay focused and don't wander off topic.

For example, our BXNet Slack presence includes a General channel that is open to all users for anyone who wishes to discuss anything at all. We've also created specific channels for sharing ideas and information on plan room discussions, job descriptions, and the 2019 annual convention. We've even created a channel for storing ideas and information from last February's convention in San Antonio (all the presentation materials are right there for you), and a private channel that most of you won't be able to see for discussions among the members of the board of directors.

Easy to use

Slack is free for users and for BXNet – and easy to use. Once you're registered as a BXNet team member (see below for details), you can login anytime at slack.com. Slack also has great desktop and mobile apps for download that not only keep you logged in, but also notify you about any discussions you may be interested in as they develop.



Where Work Happens

When your team needs to kick off a project, hire a new employee, deploy some code, review a sales contract, finalize next year's budget, measure an A/B test, plan your next office opening, and more, Slack has you covered.

Email address

GET STARTED

Already using Slack? [Sign in](#)

Slack works best when it's used regularly. Log in and check back often. Participate in discussions. As with any forum, the more effort you put into it, the more you get out of it. So post, ask questions or simply connect with your fellow BXNet members.

Learn more and register today!

If you're interested in learning more about Slack, visit www.slack.com. There you'll find a host of features and videos.

If you're convinced and would like to try it for yourself, send us an email at info@bx-net.org and we'll formally sign you up as a BXNet Slack user.

Innovations and Inspirations: Alberta LCAs Tackle Pre-bid



Alberta's local construction associations are taking a gradual and careful approach to setting up the systems and processes they need to make a new province-wide pre-bid service as successful as possible.

A group of eight local construction associations (LCAs) in Alberta, Canada are about to wade into the pre-bid reporting waters.

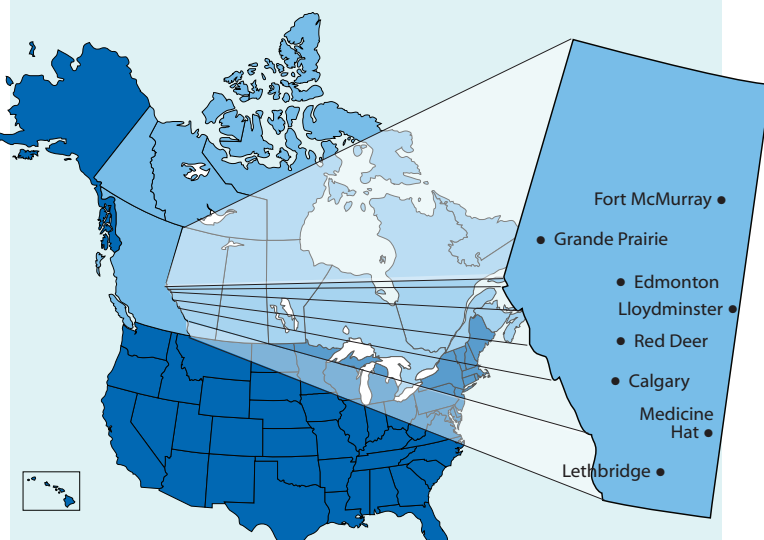
In itself, that's nothing remarkable. Plenty of builder exchanges and LCAs offer pre-bid reporting to their members. What's interesting about the Alberta story is that the eight are working together to understand the size, shape and scope of the task before them, and putting the systems and processes in place to ensure not only that pre-bid works, but that they can harness the data it delivers to provide even more value to members and plan issuers.

"This is an entirely different approach than other BXs, who jump into pre-bid without a strong game plan and wind-up scrubbing their databases a year or two later because the information they collect is outdated junk," says BXNet President Brenda Romano, who delivered an in-depth, two-day forum on pre-bid reporting for the Alberta LCAs earlier this spring. "Alberta is carefully planning before they execute."

Who's involved?

Alberta's entry into pre-bid is a collective effort of eight local construction associations, two of which are BXNet members:

- Calgary Construction Association*
- Edmonton Construction Association*
- Fort McMurray Construction Association
- Grande Prairie Construction Association
- Lethbridge Construction Association
- Lloydminster Construction Association
- Medicine Hat Construction Association
- Red Deer Construction Association



A harsh realization

Like New York State, and a handful of other regions in the United States and Canada, Alberta's LCAs share plan room documents and information. Projects entered in Lethbridge are accessible to builders in Edmonton – and everywhere else. Unlike most other jurisdictions in Canada, however, Alberta LCAs enjoy a strong relationship with the provincial government and public owners across the province. All publicly funded construction opportunities flow to COOLNet Alberta – the LCA's shared plan room resource – through an integration with the provincial procurement site, Alberta Purchasing Connection.

Curtis Griffith, the Business Development Manager at COOLNet Alberta, doesn't mince words about the effect this homogenous, steady and free flow of information has had on the LCAs' core service offering.

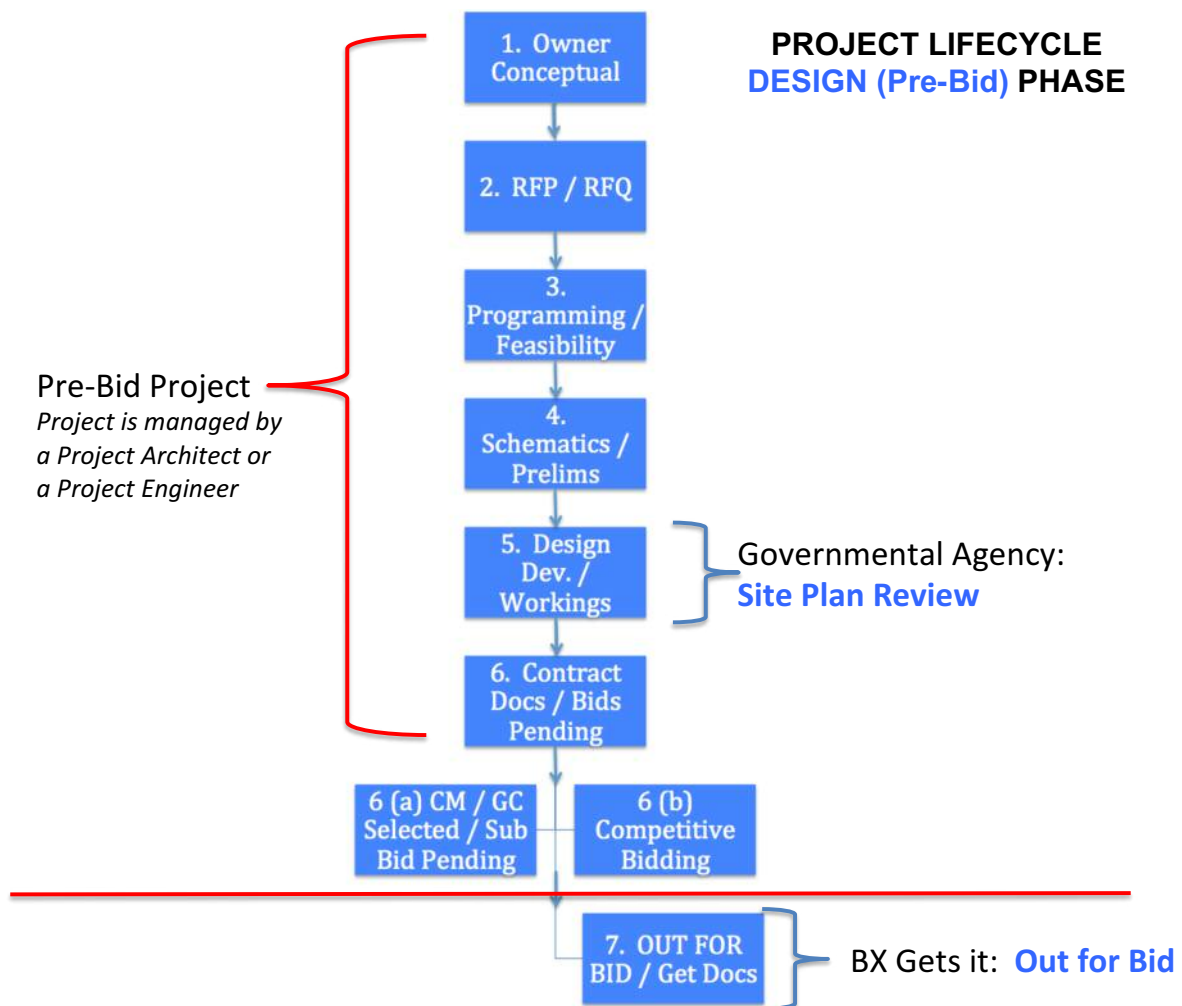
"It's not great," he says. "Our strength of relationships with government and focus on servicing public owners has created a singular focus on this sector. Our success and dominance has acted like 'horse blinders' to other services and markets we should be focusing on."

Fabio Filice, President and COO of the Calgary Construction Association, is just as frank.

"As far as our members are concerned, our online plans and specs platform is very successful," he says. "That said, our system has the capacity to offer much more. We are excited to add value to our online construction information service."

The need to shed the horse blinders and expand their service offering was an important realization for the LCA directors. They understood the significance of delivering more value to their members. Doing the same old thing wasn't going to be sustainable for much longer.

"In today's world, information is becoming bigger, more detailed, better aggregated and easier to access," says Griffith. "Our membership model requires us to provide real value in our service or we risk being Ubered. Adding value and information to our service that will impact members bottom lines will help ensure we stay relevant for years to come."



Building slow

The natural, kick-back response to this situation would have been to launch a pre-bid service post haste, but the Alberta group was more patient. Armed with intelligence from their session with Romano, they thought about not only how they would move into the pre-bid world, but also what systems and processes they would put in place to ensure its success.

Key to this was understanding whether and how their existing software platform could support the increased data flow – and could deliver the kinds of analytics the LCAs wanted to take away from their new sources of information.

“What we’re hoping to take out of the pre-bid exercise is not just a greater flow of information to our members and a more compelling service offering,” says Filice. “It’s also the capacity to report on critical statistics from across our industry.”

The LCAs understand that there is a need for detailed and accurate reporting on metrics such as regional construction costs per square foot and different types of projects. That information isn’t always available to the associations when members or owners ask, however. They often fill such requests through information collected by national data aggregators.

Alberta’s aim is to dive deep in its data collection – and adopt rigorous quality control procedures to check and re-check for accuracy – so that the LCAs can become the clearinghouse of information that owners need to make purchasing decisions, and that they need to provide even further value for members.

Deployment

The other interesting angle to Alberta’s pre-bid deployment is that it’s being done not by current staff members, but by people they will hire specifically for the role. Rather than tasking the pre-bid reporting work to someone in the office who has a few extra hours to spare in his or her week, the Alberta LCAs decided that if they were going to play this game, they were going to push all their chips into the middle of the table.

“Each of the eight LCAs are invested in the success of the two reporters,” explains Matt Schellenberger, Director of Corporate Development with the Edmonton Construction Association. “One of the reporters will cover the south of the province; the other the north.”

The Alberta approach is even more nuanced than that, he adds. Recognizing that it may be difficult to find qualified people with construction knowledge and experience right off the bat, the group is preferring to find qualified people first and teach them the industry ropes second. To that end, the reporters will start out working on active projects. They’ll start building relationships with plans issuers –

architects, owners, engineers – across the province to bring in more active tenders and more private-sector projects.

The hope is that as these people grow, and grow more confident, in their roles, their relationships with project sources will reach the point where pre-bid leads flow naturally. And once the reporters achieve that level of sophistication, the LCAs’ aim is to migrate the reporters to pre-bid exclusively, while backfilling the active-reporter roles.

“I think most associations and exchanges approach the idea of bringing in a pre-bid leads service as something they can jump into,” says Griffith. “It’s not. Reporting on pre-bid leads is step D, and most people don’t take the time to complete A, B and C.”

A broader vision

Amazingly, Alberta’s story doesn’t end with pre-bid. The provincial LCAs are poised to partner with their fellow associations in next-door Saskatchewan and Manitoba to unite all three provinces’ online construction information services on a single platform and under a single brand.

The aim is less to provide contractors with project leads across all three provinces – few travel that far afield. It’s about creating real value for owners and stakeholders in the associations’ ability to connect construction owners with the best contractors and suppliers available.

The aggregated service, called BuildWorks Canada, is set to launch in the second quarter of this year.

Lessons to be learned

The situation that led to the Alberta LCAs’ decision to wade into the pre-bid waters is common to many BXs and LCAs across the United States and Canada. The reality is that the role that many have performed for generations is simply no longer enough to meet members’ needs.

If BXs and LCAs are to continue to survive, change of this nature is needed.

If you would like to learn from Alberta’s experiences or share thoughts with them, reach out to John McNicoll of the Edmonton Construction Association or Fabio Filice of the Calgary Construction Association. Both are BXNet members and would be more than willing to provide insight.



A Series of Unfortunate Interactions



When did someone train hapless receptionists and customer “dis-service” representatives to begin every sentence with, “Unfortunately...?” How does “fortune” (or lack of it) factor into providing basic or promised service?

“Unfortunately, sir, we don’t offer that product, even though our website says we do.”

Am I “fortunate” when a representative can do something for my benefit? Should I feel lucky that someone is doing their job?

I was scheduled to have an important surgery. The procedure was scheduled two months prior. We exchanged insurance information, phone numbers, addresses, surgery time and location. Twelve days before the scheduled procedure, I received a phone call from the scheduling nurse. She first asked if I received her voicemail one week ago. “No, I did not.” I replied. “You must not have turned your phone on,” was her curt response.

(My wife tells everyone we meet that I have my phone with me always, and on... even at night. It’s true. When you have clients across many time zones and have grown children who have nighttime crises, you keep the phone working and near at all times.)

Next, the caller said, “Unfortunately, I am calling to tell you that your insurance denied the surgery. The doctor doesn’t work with the hospital system that your insurance covers.” Wait, this information has been known for almost two months.

I asked, “Why are you telling me this now within days of the operation?”

“Well, as I said on the voice message last week that you claim you never received, unfortunately, we are cancelling the surgery. Unfortunately, you will have to find another surgeon yourself.”

“On my own? Can’t you recommend someone who works with my insurance? You’re my doctor’s office. You diagnosed the condition. You scheduled the surgery in early November. It’s January 2. The surgery is next week!”

“Unfortunately, sir (in that reprimanding tone again), that is not our responsibility.”

I don’t know who hung up on whom.

Continued on page 11

Competitor Watch

Issue to issue, we're keeping tabs on the latest news and information on what the major providers of construction bid opportunities are up to. We provide this information without bias. BXNet neither endorses nor opposes such activities. We merely present them so our members may stay current on the activities of organizations that some may consider to be competitors.

Check this page regularly, and send us tips if you see something of interest: info@bx-net.org.



ConstructConnect acquires Quote Software, Inc.

ConstructConnect, a leading provider of construction information and technology solutions in North America, announced on January 11 that it has acquired the assets of Quote Software, Inc., a privately-held Eugene, Oregon based software company. Quote Software focuses primarily on estimating and building information modeling software and services for plumbing and mechanical contractors.

"The acquisition of Quote Software which includes its award-winning QuoteSoft product line is a natural fit that gives us the ability to offer a more complete and actionable preconstruction solution to our combined customers," explained Dave Conway, CEO of ConstructConnect. "This is an important transaction for us, and is a key component of how we continue to serve the industry by combining relevant construction information with easy-to-use software."

Quote Software's 26-year history was founded on the principle of "no two metal shops are alike," so its software would not be a "one size fits all" model. The company's QuoteSoft Pipe and QuoteSoft Duct estimating software was developed in accordance to fit each customer's unique needs.

"We're excited to be part of the ConstructConnect family," said Kerry Brainard, president of Quote Software. "We share the same philosophy about maintaining strong customer relationships, by letting our customers drive the development of our products."



Dodge Data & Analytics expands coverage of Canadian construction projects

Dodge Data & Analytics announced in March that it had partnered with several large Canadian construction associations to significantly increase the volume of projects and documents reported and provide better value and coverage to its customer base.

Enhancing its offering in key Canadian provinces, Dodge has entered exclusive relationships with the British Columbia Construction Association (BCCA) and the majority of local construction associations within the province of Ontario. Leveraging the analytical capacity and combined data sets of all parties, Dodge will further develop Canadian economic- and construction-related materials and forecasts for association members and Dodge customers.

“Through these strategic partnerships, Dodge is doubling down on Canadian construction and reaffirming its commitment to providing unparalleled market insights on Canadian construction activity,” said Mike Petruccio, Chief Executive Officer, Dodge Data & Analytics. “As always, we will continue to seek new Canadian sources to enhance our coverage and the value we offer the industry.”

The addition of new sources and the increased availability of documents has already fueled significant growth in Dodge’s collection of Canadian projects and associated plans and specifications, and Dodge anticipates further substantive increases in Ontario, which represents about 40% of Canadian construction activity.

Dodge Data & Analytics has traditionally served the Canadian market through a number of other channels on an ongoing basis, including:

- Annual Canadian Outlook: Dodge’s Canadian senior economist Richard Branch delivers a Canada-specific construction activity forecast at its annual Construction Outlook Executive Conference and makes frequent related presentations throughout the year.
- Canadian Construction Forecasting Service (CCFS): The semi-annual CCFS provides a detailed outlook for Canadian construction with a focus on broader economic trends in the country that can have an impact on the industry. It includes a five-year forecast of building permits for 15 structure types, covering the nation, provinces and 10 largest metropolitan areas.

Local presence: Dodge maintains an office in Vancouver, British Columbia, which supplements the BCCA relationships within the province.

Taken together, Dodge’s strategic relationships and activities in Canada attest to a firm and growing commitment to the Canadian market and to the quality of Dodge data. Additional analytics content is anticipated as an outgrowth of these relationships.

Unfortunate

Continued from page 10

“Unfortunately” has become the go-to excuse for unmet, or poor service.

- Unfortunately, the service technician ran late today (and we didn’t call to tell you not to leave work... when we knew the situation this morning).
- Unfortunately, your pre-paid hotel room is unavailable (we gave it to another guest earlier today).
- Unfortunately, our policy (which supersedes serving our customers) prohibits us from assisting you further.
- Unfortunately, there were requirements (that we should have alerted you to fulfill before you drove 35 miles) for your scheduled appointment.

Unfortunately, this is your problem; not ours.

“Actually,” it’s worse

Have you noticed that people aren’t “actually” in their offices when you call?

“Actually, Mrs. Smith is not in her office right now.” It makes me wonder if Mrs. Smith is “virtually” in her office by hologram, but not “physically” present.

You don’t need to modify your statement with “actually.” We get it. Mrs. Smith isn’t in. Was that so hard to say? Professionals are laughing at your staff when they say this.

If you are a CEO or the president of your company, borrow someone else’s phone to call your office. Ask whoever answers the phone if you’re available for a talk. See what response you get. Are you “actually” out of the office? My guess is that you will be surprised at the response.

Employees as investments – or liabilities

Have you been the unfortunate victim of employees who are chasing away valuable business? Top-level managers know that their employees are either bringing in business, retaining it or chasing it off. The day your employees become liabilities is the day you need to look at the bottom line.

Customers are your source of income. Employees who treat them disrespectfully are a liability.

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Introducing La Crosse BX's New Executive Director



For those who don't know, there has been a change in personnel at the head of the La Crosse Builders Exchange in Wisconsin. Ashley Skoczynski replaces Sheila Erickson as executive director at LAXBX.

She introduces herself in this note below

Hi! I'm Ashley Skoczynski. I am the new executive director for La Crosse Builders Exchange. In this role, I am responsible for increasing membership satisfaction and growing the organization. My background includes experience in non-profit organizations, universities, corporations, and even working for a religious order. I have been interested in leadership roles for many years and enjoy opportunities to use my creativity along with solid business principles. Outside work, I appreciate a balance of social activities and service. I visit my family once in a while (they live four hours away), I spend time with friends, and I serve on a variety of boards and committees. I look forward to learning from other builders exchanges and hope to meet everyone at BXNet in the future. If you have any questions or advice, please reach out to me at ashley@laxbx.com or 608-781-1819.

Welcome to BXNet, Ashley!

Dave Smith (left) accepts his BXNet Honorary Membership status from CCA director Fabio Filice.



Dave Smith Named BXNet Honorary Member

Dave Smith, the former executive director of the Calgary Construction Association (CCA), is BXNet's newest Honorary Member.

Current CCA president and chief operating officer Fabio Filice presented the tribute on behalf of BXNet to Smith during CCA's annual general meeting on March 22. Smith also received CCA's Man of the Year award at the conference.

Smith has been a long-time executive of not only CCA, but also BXNet. During his time with our group, he served on the IBEE (and later BXNet) boards of directors. He also spearheaded one of the largest annual conferences in the history of IBEE/BXNet when BXNet co-hosted its convention with that of the Canadian Construction Association in Banff, Alberta, Canada in 2006.

Smith also received the IBEE No Boundary Award for innovation in his organization.

In her letter to Smith confirming his Honorary Member status, BXNet president Brenda Romano thanked Smith for his service to members – on both sides of the border.

"Our entire membership has benefited from your insight, experience and wisdom over the years," she wrote. "We sincerely hope you will continue to participate in BXNet and share those vast reserves in the future."

Congratulations!