

Alan Potter success story

When information challenges technology

Tech savvy Alan Potter believes in good old business practises when it comes to architecture. Choosing Architectural Desktop over the more racy entrant of Autodesk Revit onto the market, Alan confirms success is not about design technology itself but rather the adaptability, aptitude and attributes of the architect who sits in the design seat.

At 39 years of age, Alan Potter has owned his own practice for the past ten years. Tall and sinewy, he is an Eastern Cape boy whose artistic side was inspired towards architecture through a friend's father. Ultimately though, he is a gadgets man. One of the first adopters of AutoCad 11, he currently runs *potter + associates ARCHITECTS* on the Architectural Desktop (ADT) and AutoCad Architecture (ACA) platform, despite a migration by many to building information technology (BIM) that Revit brings to the market.

Alan's decisions to remain loyal to ADT are practical ones, backed by a firm business direction. "I did a lot of research when Revit came onto the market," says Alan, "without getting emotional about it. Yes, it's a great product, which offers simple drafting techniques, but ADT works for me, my business and with what's currently happening in the marketplace."

For one thing, most of Alan's client's fit the 80/20 principle – they are return customers who like dealing directly with him. For them it's about Alan's integrity and not the software he uses.

Secondly, he doesn't want to have to redraft the last 8 years of work. "If this particular problem was possible to overcome, such as Autodesk bringing out a package with the Revit series that could upgrade from ADT, I would. But whether you have the best software or the worst software, and you're giving the client what he wants - he's happy – he is not coming to you because of the software you use."

For another thing, Alan is clear about the intention of his business. "I don't do 'styles'," he



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says, “I have turned down a lot of work that just didn’t suit me to do, and in the words of Revel Fox, ‘I never regret saying no, but I have regretted saying yes’. It’s about integrity, it’s not about saying yes and then not delivering on time, it’s not about looks versus practicality. It’s not about doing a building faster; it’s about good buildings that people will enjoy. And at the end of the day, if the client is not seeing the worth of expensive software, why should he have to pay for it?”

“One has to be careful not to fall into that trap – that of remaining an architect versus pure business, many see design as just a product – I know which camp I am in.”

Alan comments that he believes the South African market is still in a state of flux. “Overseas, most people who join the profession stay in it for the rest of their lives. This is not so easy in South Africa, we are still being exposed to volatile changes. This makes finding qualified staff problematic. And the software vendors have a long way to go still. Believe me, it was a nightmare getting onto the ADT platform. Training and support was an issue – luckily I had Niko Karrassavas from Cadplan who is an architect and who knew it well enough. All software has its issues and bugs, and it was a mindset I had to change too, it was not all the software’s fault. At the end of the day, I did my own research, downloaded international training manuals written by writers who understand what architects are trying to do, and spent a lot of time reading. This was what helped me to get my drawing down quicker. What I do know is that ADT can do pretty much what Revit can do and many people around the world have made a substantial investment in it. Today, I know ADT very well and I use all its features. I would say I am only about 3 days behind Revit processes in terms of turn around on production.”

Currently, Alan has one of his largest projects to date ahead of him, has recently lost two younger staff members and has 7 other projects on the go. He knows all about productivity output when it comes to ADT. “I have got proficient enough with ADT to do a R100 million project – get approximately 100 A1 drawings down in 6 weeks. Of course having a lot of repetition has made it easier, but if I average it out, there is no way BIM could have solved this for me in time.”

Says Alan: “The reality of it is that technology can save you time, but at the end of the day, it is us doing the designing, computers can’t do it for you.”

Young guys are coming into the workplace, and they need playtime to experiment with BIM features, time spent learning new technology – sadly in the larger firms, the partners don’t know how beneficial this is – it’s the dichotomy of the older architects and the

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younger generation.

“For me, I took the time to learn the tools of ADT, it was time that saves me time now and that kind of time spent learning you can’t quantify in terms of returns.”

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