A CAD Manager's Wish List

By Robert Green

To My Coworkers, Management, and Software Providers:

Day in and day out, there are several things you could do to help me help our CAD operations. If I haven't communicated those well in the past, I'd like to take the opportunity to do so now. Here goes. — *Your CAD Manager*

To My Users

Let's do things better! If we can interact with each other via a proactive mode of communication rather than a reactive one, we'll all have a more positive attitude, and things will get better over time. Focus on asking, "How can we do this better?" instead of complaining that "This doesn't work." I'm here to listen to your good ideas for improving things!

Please understand that I am only mortal. I don't know the answer to everything, but I'm usually able to find the answer if I take the time to look it up. Please know that you could likely do the same if you took the time to look for the answer yourself.

Write down my answers. You wouldn't believe how many times I must answer the same questions. If you could please take notes or otherwise capture the information I provide you for future use, it would save me — and you — a huge amount of time!

Follow the standards, unless you can tell me a better way. Ignoring standards because you just don't like them causes support problems and inconsistencies in our projects. As stated above, I'm all about doing things better, so if you've got an idea for improving our standards, I'm all ears.

To the IT Dept.

I need administrative access to install software and fix problems. I'm called upon to solve software problems, restore files, and perform all sorts of minor miracles to move projects out the door every day. Getting all this done is challenging enough without having to wait for an IT representative to restore a file or clear a printer queue. I understand that security is very important, but I'm already entrusted with managing all the CAD data, so why not give me the tools I need to do my job quickly and efficiently?

Don't assume cloud CAD tools are simple. From bandwidth problems to security issues to license policy changes, cloud CAD tools are sometimes problematic to implement. Before you make any judgment calls, come talk to me about the problems we could create by jumping in headfirst.

Let me help you with software deployments. I know you're awesome at pushing out updates for web clients and general office software tools, but CAD and building information modeling (BIM) tools are different because they are often highly customized. If we work together to create CAD/BIM deployments that are fully customized for real-world use, we'll both save time — and users can get to work sooner.

To the Accounting Dept.

Tell me how to present my ideas to you so they can be approved. Imagine me using Dr. McCoy's voice and saying, "Dammit, Jim — I'm a CAD manager, not an accountant!" I know what tools I need and I have a pretty good idea of how to justify them economically, but I don't always know the right forms, spreadsheets, or logical approaches to use when making requests. If you can help educate me on how to make my case, we'll all be better informed, and decisions will get made faster.

To Senior Management

Treat me as a member of your management team. Don't think of me as just "the computer guy/gal," but rather as someone who can help chart a course toward higher productivity. Give me at least the degree of respect you'd give a senior project manager, and watch me shine.

Have my back when I need help. If users don't want to follow standards, or project managers neglect to get CAD deliverables into contracts, please go to bat for me. If you can simply let the users know they're expected to follow standards and that project managers should work with me during project startups, I promise things will go better. I'm not asking you to do my job, I'm just asking you to stand up for me when I need some additional authority.

Involve me in budgets and strategic decision making. I've got worlds of experience in everything CAD related, and I know what we need to purchase and accomplish in the coming year. Don't rely on accounting, IT, or a software vendor to give you all your information in this area — I'm here to help you.

Accept that standards and training programs are not optional. CAD/BIM users are most efficient and effective when they all know how to work to a uniform set of standards. Imparting these standards requires ongoing training, which I promise to keep as concise as possible.

To the CAD Companies

Quit telling me what I need. My clients tell us what they expect in terms of software formats and deliverables, and these are almost always free-standing files with known formats. My customers aren't asking for the latest bleeding-edge technologies, so please don't push me to adopt them.

Refine your software products. Amplifying the point above, make my existing software work better! I'd rather pay for something mature that has speed and stability than something new that is clunky and buggy.

Drop the hype and buzzwords and get real. When I read about "the latest paradigm-shifting cloud-enabled cross-platform design-optimization tool with collaborative AI," my eyes glaze over. How about simply describing what the software does, with some real-world examples and data sets that I can actually try out? I'm far more likely to pursue software that is explained with down-to-earth language rather than marketing gobbledygook.

Help your (my) users. If you want us to use your software, then produce training materials that show us how.

Help me help you. When I go to my management and ask for money to upgrade or purchase subscriptions, I'm always met with the same response: "Why do you need that?" The burden then falls on me to explain why they should spend their money on your product. Wouldn't you sell more software if you provided me with business tools to help me make the case?

To Everyone

Please understand my job is multifaceted and stressful. I have to deal with upset users, deadline pressure, budgets, technical configurations, networking problems, and data security — and somehow get my own billable work done. It isn't easy doing all this, so if I seem stressed out, it's because I am!

Help me, and we'll all benefit. I'm not asking you to do my job, but if you can help me by fulfilling any of the wishes listed here, I promise we'll all get done quicker, have less rework, and enjoy our day a little more.

Talk to me, so we can collaborate effectively. I'm always eager to make things work better, so let's talk about how to do just that!

View me as your secret weapon. CAD managers make users faster, projects more profitable, IT more streamlined, software better standardized, and management teams better informed. Why would you pass that up?

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