e-Journal
THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE GRAND VALLEY CONSTRUCTION ASSOCIATION
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The TECH ISSUE

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Exciting times are ahead!

By Colin Goheen, GVCA Chair

I AM LOOKING FORWARD to a very busy and productive year serving as chair of the GVCA. Our association is always ahead of the game by responding to the needs of members, identifying trends in the industry and advocating on your behalf.

The construction industry is changing rapidly. In the next few years we will see changes in the way we connect with our members. We will have to change to meet the needs of the next generation, all the while keeping our membership base informed and meeting their needs. New methods in construction will present opportunities for the association to position itself and remain relevant.

Of course GVCA will respond to this new way of doing business. We will become more environmentally conscious as you saw at our AGM when we presented our annual report on USB sticks.

We will communicate with our members more than we ever have before. We reach over 2,200 industry stakeholders every month through our e-newsletter, and the Journal magazine is distributed to over 2,000 companies in the construction industry. The e-format of the Journal in particular has been widely accepted by the membership.

We will encourage members to look for innovative ways of doing business, help them in the process, and celebrate their successes. At the CCA conference in Charlevoix, Quebec I saw firsthand the work that is going into the national association’s Canadian Construction Innovations group. I think such efforts will serve as examples for our members going forward. Although the construction industry has traditionally been a late adopter of technology, we’re catching up to the curve.

Amid all this change, we cannot forget our commitment to maintaining sound business practices. The new LRT in Waterloo Region will not only provide opportunities for our members, it will also challenge us on a different level of risk. There will be new bidding practices, more complex bidding documents, and warranties and payouts will be different than what we have seen in the typical project.

All of these new developments add up to opportunities for GVCA and its members.

I am excited about the year ahead and I look forward to being the Chair of this amazing association.
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As the region’s only full-colour, construction news magazine, each issue of the GVCA Journal brings you the industry news you need to know, coupled with insightful commentary from some of the best known names in the business.

BOOK TODAY! Reserve your space today for as little as $300 per issue.
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am honoured

By Martha George, GVCA President

IT’S TRULY AN HONOUR to serve as president of this association. With the support of our members and the members of the board of directors, I have been able to accomplish much in the past year. Three highlights in particular stand out.

The introduction of the Ethics in Construction has been a feather in our cap. Although you can’t change the way someone behaves, you can at least provide a platform for understanding the decision-making process and the impact your decisions have on others.

We continue to grow our LinC–Leaders in Construction group. Youth brings so much energy to any group or association. We are rapidly growing our membership in the under 40 group, and programming to their needs. This is the lifeline of our association. As well, our WinC–Women in Construction events are always sold out. This signals to the development of specialized needs in the industry.

I’m delighted that others are taking note of the exceptional work GVCA does for its members. As you likely know by now, GVCA won the CCA Partner Association Award of Excellence for 2012. You probably also know that I personally was one of only a handful of members of Ontario’s construction industry to receive a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. And while I personally am delighted by these significant accomplishments, I must say that these awards are due almost entirely to the exceptional work of the members of our board of directors. They give me the direction, support and flexibility to dream up new ways to serve our members. And I don’t know where our association would be without them.

Each year, the challenge I face is to add new opportunities for GVCA members. Help them in growing their business and staying ahead of the game. There is so much to do, and so little time to do it in. The list of opportunities for an association to help members continues to grow, change, and explore.

I am looking forward to the most exciting year I have ever had at the GVCA. Thank you again for the opportunity to serve.
The small contractor’s guide to ONLINE collaboration
This industry runs on collaboration. So why aren’t you already sharing documents with clients and partners online? The technology is proven and cost-effective and best of all, easy to implement.

**THERE’S NO DOUBT** that construction is a collaborative business. Everything we do on a job site is based on working with others to conceive, maintain and execute the assembly of a structure. No one can do construction work in a silo. To even attempt to do so is to invite errors. Communication and cooperation are critical elements of any project.

Trouble is, collaboration takes time. People have to be willing to attend meetings, available to answer phone calls, inclined to respond to emails. Those who are able to share information efficiently resolve matters swiftly and maintain project schedules. Those who cannot do not. If only technology could help in some way…

Happily, we live in a day and age where none of us is bounded by geography. Wireless technologies give us access to data at any time and in any place and—critically—in its most current format. And in an industry where so much information must be shared between a job site and the offices of many different companies, such flexibility is a boon to productivity.

**How can I collaborate online?**

On site or in the client’s office, use cloud-based applications to do take offs and estimates, track hours, access project key documents and log project updates.

From your own office, use them to collaborate on bids, notify team members of modifications to plans and specs, track and log billing, pay invoices and run financial reports.

And that’s just the beginning!
Of course, wanting to embrace wireless collaboration is one thing. Being able to do so is another thing entirely. You might think that setting up your company with a central server from which it can store and share drawings, documents and spreadsheets, manage emails and host real-time chats would be expensive. And you’d be right. Such a network could cost as much as $30,000 to build. Luckily, this kind of set up isn’t necessary for a company with limited means but with the drive to work a bit more efficiently. Google Apps for Business and Microsoft Office 365 are two tools that can bring together all your project team members for very little money indeed.

So what’s on offer? With Google Apps, you get a suite of applications that includes mail, discussion groups, calendars, instant messaging, word processing, presentation and spreadsheet tools, and a webpage creation program. What’s more, each app is completely customizable and can be enhanced via the tens of thousands of apps available on the Google Apps Marketplace. In addition to these benefits, Google Apps for Business enables you to run all these products under a custom domain name. You may also create user profiles for every member of your company. Better still, you can invite people from other companies to share and collaborate on documents in real time, restrict their access to files or limit the extent to which they may modify files, and ensure every change is accounted for with an audit trail.

“The result,” says Kevin Puloski, of Pund-IT, Inc., a Waterloo-based business-technology consultancy, “is a suite of apps that encompasses more or less the entire landscape of tools a small business would need to collaborate with other partners on site or in the office.”

The landscape of collaboration tools for small businesses of course isn’t completely dominated by Google. Microsoft also owns a share of the market. The company’s Office 365 for business suite offers many of the same core applications Google Apps does—word processing, website tools, calendars, email, conferencing tools—and brings many of these to you via the software products you already know and use: Outlook, Word, Excel and Powerpoint. And while users will appreciate having access to the thousands upon thousands of functions available through the full, virtual version of MS Word, such benefits come at a price.

“On a per-user basis, Office 365 is more expensive to implement than Google Apps,” says Puloski. “It also tends to be more complex. Where Google Apps for business offers just about everything a small business needs, Office 365 features more tiers, meaning that users may have to pay more to access particular functions.”

Puloski is an advocate of Google Apps. When companies ask Pund-IT for advice on moving to cloud-based collaboration, more often than not, he and his partners point clients to Google Apps.

“Google’s products are easier to administer and they’re better for sharing with others,”

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“Google’s products are easier to administer and they’re better for sharing with others,”
he says. "Google also has the advantage of drawing on the thousands of apps available for the Android operating system to supplement the functionality of its products. That's a plus that Microsoft has not leveraged to the same degree."

In the end, the solution that's best for your business will depend on your company's particular needs. Both Google Apps and Office 365 have their pros and cons.
Fleet of fleet

IN THE LATE 1990s, technology companies introduced fleet-management systems that enabled companies to quickly see where their vehicles were. The software proved a boon for fleet efficiency: businesses could save money by identifying the most efficient routes. The technology also helped companies pinpoint and recover stolen vehicles.

Today, fleet management solutions provide much more than location information. The latest systems also present diagnostic data for better maintenance, performance details that enable companies to identify problem drivers, and analytics to help businesses save costs.

Automotive Resources International (ARI) offers fleet-management technology that helps specify the best vehicle for each job based on parameters including gas mileage, fuel prices and even maintenance costs. Analytics baked into the system reveal details in real-time, such as how much the company spends on maintenance for each vehicle and what sorts of vehicles the company may need in the future. Meanwhile, ARI’s mobile apps give drivers the ability to report mileage, and fleet managers the ability to approve maintenance purchase orders, all from their smartphones.

Fleet management technology has come a long way since 1995. New software helps companies save costs and operate more efficiently.
“We always say you can’t manage what you can’t measure. In construction that’s even more important considering the substantial investments companies make in the vehicles they use,” says Peter Nogalo, marketing manager for ARI in Mississauga.

Although ARI doesn’t have many customers in the construction industry at this point, other fleet management technology providers specifically target this industry.

Trimble Navigation Ltd., for example, offers a fleet tracking system for firms that haul aggregate, block and other construction material. TrimFleet TrimView AGG finds the nearest vehicle available for a job, tracks operator hours and logs unsafe driving behaviour. The system comes with special sensors for forklifts and air-actuated belly dump gates to alert fleet managers when vehicles may require service.

John Deere’s JD Link Machine Monitoring system gives equipment owners remote access to fleet location and utilization data, plus diagnostic details. The program enables companies to see whether machines require maintenance, which simplifies scheduling. The system also catalogues machine and operator productivity.
Caterpillar Inc. also offers fleet-management technology for its products. **Cat Product Link** uses telematics to not only provide vehicle locations, but also information about fuel levels, working time versus idle time and maintenance records. The software also has a geo-fencing function that sends an alert to a manager’s mobile phone when a vehicle moves beyond a specified area.

Some fleet management providers offer cloud-based solutions that require no software or hardware installation. **Pedigree Technologies’ OneView** fleet management system runs on the web. Companies pay a monthly fee to access the solution, which provides vehicle tracking tied to the familiar Google Maps interface. The software also alerts managers when vehicles travel beyond a set area or speed. Alerts for upcoming maintenance requirements can be set as well.

Reports indicate that fleet management technology helps companies reduce costs for fuel, repair costs and even insurance. (Some drivers behave better when they know they’re being monitored.) With solutions from technology firms such as Pedigree, Trimble and ARI—plus software from manufacturers like John Deere and Caterpillar—construction teams have a swatch of options to save costs and improve efficiency.
When innovation is more than
Can just talk
TO WRITE AN ARTICLE about innovation in Waterloo Region is akin to shooting ducks on a pond. This region is known as the Technology Triangle of Canada and boasts a plethora of start-ups as well as plenty of mid-stream and mature technology organizations. At last count, more than 1,000 technology companies who generate in excess of $30 billion in revenue call this area home, according to Communitech. This is where BlackBerry was born, Desire2Learn is taking education by storm and more than 998 other companies are making names for themselves. But how has this regional thirst for innovation translated into the bricks and mortar world of ICI construction? Are GVCA members taking advantage of technology to improve their business and differentiate their services from competitors — and are they willing to take the risk to get there?

Some are. For First on Site Restoration, HCM Group and local start up TribeHR, innovation is what drives their success and they’ve put their money on it.

First on Site Restoration comes to the technology game with a solid pedigree. As one of Canada’s Best Managed Companies in 2012, they are recognized for implementing world-class business practices and creating value in innovative ways. They also believe that technology can make the difference in their line of work, says business development manager Kristin McCutcheon.

In the fall of 2012, First on Site launched mobileCT, proprietary claims tracking software that runs on ruggedized mobile tablets and allows restoration project managers to quickly and accurately generate initial site reports at the scene of the event. While it may not sound all that glamorous, these claim tracking reports are the lynchpin in the insurance industry. When disaster strikes, the insurance industry relies on such claim reports for information. The faster and more accurate these reports are created and delivered to insurance companies, the quicker claims can be settled. Shortening the cycle claim was the impetus behind the research and development of this software, says McCutcheon.

“Our COO, Bruce Derraugh, knew that we needed to use technology to increase efficiencies in the claims cycle process because as the insurance industry changed, so did margins. When everyone is cutting back, you need to use innovation to make your business more efficient,” says McCutcheon.

New ways to improve service

When Derraugh recognized that the restoration industry was in need of new ways of improving service and decreasing inefficiencies, he also knew technology was the answer. The mobileCT platform, which took six months to develop and several months of beta testing, allowed First on Site project managers to capture all the required data at the site for a claim in real time. Using a rugged tablet capable of withstanding the rigors of job site abuse and the mobileCT program, onsite project managers now gather claims information from the field and complete numerous tasks: draw up floor plans; identify issues and needs; take photos; and then turn this data into standardized reports and forms, which are then transmitted directly to the insurers.

So effective is mobileCT that McCutcheon admits she feels like she is “cheating” when she is on a sales call. “It’s clearly such an advantage to have this technology. It shortens claim cycle times, improves customer service and reduces paperwork.” She knows its just a matter of time before her competitors follow their lead, but she is confident that being first to market with this “game changer” and her company’s positive attitude towards using technology and innovation will keep them at the forefront of the industry.
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Using technology to improve environmental impact

Another local construction company investing in research and development of software technology is the HCM Group in Ayr. With “teamwork, innovation, sustainability and service" as their core values, owner Martin Halliwell, P.Eng, MBA knew he needed to do something to help owners and engineers determine the environmental impact of the materials used in their project designs. Working with Landon Gardner, a Master’s student of Clean Energy Engineering at McMaster University and now at University of British Columbia, Halliwell and his team have developed a Sustainability Engineering Design Audit (SEDA). This software will allow small to mid-sized engineering firms to calculate the impact their design has on such environmental issues as: climate change, ozone depletion, chemical pollution and biodiversity loss.

Halliwell has hired a team of three sustainability experts to help bring SEDA to fruition over the summer of 2013, while simultaneously launching
We need to make a difference in how we use our planet’s resources. Engineers have the ability to make a huge impact on how buildings and civil engineering structures are designed and how our global resources are used, this is why SEDA is important.

Innovation in human resources

One technology that may have an important impact on GVCA members is the ability to increase efficiency in the human resources function. One such innovative company is TribeHR, out of Waterloo. This fast-growing start up offers cloud-based human resources information systems and has the potential for helping small-to-medium-sized companies dramatically reduce the amount of time they spend on HR functions.

Mark Gally, who heads up sales and partnerships for TribeHR, says the employee engagement aspect of the system allows employees to self manage much of their personal HR needs from tracking their time off to updating their employee profiles and using the system to help build a positive company culture. “It’s a social HR system that helps people get motivated and productive in the workplace, while reducing admin costs,” says Gally. Soon to be available in a mobile platform, Gally sees the potential of construction workers on the jobsite being able to track hours and time off, and being able to input in real time when safety training was undertaken.

GVCA members are lucky. By living in such an innovation-friendly community, they are surrounded by talented people who can harness the powers of technology to improve the way the ICI construction industry does business.
Learning to swim in the sea of social media
by Angela Pause

AS SOCIAL MEDIA FLOOD the business world with their powerful effects, the local ICI construction industry is carefully testing these murky waters. While many GVCA members are just getting their feet wet, they have no intention of giving up. Social media have become just too important to dismiss according to the half dozen GVCA members who volunteered their social media stories. Or in the words of Joanne Bertrand, sales and marketing manager for the Newton Group in Guelph, “If you are not using social media at this point, you will be left far, far behind.”

Bertrand, who manages the company’s blogging and Twitter account (@NewtonGroup), has just begun to see the reach and power of social media. She recently began tweeting about a topic that is close to her and company’s heart: Earth Hour. This connects to Kiwi-Newton’s business model as they want to become better known for its sustainability efforts and the company’s “different way of building parking structures that are less expensive to build and safer for people to be in.” Bertrand uses Twitter to notify her followers when a new blog is posted on their website and to share relevant industry articles via links.

While she is slowly building a following, Bertrand realizes the quality of tweets shared is important and that it is largely a self-taught, self-researched skill she has acquired. Lest you think that Joanne falls into the millennial age group often referred to as “digital natives,” Bertrand is a vibrant woman in her mid-fifties who knows there is no turning back the social media tide. “People are interested in reading blogs that are about innovative construction technology… and I want to get in on the conversations the industry is having,” says an enthusiastic Bertrand. “Online is where it’s happening.”
Louise Cottreau at AWS Irrigation is further along the social media path. She has found that AWS’s Twitter page allows her “to connect to more professionals with more community involvement.”
Substantial and pervasive changes

Social media have completely altered the way people communicate and since people are what make up businesses, it has changed the way business communicates to its customers. While it’s easier to see how business to consumer (B2C) can use social media to its advantage—consumers interact on an individual level through their favorite social media sites—the business-to-business (B2B) use of social media is growing in importance. To ignore it is to leave money on the table because other construction-related businesses engaged in social media are reaping the rewards of having these “conversations”. They are already there at the table.

Started small, became big

One of the most successful construction-related social media users is EllisDon. While it’s easy to assume that because EllisDon is one of Canada’s largest GCs it has the deep pockets to effectively run a whole social media department, money is not why they are successful in this arena. Social media are scalable. You can begin small and grow your presence, says Christine Zakrajsek, the company’s web manager, who also handles EllisDon’s social media platform, which comprises Google +, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn.

When EllisDon first began social media five years ago, “we were literally the outcast kids on the playground, everyone pointed and laughed at us,” says Zakrajsek. “But we kept going, we didn’t give up and then all of a sudden people were saying ‘I want to play too!’ Now we have more than 3,600 followers.”

One of the key drivers that led to their social media success is their president, Geoff Smith. Smith writes a blog, which allows Zakrajsek to use Twitter to direct people to it. This is an ideal conversation starter and engagement tool, say Zakrajsek, “Which is the point behind social media.”

This is the power of social media: businesses can find like-minded individuals in organizations that they already do business with or want to do business with.

This is the strategy behind the HCM Group, which operates HC Matcon, RWH Engineering, HC Products and a newly formed human resources company focusing on providing the construction industry with qualified “sustainability” experts and training, says Paul McMenemey, sales and marketing manager for HC Matcon.

“We know we have to be there [social media] so we sent some of our staff to the GVCA (@_GVCA) social media seminar and, working with our marketing consultant, we are developing a comprehensive strategy to build our brands and have conversations through social media. You will begin to see us blogging on sustainability and our initiatives because that’s a core value and what our brand stands for – and sustainability is a key topic what our customers want to learn more about,” says McMenemey. To bolster their online presence, they redesigned their website to tell “a better story” of who they are and what they do.

While HCM group is in the nascent stage, Louise Cottreau at AWS Irrigation at AWS Irrigation is further along the social media path. She has found that AWS’s Twitter page allows her “to connect to more professionals with more community involvement.” Wisely, she follows conversations online to see who is contributing and what they are saying and then when she feels she can add value to the conversation she joins in.
Add value to conversations

This is the essence of a successful social media presence: adding value to conversations (and ideally creating them). Those who simply blast out promotional tweets or retweet non-relevant links will be left out in the cold, instead of the cozy conversation corner between people. For Zakrajsek (@chriszakrajsek) and other accomplished social media users there is very little difference between who you know in person and who know online. "Your virtual online world is as real as your real world," says Zakrajsek. "The old days of grip and grin are over. Because of our social media lives it has changed, now who you know and who shares the same values can be all over the world." Yet she also encourages social media users to "get out and actually meet these people and have a beer" if that’s possible. If you make a connection on social media with someone in the next city, and you find you have online conversations, a logical step is to meet them in person.

What usually hinders a social media presence is the perceived lack of good content to share and the person-power to accomplish it. Nathan Martin (@odellassociates) of O’Dell Associates is new to Twitter. About 75 percent of his tweets are retweets from others. "I am an erratic tweeter, when I see something that really interests me I tweet it, but that might every couple of days," he admits. "I am trying to learn social media by dipping my toes into it. I am trying to get familiar with it."

As more construction-related businesses realize that social media can make a real difference in communicating with present and potential customers, they also realize that going it alone at the start can be daunting. The G & L Group, who operate several companies, are using a mix of internal people and an external agency to help them launch their social media. External agencies provide clients with industry relevant content and “tweet” or update statuses on behalf of clients. While this allows business to actually get online, it often suffers in content quality unless that agency or consultant really knows your business and works with you on related projects. Stephanie Moore, sales and marketing coordinator at G&L (@gandlgroup), has just seen her company launch a social media presence in January 2013. While they use an outside agency to help them launch, she is internalizing the role slowly as they become more comfortable with it. "All our customers may not be there yet [on social media], but we want to be ready and waiting for them when they do get there!" says Moore.

A recruiting tool

Trigon Construction Management has used its Trigon Facebook page as a recruiting tool for a construction labourer, whereas EllisDon uses LinkedIn to post job openings. These methods of getting messages out to clients and potential new hires are invaluable – and the feedback from the community is even more so.

While much of the construction world happens on the job site, location is no longer a problem - social media are now firmly entrenched in mobile apps. In other words, people are taking social media with them in their pockets. Nielsen released its 2012 Social Media Report that showed time spent on mobile apps and the mobile web account for 63 percent of the year-over-year growth in overall time spent using social media. Forty-six percent of social media users say they use their smartphones to access social media. From boardroom to jobsite, social media use is pervasive. "It’s possible to get people engaged wherever they are at," says Zakrajset.

All these businesses rightfully recognize that social media represent a vast sea of opportunity. Not only are these companies teaching themselves how to swim, but they are also landing some big fish.

Angela Pause has been using social media since 2004. She also writes online content for clients. You can find her @angelapause or on Linkedin.
Introducing

www.bestbidz.ca

for construction bid opportunities and it’s brought to you in part by Ontario’s local construction associations (LCAs). is a single electronic plansroom that gives LCA members access to open public tenders in Ontario, invitational tenders and national bid opportunities.

“Just as they do with their local electronic plansrooms, LCA members can log into BestBidz to access the latest information on local projects, as well as public tenders across the province and across the country,” says Craig Roberts, senior director, strategy and corporate development with Reed Construction Data, the agency that has partnered with the LCAs to create BestBidz.ca.

BestBidz offers particular value to the discrete groups that use the electronic plansrooms of LCAs. For example, buyers and owners that list projects on BestBidz expose their projects to the thousands of members that comprise Ontario’s LCAs and to existing customers of Reed Construction Data. Moreover, they are able to use the service to control distribution of plans and specs, and draw on the expertise of LCA staff to manage tender documents.

General and trade contractors who use the service receive daily project news bulletins, gain access to Ontario’s largest repository of tender documents, and are able to search plans and specifications according to the MasterFormat division codes and standard naming conventions, meaning that they can quickly find the documents that are most relevant to their own lines of work.

“By indexing tender documents according to the MasterFormat division codes, BestBidz adds a great deal of value to publicly available tender data,” says Roberts. “That service—combined with the fact that we deal exclusively in construction and that BestBidz draws on the expertise of the staff of LCAs—helps make life easier for buyers as well as sellers. And that’s what helps sets this service apart from other providers of construction tender data.”

Comprehensive as BestBidz is now, Reed and the LCAs have plans to improve the site even further. Down the road, the site managers hope to include opportunities for e-tendering and to allow registered users to build pre-qualification systems that will further help streamline the process of issuing tender opportunities and collecting tender packages.
1 Platform.  
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For the Ontario Construction Industry

Bestbidz is a single electronic plans room that gives you access to construction projects in Ontario in 3 different ways.

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About the BestBidz Network

The BestBidz network is the result of a collaboration amongst Ontario’s Local Construction Associations (LCAs) that have been serving the construction industry for more than a century. BestBidz has been formed with the goal of providing the construction industry with centralized access to all construction tenders and tender documents in Ontario. From Toronto to Thunder Bay, and from Windsor to Ottawa, we’ve got you covered.

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Ball Construction builds with BIM

Kitchener-based company makes its first foray into building information modeling on the St. Catharine’s Spectator Facility, and sees big potential going forward.
BUILDING INFORMATION MODELING

(BIM) has been hailed as the next greatest thing to hit the industry. At its core, it’s about creating and manipulating digital representations of the physical and functional characteristics of a building. In other words, BIM takes drawings off paper and brings them onto the computer screen where they can be assembled in three dimensions and manipulated to create the most effective expression of the finished product.

In this country, BIM is such big news that the Canadian Construction Association has partnered with a number of companion groups to create the Institute for BIM in Canada—an entity whose mandate is to “lead and facilitate the coordinated use of BIM in the design, construction and management of the Canadian built environment.”

Canada, of course, isn’t the first country in the world to embrace BIM. The process is in use all over Asia, Europe and the United States and is proving to offer significant benefits to construction teams that are working on particularly large or complex projects. Specifically, it helps to resolve issues of constructability, eases the process of making design amendments (and therefore cost comparisons), gives the project team a practical and cohesive plan for phasing a job, reduces uncertainties, lessens the time taken to respond to owners’ questions, and increases the accuracy and quality of project documents.

Despite the benefits it purports to offer, BIM’s adoption locally has been slow. Barriers to entry are significant. BIM is intimidating. People don’t understand enough about the technology to accept it, and those who do understand it well enough have the means to afford it. It costs a lot to buy BIM software and takes a good deal of time to train people properly on its use. As a result, the promised benefits of BIM can, initially, at least, be slow to arrive.

Amid all these objections, at least one GVCA member has sunk its teeth into BIM. Kitchener’s Ball Construction is currently using BIM software to design and build the St. Catharines Spectator Facility, a 5,000-seat multi-purpose building that will serve as home to the Niagara IceDogs of the Ontario Hockey League.

Jason Homewood is an estimator with Ball. He’s part of the team that’s leading the company’s adoption of BIM.

“It’s been slow,” he says of the transition. “It could take us as much as six months to get a model of the Spectator building up and running. But we expected that.”

As the Ball team creates its BIM model, staff are beginning to see just how valuable the technology can be. On structural steel design, for example, a BIM model shows exactly how components fit together. No more referring to two or three drawings to check connections. BIM’s three-dimensional model expresses exactly what’s been designed.
“We can see how this is going to be of real value for major building components such as ductwork and electrical,” says Homewood. “These days, we’re doing calculations by hand to sort out where interferences are, and we’d resolve those as we build. BIM gives us the power to address such issues on the computer screen, before they’re ever brought to site. It’s amazing.”

Ball uses Autodesk for design. Specifically, the Revit suite of products has been designed to meet the precise needs of the contracting community. Ball does its design work using Revit and then shares the model for collaboration purposes via Autodesk’s Navisworks review software. Navisworks in particular converts the Revis model into file formats that can be accessed by virtually any company—no matter their familiarity with BIM technology.

Although demand for BIM isn’t high in Grand Valley, Homewood says the time Ball has put into familiarizing itself with the technology on the Spectator building has been well spent.

“I think you’re going to see BIM become a mandatory tool for contractors down the road,” he says. “Owners understand how their projects can benefit from BIM. They appreciate the fact that they can see their buildings in three dimensions rather than two, and they value the fact that they can use BIM technology to create their own facility maintenance schedules for the entire life-cycles of their buildings.”

Don’t think for an instant that the St. Catharines Spectator Facility is your run-of-the-mill hockey rink. It’s anything but, which is why the joint-venture team from Ball Construction and Rankin Construction judged this project to be perfect for the company’s initial use of BIM.

The steel-framed building will actually reside in a ravine, overtop the original Welland Canal. Two connecting bridges will feed traffic into the building and spectators will climb down into the bowl to see events on site. Needless to say, its particular design has forced some interesting considerations.

“There are a lot of very complicated steel connections and sloping required to support the precast concrete cladding,” says project manager Bob Nippell. “The structural BIM model we’ve created has been great for helping us detail these connections and coordinate the slope of the steel beams needed to support all the precast elements.”

Ball has also used BIM to plan the building’s underground sanitary and refrigeration levels and to drive piles in the appropriate positions and to the appropriate depths. And once the building’s final model is complete, the company will again draw on BIM to quickly resolve any complications with the building’s interior elements.

“I’m sure BIM will help us prevent a lot of design changes before they ever get brought to the site,” says Nippell. “The potential for this technology is enormous.”
BIM’s **TOP 10** benefits

1. **Better outcomes through collaboration**
   All project partners use a single, shared 3D model, cultivating collaborative working relationships. This ensures everyone is focused on achieving best value, from project inception to eventual decommissioning.

2. **Enhanced performance**
   BIM makes possible swift and accurate comparison of different design options, enabling development of more efficient, cost-effective and sustainable solutions.

3. **Optimized solutions**
   Through deployment of new generative modelling technologies, solutions can be cost-effectively optimized against agreed parameters.

4. **Greater predictability**
   Projects can be visualized at an early stage, giving owners and operators a clear idea of design intent and allowing them to modify the design to achieve the outcomes they want. In advance of construction, BIM also enables the project team to ‘build’ the project in a virtual environment, rehearsing complex procedures, optimizing temporary works designs and planning procurement of materials, equipment and manpower.

5. **Faster project delivery**
   Time savings of up to 50 percent can be achieved by agreeing the design concept early in project development to eliminate late stage design changes.

6. **Reduced safety risk**
   Crowd behaviour and fire modelling capability enable designs to be optimized for public safety. Asset managers can use the 3D model to enhance operational safety. Contractors can minimize construction risks by reviewing complex details or procedures before going on site.

7. **Fits first time**
   Integrating multidisciplinary design inputs using a single 3D model allows interface issues to be identified and resolved in advance of construction, eliminating the cost and time impacts of redesign. The model also enables new and existing assets to be integrated seamlessly.

8. **Reduced waste**
   Exact quantity take-offs mean that materials are not over-ordered. Precise program scheduling enables just-in-time delivery of materials and equipment, reducing potential for damage. Use of BIM for automated fabrication of equipment and components enables more efficient materials handling and waste recovery.

9. **Whole life asset management**
   BIM models contain product information that assists with commissioning, operation and maintenance activities – for example sequences for start-up and shut-down, interactive 3D diagrams showing how to take apart and reassemble equipment items and specifications allowing replacement parts to be ordered.

10. **Continual improvement**
    Members of the project team can feed back information about the performance of processes and items of equipment, driving improvements on subsequent projects.

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Tapping tablets

Tests conducted by one government organization suggest tablet PCs could prove useful on job sites, but the technology may have certain drawbacks.

TABLET COMPUTERS LIKE Apple's iPad and BlackBerry's PlayBook help inspectors at one government organization save up to an hour of work a day. But decision-makers at Defence Construction Canada (DCC) aren't completely convinced just yet that the pros of such devices outweigh their cons.

A Crown corporation, DCC provides procurement, contract management and related infrastructure services to the Department of National Defence. When the Canadian Forces need a new airplane hangar or training facility built, DCC coordinates the project.
In 2012, DCC conducted a pilot study to find out whether employees could save time and work more efficiently using tablet PCs. To do so, the organization provided tablets to select employees working at sites across Canada. Concluded last July, the initial test phase proved positive.

“We found that the use of tablet PCs allowed employees to save time while accomplishing certain specific tasks more efficiently,” says Nicolas Forget, DCC’s manager of operations coordination.

DCC contract coordinators, who manage contracts and ensure construction work is completed according to drawings and specifications, saved time otherwise spent transcribing notes. Before using tablets, coordinators would record notes by hand and then return to their offices and enter the information into their desktop computers. With tablets, coordinators would enter information directly into the portable device and sync or email the data back to base—no need to re-enter the data at the office. Coordinators also saved time when referencing contractual documents. If the user needed to look at a diagram or a blueprint, he or she could simply call the document up on the tablet, rather than run back to the office to access the documents.

In total, DCC estimates that coordinators saved approximately an hour per day when using tablet PCs. The time saved quickly offsets the device purchase costs.

But this doesn’t mean DCC is ready to begin buying tablets in bulk. The organization still has a number of important issues to investigate.

For example, what impact on data security could tablets have? Which tablet and platform works best?

According to Forget, the organization tested tablets from a number of manufacturers, running on various operating systems such as iOS, Android and Windows, seeking the right combination of security and inter-
operability with DCC back-end computer systems. But it’s too soon for the organization to pinpoint just which tablet makes the most sense, Forget says. Tests continue.

“There are new tablets that are much more business-oriented,” Forget says. He explains that many earlier tablets were oriented for use at home, not at work. “The latest devices may respond more to our needs rather than those oriented as companion devices.”

Even just a few years ago, tablets would have been rare to see on job sites. But that’s changing. EllisDon Corp reportedly uses tablets and SiteWorks software to track punch lists and share information among jobsite managers. PCL Constructors is said to run a bring-your-own-device program such that subcontractors on tablets can access PCL’s centralized document-control system and email system for document verification and communication.

Dan Heitbohmer is president of BuildCircle Inc., a Stratford software company targeting contractors. He says the construction sector is beginning to rely more heavily on mobile technology, and tablet usage is inevitable. “As the prices of tablets continue to drop and the quality and quantity of software improves, we will see them out in the field more often.”

The increasing likelihood of tablets on sites corresponds with an increasing number of construction-focused apps for smartphones and tablets. BuildCircle’s software, for instance, enables contractors to communicate with subcontractors: provide and access updates, generate reports and track bid-status information, among other tasks. Users can download Android and BlackBerry apps for the software. (An Apple iOS app is in development.)

Bridgit is another app for the construction industry. This software, developed by Bridgit Inc., a Toronto startup, lets users send RFIs directly from their mobile devices and track progress of requests. Users can also send jobsite information to HQ: weather conditions, information about workers, equipment and materials, and safety documents, for instance. Users can organize site photos, mark up images and add comments to pictures. The app appends GPS location information to each photo, for instantaneous geographic references.

Lauren Hasegawa, Bridgit’s cofounder, says three construction companies have agreed to test her firm’s software. She adds that many construction companies are wary of the time and costs required to implement software, especially when the technology is designed for complicated back-office processes. “People get overwhelmed. They don’t want to adopt something that’s going to make their lives more complicated.” Bridgit is designed to be simple and easy to use, so companies need not waste time and money implementing it, she says.

With apps like Bridgit on the horizon and software such as BuildCircle’s solution—not to mention leadership from large firms including Ellis Don, PCL and DCC—it may not be long before tablets are common on job sites everywhere, including in Grand Valley.
MOBILE APPS ARE taking on an increased role in today's construction industry. That much is sure. On site and in the office, we’re all turning to our smartphones to change the way in which we go about our daily business. For some, that means changing the way we organize our priorities and the speed at which we share information. For others, it’s about finding new tools to improve the way we go about our daily tasks. Whatever way you consider it, mobile apps are here and they’re here to stay.

Tom Bellis, marketing and communications director with the Ready Mixed Concrete Association of Ontario (RMCAO), has conducted a bit of research into the prevalence of mobile technology in the industry. His findings show that although we might not all be using mobile apps on the jobsite every day, we undeniably have the capacity to do so.

“My research shows that about 93 percent of people in the construction industry in the United States bring mobile devices to worksites. I think those numbers resonate here in Canada too. That tells me that people have the potential to start using mobile apps on site. They just need a push to do so.”
Sometimes, a push is exactly what people need to start using a mobile app. As good as your device’s app store might be, reading about an app is no substitute for seeing it in use in the field. For many people, that “aha!” moment is transformative. It shows people the value and convenience of new technology.

So how are we using mobile technology on site? The ideal many people have in mind is of a superintendent walking around the jobsite with a tablet PC in his hands, highlighting sections of blueprints as he delivers sage advice to workers. Although that scenario might play out on the jobsites of the world’s largest builders, it’s certainly a long way off for the average contractor. Today’s reality, says Bellis, is more modest.

“I’d classify mobile apps for the industry into three categories,” he says. “The first is those apps that are pre-loaded on a smartphone. So calendars, to-do-lists and email. The second are consumer mobile devices, which are things like calculator apps and measurement tools that you can find on a device’s app store. The third are tools that are built to support, and tie into, desktop computers. So apps for productivity, for BIM, for bid management.”

Surprisingly, you might think that app usage in construction diminishes as you work further down Bellis’ list. And while it’s probably fair to say that everyone who uses a smartphone will at some point pull it out on site to check email or book a meeting, it’s also likely that people will download measurement tools or leveling tools and pull those into service at one point or another in their working lives. Moreover, while mobile BIM tools might not be commonplace on construction sites, productivity tools such as Evernote, Dropbox and SkyDrive that tie back to a user’s desktop, tablet and smartphone are often used by people to update and share changing documents.

“There’s a world of potential out there for construction people who use mobile devices,” says Bellis. “Mobile apps are going to play a big role in our industry going forward.”

If you’re a new mobile adopter or an avid fan who’s looking to kick the tires on a few new products, we’ve got you covered. Here’s a list of 10 construction-focused apps that just might make life on site or in the office (or both) a little easier.

1. **Autodesk Buzzsaw**

   Got Autodesk? It’s a must-have 3D design suite that’s used across the architecture, engineering and construction fields, as well as in manufacturing, media and entertainment. Buzzsaw is one of many Autodesk products. This one supports BIM workflows, giving users real-time access to project data from any platform. Pull project files anywhere, communicate with team members, fix problems on paper before they’re ever cast in cement.

   (Autodesk users take heart: app stores are loaded with Autodesk mobile products. Buzzsaw is just one of many ways to bring Autodesk with you anywhere!)

2. **SkyDrive**

   Man is it frustrating when you’re sure you’ve got a document on your tablet only to find that you left it on your desktop at the office. Sweep that problem aside with Microsoft SkyDrive. It’s a virtual file-management suite that enables you to store, move and update files quickly among any connected device. Once you login, hey presto!, you’ve got full access to stored files and never have to worry about working from the most current version of a document.
3. PlanGrid
This is cool. Sign up for a free account at PlanGrid.com, then use the tool to store PDF documents—drawings, punchlists, progress photos—online. Through PlanGrid, you can annotate documents and push updates out to all team members to make sure they're current on the latest developments. You can even use the tool to do takeoff measurements.

4. JDLink
Own a Deere? If you do, you’ll never lose track of it again if you download JDLink. The tool helps you keep tabs on your John Deere machines no matter where they do. But this app isn’t just about global positioning systems. It’s also about checking maintenance schedules, viewing when a machine was last used, and even setting alerts about movement outside of normal business hours or specified regions of the city.

5. Construction Master Pro Advanced Calculator
Mathematically challenged people, take heart. Calculated Industries just launched the latest version of its Construction Master Pro Advanced Feet Inch Fraction Construction-Math Calculator. And while the name’s a bit cumbersome, this is without a doubt an efficient tool. Use the app to solve complex construction math problems in estimating, bidding and building. We’re talking about dimensional math and conversions, right-angle solutions, area and volume solutions, and special functions like trigonometry, compound miters, crown angles and more. $20 well spent!

6. FormMobi
OK, FormMobi might not be the last mobile tool you ever use, but it’s sure got some handy functions. Use the customizable form system to record critical information in the field and communicate it—in an array of formats—back to base. Annotate documents. Supplement with photos. Record voice memos. Even confirm authenticity by signing forms, pre-delivery. It’s a handy solution to ensure processes are followed and information confirmed.

7. DeWALT Mobile Pro
You might be forgiven for skipping past this one, but give it a second look. It’s not a catalogue of DeWALT tools. It’s actually a useful resource and a handy in-the-field reference guide. The construction calculator will help do takeoffs and calculate the lengths, areas and volumes of shapes. It also gives formulas for estimating studs, drywall and concrete slabs. Purchase add-on modules and suddenly, you’ve got capacity to solve problems that are unique to the electrical, site work, concrete & masonry and finish work trades, as well as for general business and finance.

8. PunchLists
OK, so this app isn’t perfectly suited to a $50-million office tower. But it’s exactly the kind of thing you could sink your teeth into if you’re a small general or trade contractor that’s running a lot of little jobs. Take pictures of deficiencies in the field, record specific location information, document problems, suggest corrective actions, deliver to your colleagues. It’s that easy.

9. Procore
Construction project management—in your pocket. Use this app to stay on top of critical project data: schedules, RFPs, submittals, change orders, contracts, budgets, documents, photos and more. Supports your existing Procore construction management platform account.

10. Quad Level
As the name suggests, this app provides four displays (vertical, horizontal, diagonal and 2D) for every surface to be measured. It reads quickly, senses even the slightest deviation from plumb or level and, best yet, tells you exactly how far off level you are in inches per 10 feet.
it won't be long before a municipal government or other public-sector entity near you starts buying construction services electronically. e-Procurement—that is, the sourcing of construction services via electronic means—has long been mooted in the industry but a handful of recent developments are giving the technique more traction in the marketplace.

What is e-procurement?
By the definition above, most government agencies could rightly claim to already procure construction services electronically. After all, they issue tender packages to the public via the electronic plansrooms of local construction associations and via third-party tendering websites such as MERX and Biddingo. But that approach is only a very narrow interpretation of e-procurement for construction. Because, in the end, owners still request that bid forms and bonds be delivered in hard copy to their offices by a specific date and time.

GET READY, GVCA MEMBERS: Submit a bid form and a bond online? Why not? A handful of public-sector buyers have recently dipped their toes in that particular pond and report good successes.
True e-procurement, then, is about not just the distribution of tenders electronically. It’s also about e-tendering, that is: the receipt of bid forms and bid bonds via electronic means. And, for a variety of reasons, governments across the country have been hesitant to adopt this much more intensive version of e-procurement. Stephen Bauld, president and CEO of Purchasing Consultants International Inc. and an expert on government procurement, explains why in an article he wrote for the *Daily Commercial News* in April 2012.

“A number of events and obstacles have delayed the extent of the shift towards e-procurement, and in particular e-tendering. One of the biggest concerns raised is the security of the documents. Further issues that have delayed widespread adoption of e-procurement in the public sector include the differing extent to which centralization and decentralization of the purchasing function prevail within government as opposed to the private sector.”

In other words, he says, there’s a lot of fear and uncertainty at play.

“Part of the problem is that no one has yet tested a model that other municipalities can look at and say: let’s use that as a starting point,” he says. “Since no one knows where the legal loopholes and liabilities are, no one in the public sector is willing to stick his neck out to be the first to use such a system.”

Which is a shame, he says, because the benefits of creating a true, robust e-procurement and e-tendering system cannot be ignored.

**Reaping the rewards**

Bauld’s theory is that e-tendering will be beneficial to municipalities because it will attract more bids to any job. His logic: e-tendering means that contractors can submit bids to an owner from the comfort of their own offices without ever getting stuck in traffic or being unable to find parking, or paying for a courier to deliver bid packages. With such inconveniences of the job taken away, more contractors will be more likely to bid more jobs. More bidders on a project, in turn, means better pricing for municipal governments.

“Think about how much money a city could save on its annual capital budget if e-tendering brought in prices that were 10 to 15 percent lower than by traditional means,” he says. “We’re talking savings in the tens of millions of dollars annually. What’s more, an e-tendering system would give bid results in seconds. No more waiting around to discover the low bidder.”

**Two trials show positive results**

Two public-sector buyers recently ran e-procurement and e-tendering trials. And both learned important lessons from their experiences.

In January, the Town of Newmarket ran a mock tender in conjunction with the Surety Association of Canada to collect bid submissions from interested contractors on a fictional tender. The town issued a mock tender package via its website and encouraged would-be bidders to review the instructions to bidders and submit fictional bids via an online form. Results were positive says procurement officer Christine Wood.

“Fifty-seven contractors took our plans for that project and 14 submitted bids,” she says. “The project was a huge benefit to us to see how we might unfold such an exercise—because we really do feel as though we’ll collect bid submissions for standing offers electronically within the next year or two. It was also beneficial to the participating contractors who got to see exactly how they would deliver prices and bonds to us via an electronic system.”
Although the test wasn’t perfect—the town had to declare four of the 14 fictional bids it received non-compliant due to errors made by contractors during the submission process—it did show a number of important benefits.

“It was a huge time saver in the first place,” says Wood. “Our staff normally scan the hard-copy bid documents they receive so we have these documents in electronic format. Obviously that step’s no longer needed. What’s more, we don’t have to try to read bidders’ messy handwriting.”

Just as importantly, the system makes late bids and calculation errors things of the past. As closing time approaches, the system will warn a contractor to get his bid in. Once closing time arrives, the system locks down all users to prevent them from sending any information to the owner. The system will also add all unit prices together on a contractor’s bid form, meaning that no one has to do any calculations manually and risk making a costly clerical error.

Defence Construction Canada (DCC) took its e-procurement and e-tendering trial a step further. The Crown corporation used e-tendering software to buy construction services for a live, $2-million utilities project in Victoria, BC. Richard Allie, manager of contract services for DCC, explains that the corporation issued its tender call via MERX, as it always does, and included notes in its instructions to bidders advising interested companies that they would have to complete the tendering process using software on the website of the Vancouver Island Construction Association. Contractors were expected to log into the system to build their user profiles and then enter all required information—such as business numbers, health and safety documentation and proof of workers’ compensation—with their bid prices.

Once the closing date and time arrived, DCC’s local contracting officer logged into the system to collect the prices and announced the bid results. Allie says that while DCC wanted to rely exclusively on the electronic system for the tendering process, the corporation was mindful to build safeguards into the process. For example, once the unofficial bid results were announced, the corporation enacted its full due diligence processes to ensure the low bidder was compliant. DCC also asked the low bidder to deliver its bid bond within 24 hours of the closing date.

“We had a back-up plan in place just in case things didn’t go off perfectly, but we ran into no major troubles,” says Allie. “In fact, we saw quite a few benefits, not the least of which is that the system weeded out all non-compliant bidders for us, so we never had to spend time disqualifying anyone. That was a real time savings and a huge benefit.”

DCC collected five bids for the project, which is well in line with its average for a contract of that size and scope. The corporation is now analyzing the results from this tender to include in its business case to launch e-procurement and e-tendering within the next two years.

**Next steps**

Get ready for e-procurement and e-tendering or get out of the way. That’s Bauld’s advice for contractors who may be worried about using online technology to win business.

“The simple reality of the matter is that the way is clear for municipalities to go the e-procurement route,” he says. “The technology is there to address any major challenges and objections. And if it can save time and money in public-sector procurement offices that are already stretched for resources, it just makes sense to go the e-tendering route.”
Helping to drive municipalities towards e-procurement and e-tendering has been the Surety Association of Canada (SAC). For a long time, bonding was one of the principal bottlenecks to e-tendering. Specifically, the surety industry needed to devise a system that would make electronic versions of bonds just as valid as their hard-copy counterparts. Enter SAC’s Mock Tender Program for E-Bonds.

According to SAC, the program is an opportunity for owners to work with the association to request and assess electronic bid bonds.

"By simulating a realistic scenario, all parties to the tendering process will have the opportunity to participate first hand in the preparation and presentation of an electronic bid bond in response to and in accordance with an owner’s request. Upon receipt of an electronic bid bond, participating owners will provide indication as to whether any particular form or presentation of an electronic bond received would have been accepted or rejected in an actual tender along with explanatory comments."

Mobile Bonds is one of just a handful of Canadian companies that offers a surety bond transaction service. The company was one of two invited by SAC to participate in the Town of Newmarket’s mock tender. Mobile Bonds president Steve Muxlow says the trial ran seamlessly.

“People who use the system for the first time marvel at how quickly it works,” he says. “In well under an hour a contractor can have a valid bond ready for delivery to an owner. It can take hours or even days to get a bond via the traditional route. This process saves time and money.”

Registered users can log into the Mobile Bonds system to prepare their bonds online, seal the documents with encrypted digital signatures, deliver them to their bonding companies or brokers for authentication, and then upload the documents into such systems as MERX and Biddingo for delivery to a tendering authority. No more paper. No more faxes. No more couriers.

SAC conducted its own assessment of Mobile Bonds’ systems and processes and reported positively on the process, saying: “the workflow of the technology mimics a close comparison to the current workflows used in the current paper bond environment,” and concluding that “the service appears to offer an innovative, readily available solution, not just for bid bonds, but also for other types of surety instruments.”

For its part, SAC will use the information it collects from trials such as Newmarket’s to understand the challenges to and benefits of e-bonding systems with the aim of releasing a summary paper later this year.
GVCA social calendar
Summer 2013

May 9
Women in Construction (WinC)
Networking Dinner

June 7
Leaders in Construction (LinC)
Boat Cruise

June 20
Golf Tournament

August 21
Women in Construction (WinC)
Golf Tournament

GVCA education calendar, 2013

April 24 & 25
Microsoft Project for Construction

April 30 & May 2
Construction 101

May 15
Preventing Fraud in Your Company Seminar

May 24
Contractor Electrical Safety Awareness Seminar
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   Let’s face it, there are a number of association publications on the market today that might be considered self-serving. They do a fine job of promoting the aims and goals of the associations they serve, without actually giving the readers news of any substance. The GVCA e-Journal isn’t like that. While part of our goal is to support the public policy and outreach goals of the GVCA, a greater part of our mandate is provide you with news and insight into development and trends in today’s industry. After all, we understand that our members are businesses first and members second.

3. **It goes anywhere you do**
   
   We designed the GVCA e-Journal (and the electronic version of the hard-copy magazine) to be readable on any mobile phone or tablet computer. So whether you’re at home or on the road, the latest industry news is always available at your fingertips.

4. **It’s our publication**
   
   The GVCA e-Journal is wholly owned and managed by the Grand Valley Construction Association. That means that every cent of every dollar you spend on advertising in our publication goes to support the product on a cost-recovery basis and goes to support the association itself. Not all association publications are run that way. That’s what makes us special and—most importantly—accountable.

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