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Ignoring BIM at Our Peril

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By James Boland

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The masonry trades risk contributing to their own obsolescence by failing to get into step with building information modeling (BIM) — the 3D modeling and information laden process for building design and construction planning that is sweeping the industry.

BIM, a process for designing and building that saves time and cost, improves estimation accuracy, reduces waste and avoids conflicts in the field, is not new to the construction industry. Yet the masonry trades lag well behind most others — including concrete placement and steel — in developing tools specifically designed to improve trade-specific planning and execution through BIM.

“If we don’t incorporate BIM technology into the masonry industry, masonry will seem difficult to work with and become

uncompetitive. It is no doubt the future of masonry. It’s not a choice, but a must,” says David Biggs, P.E., S.E., who teaches historic preservation engineering at University of Pennsylvania and program coordinator of the [BIM for Masonry Initiative](#).

For three years now, the BIM for Masonry Initiative representing the masonry industry of the U.S. and portions of Canada, has been promoting the development of techniques and tools to assist designers, manufacturers, contractors, construction managers and owners in the better use of masonry with BIM technology. The work has benefited from the financial support and leadership of the [International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers \(IUBAC\)](#), NCMA Foundation, Mason Contractors Association of America, International Masonry Institute (IMI), Western States Clay Products, Brick Industry association and The Masonry Society. Additional financial support has been provided by many regional masonry organizations and companies.

The benefits BIM provides for masonry are hard to ignore: Its 3D visualizations provide a digital representation of the building, from exterior to interior, which makes scheduling, estimating, site planning and record keeping more accurate and visual-friendly. Also, it is capable of creating quantity takeoffs, direct fabrication, clash detection and energy analysis. Most importantly, all the building information stored in BIM can be accessed and interactively shared by designers, architects, engineers, project managers, contractors, owners and craftworkers to facilitate smoother workflows and collaboration, because they can read from, and write to the same information source.

David Sovinski, national director of industry development for the IMI calls the BIM-M Initiative “the most significant cooperative masonry industry venture to be undertaken.” He says the industry has rallied together to stimulate the development of digital tools that will transform how masonry

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is designed and constructed.


BIM-M will report on its progress at the **BIM 2015 Symposium**, to be held in St. Louis, Mo., April 9-10. The event is hosted by the Masonry Institute of St. Louis and features keynote speaker Will Ikerd, a principal at IKERD Consulting, Dallas Texas, an internationally recognized consulting group specializing in BIM and virtual design and construction. Attendance is also open to anyone interested in BIM for masonry. BIM-M information and symposium details and registration are available at www.bimformasonry.org.

If you are involved in the masonry trades, and the future of this material and its continued relevance to construction matters to you, then it is time to step up and get involved. Ignore the future at your peril.

James Boland is the President of International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers, the 150-year-old trade union in North America that represents skilled bricklayers, tile setters, cement masons, plasterers, stone masons, marble masons, restoration workers, and terrazzo and mosaic workers in the U.S. and Canada.

Keywords: [Masonry](#); [Bricklayers](#); [Craft Workers](#)

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