



Christopher Giffin, RRC, AIA  
President



## KEEPING PACE

**T**he theme for this issue of *IIBEC Interface* is technology, and I've spent some time recently thinking about how much technology has altered the way we do business. When I started out in the late 1980s and early 1990s, our work didn't rely on the internet, computers, or cellphones. The fax machine was the state of the art. Even at that time, the pace of business could seem extreme, but expectations were different. I remember feverishly trying to finalize a set of hand-drawn construction documents by a certain deadline. I had no choice but to finish on time because it would take two business days to deliver the drawings to the reproduction company where they would generate the blueline copies for the owner and various bidders. When my office acquired its own in-house blueline machine, that eliminated the hassle of working with the reproduction company, but I would now spend all day plotting the drawings and all night inhaling ammonia as I ran the original drawings through the blueline machine.

We have certainly come a long way since those days. We have powerful smartphones, tablets, and laptops that allow us to do all sorts of things we could not even dream about 30 years ago. Even 10 years ago, the ability to order something online in the morning and have it show up at your house later in the day would have seemed like a fantasy. In the course of a few decades, we've moved from snail mail to faxes, to email, to sharing files via the cloud. What's next? What will we be doing 10 years from now?

I greatly appreciate the many professional benefits that current technology provides. The construction industry, like others, has been transformed by innovations such as meeting software that allows all team members to interact "face to face" without being in the same room (or even the same country). We can easily store documents, photos, and videos so they can be reviewed from anywhere. We can also access the latest updates to codes and standards with the click of a mouse, improve our skills through virtual training, and quickly compare products and prices from competing vendors' websites. Research and practice are both advancing as cutting-edge software facilitates experimentation, the design of sophisticated models, and the analysis of complex data in ways never before possible.

On the other hand, there are times when I worry that the pace of technology is so rapid that we can't effectively keep up. One of the downsides of all this technology is the acceleration of expectations. Long gone is the era when we might have seven days to review something like a product submittal or payment application. It often feels like we don't even have seven hours to respond to requests from clients and colleagues—sometimes, it feels like we only have seven minutes. Are we approaching the point where we will be expected to provide answers in seven seconds?

Scheduling conflicts are also becoming a greater challenge. I don't know about you, but I find that the volume of "urgent" demands coupled with very tight scheduling windows can create significant stresses in the project environment.

If you are a younger professional who grew up with Google, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and the continual revolution of technology in every aspect of your life, you may be better suited than those of us who have been in the industry longer to integrate technology into your work. Perhaps you are less stressed than I am by the current pace of expectations in our industry because that fast pace seems "natural" to you. Even if that is the case, accelerated expectations can pose a serious challenge. Today's employers tend to expect younger professionals to spool up their building enclosure knowledge and skills as quickly as they adopt a new social media platform. Fortunately, IIBEC's educational offerings through our chapter-sponsored programs, symposiums, and convention programs are second to none and can help professionals of all ages learn what they need to succeed.

As we move forward, our success as an industry can't rely on technology alone. Anyone can get instant information from a Google search, but it takes critical judgment, analytic abilities, and experience to sift through all the data to find the best solution for a particular challenge. Blueline machines and faxes may be relics, but "old-fashioned" practices such as diplomacy, mentorships, and collegial conversations remain as crucial today as ever.