

That CAD Girl

Carlson Software VS Civil 3D® – Revisited

March 12, 2010

There is a loooonnnggg conversation comparing Civil 3D and Carlson Software that is taking place across two websites: www.civil3d.com and [Autodesk Civil 3D Discussion Group: Carlson VS 3D](#).

I give kudos to James Wedding for extending the discussion on his website www.civil3d.com and also to [Autodesk](#) for allowing the conversation to happen in their Civil 3D Discussion Group. This topic is of vital interest to many people and, I think, will be a valuable resource.

I have posted a lengthy response to the comments from both sites below. In order to make it follow-able for those here on www.thatcadgirl.com, I have included links to the comments I was responding to.

Neil – I'll cede several of the points you made in your post.

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[\(Read it here\)](#). Both programs have dynamic design capabilities; but, if you define dynamic as, “like Civil 3D does it”, then: No, Carlson doesn’t do it like Civil 3D does. And I definitely agree with the pad template example. You do have to pick the “Process” button to get it to re-design and there is no Undo for the surface model. Dynamic? I’ll agree that’s a stretch; however, I don’t think I’ve ever cited it as an example of Carlson’s dynamic reactions.

But, even with those and other supposed drawbacks such as the number of files Carlson creates, can I get my job done and out the door on time and under budget? Can most of my staff learn it on their own? Can I easily recover my data after an AutoCAD crash? Can I share my designs with others using any version of Land Desktop without having to explode everything? Can I avoid upgrading and the associated headaches every year? With Carlson, I can.

Bottom line, there will obviously be trade-offs. So, what is it worth to me? You cannot have this conversation without looking at what makes your company money. [Dewberry](#) probably has the moral high-ground here: [Dewberry – CE News Article](#). They went through all the motions with Civil 3D and

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undoubtedly put their checkbook behind that effort. But Civil 3D must not have returned the favor. If they'd met productivity and profitability goals with Civil 3D, would they have given it up?

I'm not trying to deny that there are people and companies out there who are able to be efficient and turn a profit with Civil 3D. If you have figured it out and it works for you and your company as it seems to have for Arthur Miller, a gentleman who posted at James' site ([Read it here](#)), then more power to you – I think that's fantastic.

I've looked for good hard numbers and more "Arthur Millers" but they seem to be few and far between. Instead, Civil 3D defenders usually point to bells and whistles, whistles and bells...

MSpatz makes the argument for the bells and whistles very well here on this DG thread and then cross-posted the same thing here: ([Read it Here](#)). He states that it only cost his company \$500 per person to implement. I must say that's the lowest cost I've ever heard. Is this typical? MSpatz knows Civil 3D well enough to be a contributor at www.civil3d.com. Do you need an MSpatz on staff to create and maintain Civil

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3D installations in order to keep those numbers that low? And what if an office only has one MSpatz on staff? There's a potential cost there too... Who picks up if he's out of the office or leaves the company? Redundancy in knowledge is pretty important. I'm happy to admit that I'm wrong, but I'd like to hear from others what it really costs to get it up and keep it going (training, upgrades, pilot projects, creating templates, assemblies, styles, etc.). Contact me here ContactUs@thatcadgirl.com.

He also states that, "It is not a layer thing, it is a style thing – KEY". No matter how KEY he believes "Styles" are, they don't pay salaries. I agree: dynamic objects are COOL! and can also greatly increase productivity. But they also have a cost and complexity component. How much money does, "Look how cool this is!" bring in the door on an annual basis? That's why, instead of touting the **features** of either Carlson or Civil 3D, I tend to focus on the **benefits** to a business as a whole. **Features** make money for Autodesk, their resellers and consultants. **Benefits** make money for the people using the software.

Sinc's post ([Read it here](#)) summed this up very neatly. As

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much as they like Civil 3D, he's just not sure they'll be able to justify the cost. And it sounds like they are extremely productive with it.

Which leads me to my last point: If and when they have to leave Civil 3D behind, Sinc's group will have a choice and that choice might lead them away from Autodesk entirely. It seems that in so many things Autodesk is doing these days, they are forcing everyone to, not just move to Civil 3D, but to move to the **latest version of Civil 3D**. Retiring products so quickly... making 2010 C3D objects incompatible with 2009... punitive costs for letting subscription lapse... the list goes on. Business decision for them, too – I understand that. They must have decided it's profitable for them, but it's pricing many people out of Autodesk's civil/survey market.

I had a conversation with Jason Hickey at AU right after he started with EE. I think he was either just starting or just finishing up an implementation with Stantec. I told him that I thought that Autodesk was missing the vast majority of small to mid-size engineering & surveying customers out there because the cost/benefit just wasn't there and they wouldn't adopt Civil 3D until it was. I'm paraphrasing, but his

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response was something like, "Once the Stantecs of the world move to Civil 3D, the others won't have a choice."

I had just recently signed on with Carlson at that point and wasn't yet sure whether Carlson would be competitive. But, I told him then what I've told many people since, "Whether it's Carlson or another software company, someone, someplace will develop an alternative for that market. Because they just will not sign onto something that will make them lose money."

PS – Working on putting together a real shootout, invitations have been extended... will keep you posted.