

Topic:
MCAD

How CAD/CAM Managers at Mechanical Engineering sites are using email, intranets and extranets for collaboration

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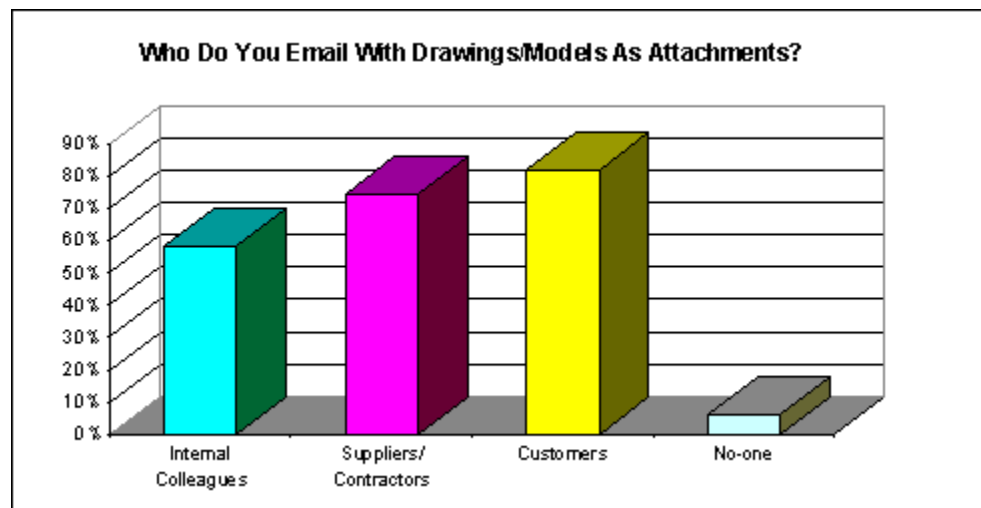
It's become traditional for articles on collaborative design solutions to be introduced by time-to-market imperatives, and a rallying cry that the deployment of such solutions is essential to competitive advantage. But *iCAD* will spare you all that.

Here are the findings from our interviews with senior decision makers with responsibility for design functions at 210 UK mechanical engineering sites. We asked them about their use of email, Intranets and the Internet to enhance the design process and share information with colleagues, suppliers, sub-contractors and customers.

Emailing Drawings

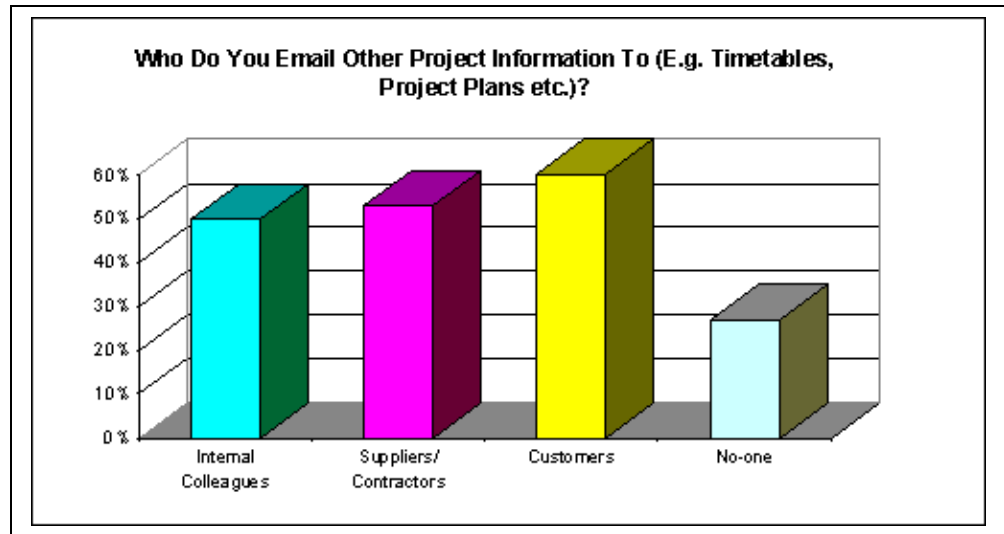
For the 98% of our sample using email to communicate either internally or with external parties (the five sites we encountered who don't use email would be worthy of an article themselves), we asked whether they use email for attaching drawings or models, and if so, who they send them to.

Overall, 94% are using email for this purpose; the chart below shows the proportion that are sending such attachments to internal colleagues, suppliers/sub-contractors and customers.



Emailing Project Information

We asked our sample if they use email for communicating other project information, such as timetables, project plans, costing and /or billing documents. Nearly three quarters are doing this, with roughly equal proportions communicating in this way with internal colleagues, suppliers/sub-contractors and customers.



Real Time Communication

Only just over a fifth of our sample takes advantage of technology to facilitate real time communications, e.g. web meetings or video conferencing. Again taking the sample as a whole, 16% of sites communicate in this way with internal colleagues, 8% with suppliers/subcontractors, and 13% with customers. Use of these technologies is significantly higher in larger sites; less than 10% of sites with less than 100 staff use them, compared to nearly 50% of sites with more than 100 staff.

Project Hosting Tools

Overall only 6% of our sample use a project-hosting tool to create one pool of all released project documentation, with email alerts for updates. These are accessed by internal colleagues in 5% of sites, by customers in 2% of sites, and by suppliers/sub-contractors in 1% of sites.

Intranet Collaboration

Nearly three out of ten sites use an intranet site for internal collaboration on design work. Of these sites with intranets:

- 17% use their intranet for real time collaboration (representing **5% of the total sample**)

A quarter use their intranet for distributed internal or external design activity across time zones more than 8 hours apart - e.g. 'follow the sun' design activity (**7% of the total sample**).

Extranet Collaboration

Only 7% of sites have an extranet site for collaboration on design work with customers or suppliers/sub-contractors. Of these 15 sites, six are using this extranet for real time external collaboration on design work (representing **3% of the total sample**).

Of these 15 sites, five are using this extranet site for distributed internal or external design activity across time zones more than 8 hours apart (representing **2% of the total sample**).

Conclusion

On the face of it the current levels of collaborative design activity are still fairly low. Pessimists can point to the fact that very few sites are currently collaborating at the more sophisticated levels - only 5% for example are using an Intranet to collaborate on design work in real time. However there are signs that the much-trumpeted evolution is under way. The fact that nearly a third are using an Intranet for asynchronous collaboration is encouraging.

These findings simply provide a snapshot of current activities. In a future edition *iCAD* will look at the attitudes to and intentions for moving to different/higher levels of collaboration.

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