

Topic:
CAD/CAM
Resellers

Just Visiting?

Do CAD managers know (or care) what information is available from their resellers' or vendors' websites? We investigate the awareness/attitudes of managers at 260 AEC sites

iCAD is produced by Business Advantage, a B2B research, business development and marketing consulting practice operating in the global IT, Digital and Telecommunications sectors.

Visit the websites from a random selection of design solution VARs and vendors, and the difference in the type of information and services available to visitors varies enormously. Some are loaded up with customer discussion forums, self-help pages and the like - others, well, perhaps they're just hoping the beige background will encourage visitors to return. But how much do customers care anyway? Do they know what information/services are available from their suppliers' websites, or have an opinion on what they would like to have available?

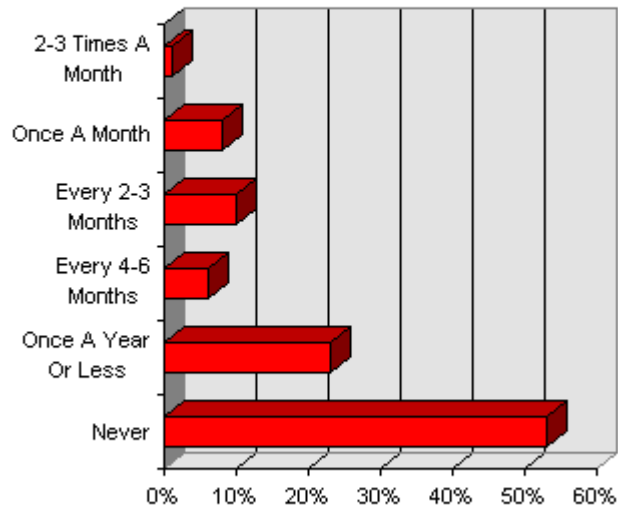
Do you want to target CAD/CAM users in the UK?
[Would the contact details of 60,000 decision makers help?](#)

To get a feel for this issue in the AEC sector, CAD SPAGHETTI interviewed managers of design functions at 261 UK AEC sites. In the first of a two-part series, **we reveal the extent to which they are visiting their CAD resellers' and manufacturers' websites, and their awareness of the information on offer.**

VAR Site Counts

The vast majority of our sample obtain their CAD products/services from resellers. Few of these however seem to use their reseller's website as a regular source of information; only 9% visit their main VAR's website more than once a month, and nearly a quarter reckon they do so only once a year or less. **Over half of our sample NEVER visit their main CAD reseller's website.**

How Often Do You Visit The Web Site Of Your Main CAD Reseller?



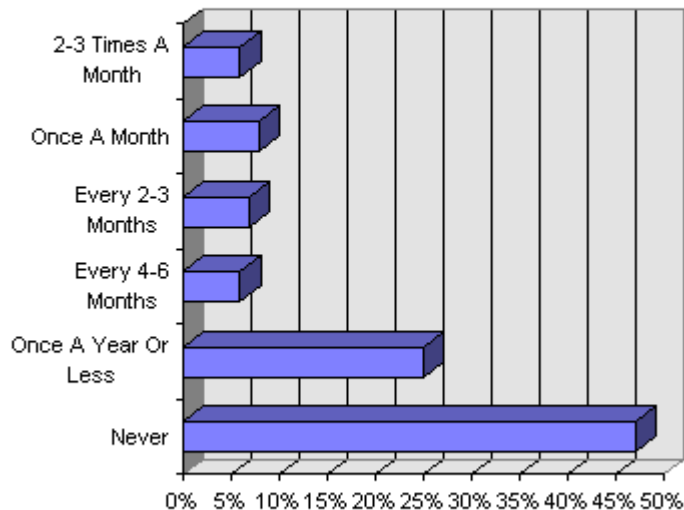
Visiting Vendors

While the content of reseller websites is variable, and in some cases will offer no reason for customers to visit them, those of CAD manufacturers are more consistent in the quality of value-added information they offer. In the case of our AEC sample, the majority will be using Autodesk products. Via their 'Point A' facility, Autodesk offers a wide range of tips, news updates, discussion groups and more - yet **45% of our sample say they never visit the website of their main CAD solution manufacturer**, a group that must include a high proportion of Autodesk customers. A further quarter do so once a year or less. Around one in five are making more frequent use of their CAD manufacturers websites, visiting them every three months or more.

This research has been conducted by the Business Advantage Group Plc. Our multi-lingual market research team has conducted projects in over 100 countries. [Find out](#) what some of our customers have said about our work.

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How Often Do You Visit The Website Of Your Main CAD Software Vendor?



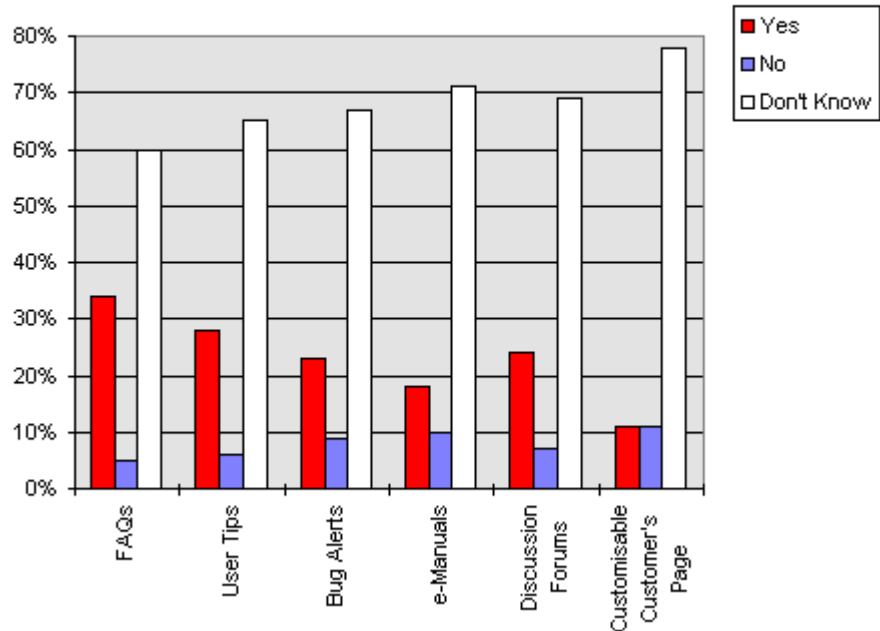
Services Unknown

We gave our sample of managers a list of various types of information/services, and asked if they were available on the website of their main supplier of CAD software. The types of information asked about were:

- FAQs/self-help facility for commonly occurring problems
- A users' tips page
- Description of known software bugs
- Electronic software manuals
- Customer discussion forums
- Customisable customer section for individual companies, eg. for showing contact history etc.

Half of those obtaining CAD software from resellers say they never visit their suppliers website, so for each type of website feature above we would expect at least this level of ignorance about their availability. However the chart below illustrates that between 60% and 78% of our sample didn't know whether these features were available or not, showing that a significant proportion of those who do visit their suppliers' websites haven't familiarised themselves with the range of support available.

What Services Are Offered On Your Main CAD Supplier's Website?



Net Users

The size of the groups of managers who said that their CAD suppliers' websites do offer the features considered above are too small for further reliable analysis. However it's worth noting the generally positive attitude to the usefulness of these six types of support.

- 89 managers said their supplier's website has a FAQ/self-help facility; half described this as very useful or useful, just over a third said it was quite useful, and 13% said it wasn't useful.
- 74 managers said their supplier's website had a users' tips page; half said this was very useful or useful, just under a third said it was quite useful, and 14% said it wasn't useful.
- 60 managers said their supplier's website listed known software bugs; just under a half said it was very useful or useful, over a third said this was quite useful, and 10% said it wasn't useful.
- 48 managers said their supplier has on-line software manuals; just over half said this was very useful or useful, a quarter said it was quite useful, and one in five said this wasn't useful.
- 63 managers said their supplier's website has a discussion forum; 38% said this was very useful or useful, a quarter said it was quite useful, and 27% said it wasn't useful

- 28 managers said their supplier's website offers customisable pages for individual customers; 40% said this was very useful or useful, a quarter said it was quite useful, and 15% said it wasn't useful.

Conclusion

Three quarters of managers with responsibility for CAD visit their supplier's website once a year or less, or never. A random flick through a selection of reseller websites reveals that many give customers little reason to return on a regular basis. The significant findings from this survey however are the proportions of managers who have no idea what features are present on their resellers' websites. Those resellers who see their websites as important tools for maintaining/gaining business need to understand the reasons why a certain proportion of customers aren't visiting them. Some customers will simply be comfortable with the range of functions they see as necessary and will feel no reason to seek support elsewhere, while others may have got used to other forms of contact. Putting valuable information on a website is a tried and trusted method of attracting repeat visits, but only if people know it's there.

For vendors looking to foster more direct relationships with customers, websites are a prime tool. Their websites tend to be more consistent than those of resellers in terms of the depth of supporting information available - yet still only just over half of CAD managers in the AEC sector ever visit them. Getting customers used to popping into websites for tips or to solve common problems can be a small step towards getting them more familiar with working with the Internet in general, as well as providing the chance to bring messages about new products/services to their attention. For both resellers and vendors, the first step is to find out if customers are not using their website through informed choice, or because they haven't got a clue what the benefits might be.

The indications are from this survey that the majority of CAD managers who are aware of the online support/information available do find it useful. Emailing customers with the link to the website and a snappy summary of the support available would be a good first step. Finding out from customers themselves is the best way to discover what features will encourage more use of a site; in the next issue of CAD SPAGHETTI we'll reveal how AEC CAD managers not aware of or using the contents of their suppliers' websites rate the potential usefulness of various features - and we find out how many resellers/vendor websites make it on to their customers' Internet favourites list.

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