SOM

CADLearning®
design your future

Quality Training with Fewer Resources

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP (SOM) is one of the leading architecture, interior design, engineering, and urban-planning firms in the world, with a 75-year reputation for design excellence and a portfolio that includes some of the most important architectural accomplishments of the 20th and 21st centuries. Since its inception, SOM has been a leader in the research and development of specialized technologies, new processes and innovative ideas, many of which have had a palpable and lasting impact on the design profession and the physical environment. The firm's longstanding leadership in design and building technology has been honored with more than 1,400 awards for quality, innovation, and management.

The American Institute of Architects has recognized SOM twice with its highest honor, the Architecture Firm Award—in 1962 and again in 1996. The firm maintains offices in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., London, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Mumbai, and Abu Dhabi.

"We like to think of ourselves as a 'big-A/big-E' firm," said Robert Yori, Senior Digital Design Manager at SOM.

"One of the things we bring to the table is a very close, collaborative relationship in projects from the earliest concepts all the way through to documentation and construction administration."

Training a Global Workforce: the Challenges

To meet educational demands, SOM would have someone in-house conduct classes, engage outside consultants, or, occasionally, partner with their local Autodesk resellers. With so many software applications, employees and office locations, the pure face-to-face training methodology presented palpable challenges.

"Timing is always an issue," said Yori. "The most effective way to do training is 'just in time,' but sorting out the logistics of organizing each class, getting the space together, gathering up the hardware and so forth for just-in-time training is a bit arduous. Though we usually pull it off, there is frequently a lot of waste in the training classes. People would attend a session even if they weren't assigned to a project – and then forget what they learned because they didn't use it right away."

There are also significant expenses to consider with face-to- face classes. Though SOM has internal meeting space, they often augment it by using external venues which can be expensive. As SOM gets busier and busier, the Digital Design Specialists who conduct the classes are in higher demand and become less available. The fees for working with training partners and consultants add up over time, as do travel expenses for getting team members to various office sites to teach face-to-face classes. As SOM's education requirements continued to increase – and the staff available to run the programs decreased – it became clear that a solution was needed to supplement their face-to-face learning programs.

Creating a Global Standard with CADLearning

SOM clearly saw the additional value that a CADLearning Center (CLC) implementation from 4D Technologies would bring to their firm. Private, branded CLC sites offer video tutorials for Autodesk software in a hosted learning management system. CLCs allow firms to deliver a complete online training experience, or one that complements classroom instruction. Organizations can customize curriculum; add their own content; take advantage of user reporting, assessments and quizzes; and prepare for Autodesk Certification Exams.

SOM chose CADLearning for several reasons, including its availability online. Though SOM has worked with consultants that offer training videos and tutorial packages, none were delivered via the web – and managing/maintaining training CDs/DVDs for 1,000 employees was simply not an option. "The fact that the training content is developed by industry experts, that the video tutorials are succinct, and that the content is available online were all critical factors in our decision to implement the CADLearning solution," said Yori.

"Because the CLC is online, it's easy to add courses on new software releases and quickly make them available firm-wide. We even add our own custom content."

Implementation and Usage

SOM's CADLearning Center is available to all employees and is used in a hybrid fashion. Because SOM remains a firm believer in the value of face-to-face learning, most offices use CADLearning as a supplement to classroom training. "Our CADLearning Center is the equivalent of being able to walk over to an expert, tap them on the shoulder, and say 'how do I do this?' And then instantly see your answer in a visual demonstration," said Bob Yori.

"If you forget something you learned in class or simply need help on a particular topic, the videos are searchable making it easy to find what you need."

Offices that don't have easy access to face-to-face classes rely on SOM's CLC more heavily, often as their primary educational tool. Most of SOM's classroom sessions focus on Revit, so for products like Navisworks, Ecotect and 3ds Max, CADLearning serves as the predominant training tool. Additionally, when new employees come on board, if no face-to-face sessions are scheduled, CADLearning functions as their chief learning environment until traditional classes become available.

Top 3 Benefits of CADLearning at SOM

The first main benefit of SOM's CADLearning Center is universal access – from home, office or anywhere with an internet connection – which provides firm-wide consistency in learning and training.

Second, SOM uses its CLC to host and share its own custom content. The firm posts tutorials for other software products used by employees like Rhino and Grasshopper. It also posts content from lunch-and-learns and various mini-training sessions. The CLC offers a single location for all things related to learning and training. "It can get confusing having to juggle too many resources – employees don't know who to ask for what.

Because of the CLC, the message we can send to our staff is that if you want to learn how to do something, you go to the CADLearning Center and you'll find it. It's as simple as that."

The third main benefit SOM has realized through its CADLearning Center is being able to maintain training consistency while using fewer resources. "The site has been invaluable, especially during the recent economic downturn," observes Yori. "We're able to maintain a consistent level of information and quality of learning throughout the firm while keeping costs low and stable, even as we grow and our needs expand. CADLearning provides an economical and effective solution for learning and training that should not be overlooked."

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- Robert Yori, SOM