

ZOOM WEBINAR
Executive Summary | May 6, 2020

“Overcoming Fear: The Role Design Plays in Gaining Consumer Confidence”

As the lifting of shelter-in-place COVID-19 mandates get closer to reality, there are many unanswered questions on what “going back to normal” actually looks like. Every industry and every company have been impacted, and most are struggling with how businesses should adapt in the new environment. One of the biggest concerns is how and when people will feel safe again.

The AEC community gathered on a Webinar on May 6, 2020, to discuss its pivotal role in gaining consumer confidence and building a more resilient normal, not only by making the needed changes to our buildings and public spaces, but also in educating the public along the way. More than 525 people participated online worldwide.

The discussion focused on how building design can help address consumer fear, deliver solutions, and communicate effectively with clients and the public. The goal is to prevent spread of infection by surface transmission, droplets and airborne particles. A Q&A session followed. Summary below:

- **THE FEARS:** The COVID-19 pandemic already has wreaked havoc around the world in a variety of ways – shuttering businesses, overwhelming hospital staff, canceling events, and disrupting everyday life. However, the most unsettling thing is the fear of the unknown.

GENERAL FEELINGS

- While still at elevated levels, surveys show there has been a decline in negative-based feelings of stress, worry and fear. Anxiety/stress and worry are mainly driven by 1) Not knowing how long the pandemic will last, 2) state of the U.S. economy and 3) overall public health.
- Consumers are bracing for a prolonged adjustment to their daily or weekly routines and personal finances. A survey shows that 90+% believe it will take 2+ months before routines return to normal.

GOING BACK TO WORK

- Employees face three main areas of fear and anxiety:
 - Fear of the unknown. What’s the office going to be like? Social distance, avoidance of touching things, the physical aspects of being near co-workers and then returning home to family... these are the most primal fears people will face.

- Fear of not being present. Employees will be asking themselves what it means for their careers if they can't be in the office and collaborate as part of the team.
- Fear of financial uncertainty. The workplace drives financial success for employees. They will be concerned with what happens to their companies and how their presence can ensure the organization goes forward.

ATTENDING EVENTS/GAMES IN ARENAS OR STADIUMS

- At this point, it's unknown what the "new normal" difference will be. We aren't sure how the pandemic will impact a person's choice to attend a game or event in the future. Right now, the size of a crowd is something that causes fear. Venues will need to communicate what's being done to mitigate the risk.

TRAVELING AGAIN

- It's important to remember that fear is healthy, in the context of being well-informed.
- For architects and engineers, we need to synthesize advice into objective and subjective strategies. The way people feel about going back into airports, train stations and other places is something our industry needs to inform. And our industry has an obligation to drive the conversation and drive regulation.
- Anywhere travelers are gathering, we need to control density and evaluate flow rates. There are interesting solutions to come to in the near term.

- **THE SOLUTIONS:** As a design community, we can alleviate these fears in the respective building types. Considering how infection is spread – touching of surfaces; droplets (which have led to social distance); and airborne particles to be controlled by building systems -- what changes can we expect to see in the vertical markets?

GATHERING IN CROWDS AT A GAME OR CONCERT

- Some changes to address these fears were already happening in newer venues. Things like touchless technology for ticketing, retail, food and beverage have already cut down on transmission points. This will be expanded into older venues as well.
- Cleaning the venue will need to be more "front of the house;" it will be a big deal that's visible, not something done after everyone leaves.
- At the beginning, most of the changes implemented will be operational and temporary. There will be trial-and-error to find what's most effective.
- It all starts with fan engagement. Teams and venues need to hear what's most important to the fans. They should listen to the fans and get the most bang for the buck in what's implemented.

MAKING OUR WORKPLACES FEEL SAFER

- Just like with arenas or stadiums, making employees feel safer begins with listening to users. What concerns do employees have and what ideas do we have for making the workplace feel safer?
- Workplaces will need to relocate seating, and rethink collaboration spaces and conference rooms because there may be fewer people allowed in the room.
- Employees may opt for virtual meetings over in-person meetings, even if everyone is in the office.
- Vertical movement needs to be rethought. How many people are allowed in the elevators? Do buildings designate uni-directional staircases?
- Mechanical systems will be evaluated. Workplaces may want higher levels of filtration or UV systems installed to kill germs.

- Employees will see overall higher levels of cleanliness. Workplaces will be cleaned during the day to show cleaning is taking place.

GETTING PEOPLE COMFORTABLE ON A PLANE/SUBWAY/ETC.

- We will see transportation systems develop a “district mentality” of health and safety. Related areas – such as airport security, parking, rental car facilities, gates – will work together as a symphony of experiences that provide comfort and confidence to travelers. It won't just be about the airport's or station's specific property, but rather, the property's direct relationship to the experience.
- Transportation is changing. In the short term, we may see more cars with single occupants. As a result, more parking will be needed. This will play into the ultimate capacity of a venue or building. At this point, no expanded parking decks are planned, but it may be a strategy when people return.

- **GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT AND RAISING AWARENESS:** Making physical changes to buildings is only the first part of the solution. It will be just as important to get consumers to fully trust that buildings are safe. The AEC community should deliver two types of messages: 1) Have empathy that things are not “normal” anymore. 2) Be useful and deliver value in communications. More people are watching local news than ever before, so consider sharing messages via the media. Contact the audience directly, too. Message fatigue is on the rise, but people still want useful information and will be open to receiving it.

GATHERING IN CROWDS AT A GAME OR CONCERT

- Professional and collegiate leagues are fighting to remain relevant now. They want to stay directly engaged with spectators and casual fan bases in order to return in a strong way. They can easily communicate with their base and get input on the best way for fans to make a comfortable return.
- With sports being a lightning rod, teams can leverage their brand, capture attention and gather feedback.
- Teams are waiting for a stake in the ground to see what the return to the stadium might look like. It becomes a starting point when a team comes out with a public plan addressing potential for return in reduced capacity. That's the important step that allows meaningful conversations about return; it is something to build upon.

MAKING OUR WORKPLACES FEEL SAFER

- Most people left offices in somewhat of an emergency and moved to remote working, which created unexpected, positive energy in early days. Designers should suggest to clients that returning to the office be treated like any kind of change management.
- Remember, employees are not going back to same place; it has changed dramatically by their absence and how the world has changed. There have been new technology solutions adopted. Employees have been collaborating differently. A big change needs to be treated as such.

GETTING PEOPLE COMFORTABLE ON A PLANE/SUBWAY/ETC.

- As complicated and evolving as the situation may be, it's important to synthesize the changes into simple measures for travelers and staff. Communication needs to be simple, clear and easily understood across all forms of media.
- Measures that are developed should offer a range of solutions with tiers of response to the threat. Relative to large venues, it will be hard to over-communicate as long as the message is not changing frequently.

- **QUESTIONS & ANSWER SESSION TOPICS:**

CHANGES TO EXPECT

- More awareness among employees and visitors on hygiene and sanitization. There will be more of a sense the building is being cleaned and those around you have proper hygiene. People might get shamed into new behaviors because there's such a public awareness of cleanliness and health.
- Designers will be employing ideas to make buildings better connected to nature. Things like including more daylight, evaluating what mechanical materials are used, and focusing on more natural ventilation.
- As designers, expect a shift in how we advise clients to spend their dollars. Being good stewards of client money may result in "must haves" becoming "nice to haves." We'll need to evaluate what's really important in the building.

LEVEL OF INTRUSION INTO USERS' PRIVACY

- We don't know the answer to this issue yet. For example, some universities previously explored the best ways to control access and egress and know who's on property. This met resistance due to privacy concerns, but we may see something like this come back for consideration. Reactions to privacy concerns will be different due to health concerns.
- Data shows people will bend, but not break, when it comes to privacy. For example, in a recent survey 70+% were willing to have a temperature check. Such opinions won't be shared across the board. People in New York may be more willing to forego some privacy because they've been hit harder by the situation. Those in Kansas City may be less willing.

NEGATIVE IMPACT ON INDOOR AIR QUALITY DUE TO ENHANCED CLEANING

- With the heightened sense of awareness, there will be more cleaning than before. This means more exposure to cleaning products. There will be an impact on air quality.
- The impact on indoor air quality can be viewed as similar to a medication with side effects. Users need to weigh the side effects against the benefits of the medication.

RURAL MIGRATION DUE TO AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY

- Cities like Kansas City might benefit at the expense of more crowded places, like New York or San Francisco. There is a belief that mid-sized cities didn't experience the same effects of the pandemic, which makes them more attractive and safer.
- But, remember, people have short memories. They may be back to a different "normal" without seeing that change happening.
- It's been astounding how well we've been able to operate in a remote situation. This is how people may work in the future. There may not be a reason to live in a city because you can do the work from home, 50 miles from the city. Working remotely hasn't been a failed experiment; it will have an impact on where people choose to live.

OPTIMISM VS. PESSIMISM

- Studies show there's more optimism than pessimism regarding how the economy will recover after COVID-19, especially among younger generations. We're seeing cautious optimism.

- The AEC community has a lot of work to do to make people comfortable, but there's hope. We will create "new normal" that enhances human condition and makes more meaningful connections.

Facilitators:

- Robin Broder, Principal & Chief Marketing Officer, Henderson Engineers, Robin.Broder@hendersonengineers.com
- Maria Maffry, Principal & Chief Business Development Officer, BNIM, mmaffry@bnim.com

Panel:

- VENUE
Nate Appleman, Global Director of Sports + Recreation + Venue, HOK, nate.appleman@hok.com
- WORKPLACE
Steve McDowell, National Design Innovator and CEO, BNIM, smcdowell@bnim.com
- TRAVEL/MASS TRANSIT
Ryan Gedney, National Design Director, HNTB, rgedney@HNTB.com
- CONSUMER CONFIDENCE
Chad Nicholson, SVP of Strategic Intelligence, Barkley, cnicholson@barkleyus.com

Sponsor:

- KC Global Design -- A collaboration of leading architecture, engineering, construction, design, and technology companies located in the greater Kansas City region that impact communities both here and around the world. KC Global Design exists to elevate KC as the premier design community through our collective efforts and expertise.

For more information about the session or to continue the discussion, contact Meryl Dillman, Project Manager, KC Rising, at mdillman@kcciviccouncil.org. Or, visit kcglobaldesign.com.