Plan Before You Pay

Programming and planning are essential for efficient, cost-effective plant siting

by Dario D. D DiMare

"WE BOUGHT THIS piece of property for our new facility. What do you think?

I can't count the number of times I've heard newspaper executives ask that question. When I ask if they have done any programming or masterplanning, nine of 10 times the answer is no.

This is what is referred to as the "ready, fire, aim" approach to building a new facility or addition. The odds of acquiring the best site are diminished greatly without front-end planning or "aiming". Hitting financial and operational targets is very difficult using this approach

Cutting corners during the planning stages of a project is a major mistake. About 90% of financial and operational decisions are made within the first 5% of time and money spent on a project.

It is much easier to add wall coverings and carpet than to move a press or buy adjacent property at a competitive rate (assuming that property even is available).

> To determine future plans, it is very helpful to document existing conditions regarding people, equipment, services, space and procedures.

Building a facility or addition often is a once-in-a-lifetime task as well as one of the most costly investments that a newspaper will ever make.

Therefore, I urge you to plan properly. An architect or planner experienced with newspapers can help guide you through a proven planning sequence.

Proper planning starts with your business or marketing plans. In other words, what do you want to be when you grow up? Once you have established your marketing plans, things will fall into place quite easily.

After determining such matters as current and future circulation, page count, zoning and insert requirements, and TMC and alternate-delivery plans, you will be able to quantify products that need to be produced.

With these needs defined, equipment selection and layout is attainable. Even if specific manufacturers have not been selected, it is possible to begin basic facility planning.

An operational facility plan outlining basic sizes, shapes and adjacencies puts you in a much stronger position to begin a site search. Having taken time to aim, you will have a much better chance of hitting your target.

Outlined below is a recommended approach to acquiring a site or building for a newspaper facility.

PHASE ONE
- Programming
- Master planning
- Site search
- Feasibility study
- Preliminary design
- Cost estimate
- Project schedule

PHASE TWO
- Final architecture and engineering
- Construction

Our concern here is with the first four parts of Phase One, when 90% of the

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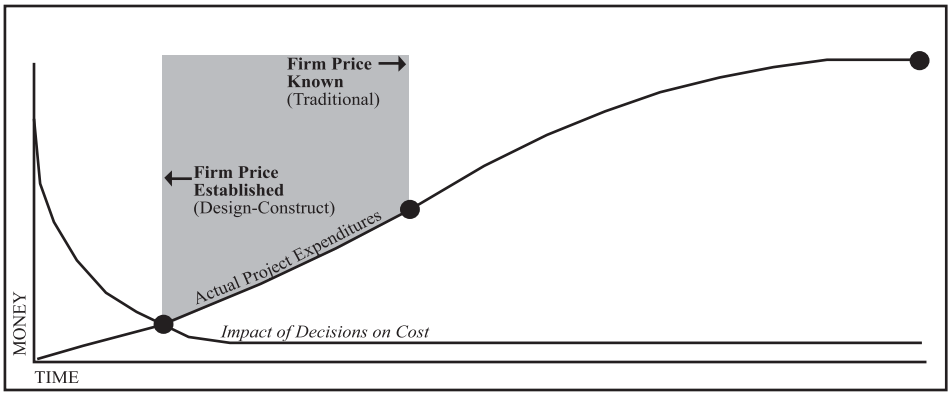

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Begin with programming, which defines and quantifies a newspaper's current needs and projects future ones, allowing for growth and changes in markets and technology.

The programming of a newspaper starts with a definition of the corporate philosophy. Is this facility going to be a monument, a prefabricated warehouse or, as in most cases, something in between. This definition of quality level sets the tone for the entire planning process.

Then, establish a project team, with a leader responsible for making decisions. With an appropriate team and leader in place and a well-understood corporate philosophy, the programming process is ready to begin.

To determine future needs, it is very helpful to document existing conditions regarding people equipment, services, space and procedures. Interview various department heads to identify current needs

In each interview, it is important to ask: What do you have now? What will you need in the new facility? What will you need five years from now? What will you need in 10 years?

These questions about future growth and technology allow built-in plans to grow and change.

For example, let's assume that the advertising department is going to be next to the composing room. The composing area is slated to be automated and shrink in size, while the advertising department plans steady growth. In this situation, the wall or area separating these departments should be easy to modify to allow for this change. Floors, ceilings, mechanical systems, sprinkler heads and lighting systems should be modular and flexible enough to make this change with minimal cost and disruption to the operations.

When needs have been defined and documented, they typically are reviewed by upper management to turn "wish lists" into reality. After several reviews, create a document listing all requirements for people, services, equipment and space. This document illustrates current and future needs.

With all needs and services defined, masterplanning can begin. This graphic representation of the program illustrates basic departmental sizes, shapes and adjacencies The masterplan also shows how each department can grow and change to accommodate new markets and technologies.

Masterplanning, like programming, begins with re-examining the corporate philosophy. Is the building going to be a social statement, a tin warehouse or a conservative facility handsomely designed yet economical?

Whatever the image, the building and site must flow. Employees and visitors should have easy safe access to the facility The receiving of ink, newsprint and skids should flow properly. The distribution and packaging area should allow logical queuing and access to mailroom windows.

Also consider the flow of information, whether electronic, on paper or in person. Finally, the flow of materials such as newsprint, preprints, inserts, plates, ink and waste must be planned carefully to minimize time, waste and cost while maximizing safety.

In addition, a masterplan illustrates space required for parking, fleet maintenance, satellite dishes, shipping, receiving and waste.

With a program and masterplan in hand, serving as a thorough check list, begin the search for a location that best meets requirements set forth in the two documents.

Elements to consider in a site search, in addition to the program and masterplan requirements, include:

- Geographic center of the newspaper's circulation.
- Geographic center of employees.
- Availability of new work force in area.
- Access to highways and roads for distribution.
- Access to rail, barge or highways for newsprint receiving.
- Availability, reliability and redundancy of electrical power.
- Fiber-optic and satellite lines of sight
- Availability of services, such as gas, oil, water and sewers.
- Nearby employee amenities.
- Proximity to publisher's house.
- Regulatory agencies and issues.

Though a feasibility study can encompass many things, it primarily consists of evaluating several schemes to determine which can be executed.

The schemes are illustrated graphically, with floor plans and elevations. Additionally, each scheme has an order-of-magnitude cost estimate, milestone schedule, and list of advantages and disadvantages.

Feasibility studies often are used when several sites have been selected and a final determination is required. There also are situations when a site is selected and several schemes seem to work. In this case, a feasibility study helps determine which scheme best meets the needs of the program.

Whether a feasibility study is conducted, it is imperative to do proper programming and masterplanning to increase the odds of a project's success.

In other words, once you are *ready* and have determined that you need a new facility, take the time to *aim*, or do programming and masterplanning. Now, when you *fire* your money at a new site or facility, you'll be sure to hit your target dead-center.

Reprinted from Editor & Publisher's Newspaper Plant & Design pullout section November 6, 1993