

NEWSPAPERS & TECHNOLOGY

Project's duration depends on smorgasbord of factors

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SPECIAL TO NEWSPAPERS & TECHNOLOGY

The second most frequently asked question right after "How much will it cost?" When renovating a newspaper facility, adding on to an existing facility or building a new structure is, "How long will it take?"

I would be willing to bet that 75 percent of the projects we undertake have been percolating and ready to start for at least 5 years, 50 percent for 5 to 10 years and 25 percent for more than 10 years. The other 25 percent occur in a methodical, well planned, pre-budgeted process.

More often than not we wait, and wait, and wait and wait some more trying to get some stuff done in advance, but to no avail. Then the board suddenly approves the project and we're jumping through hoops trying to meet an unrealistic schedule.

How long?

"It take how long?" execs ask in astonishment. "That's too long; we already bought the press, we promised the board next year, we announced it to the public, we cannot afford to wait that long, we are in a hurry, what about fast-track, we need to get the depreciation started this year, can we get the press in first, etc., etc., etc..."

The normal and most efficient process in addressing a reliable schedule is to use the American Institute of Architects' definition of the traditional approach of design-bid-build—not construction management, not fast-track and not design-build.

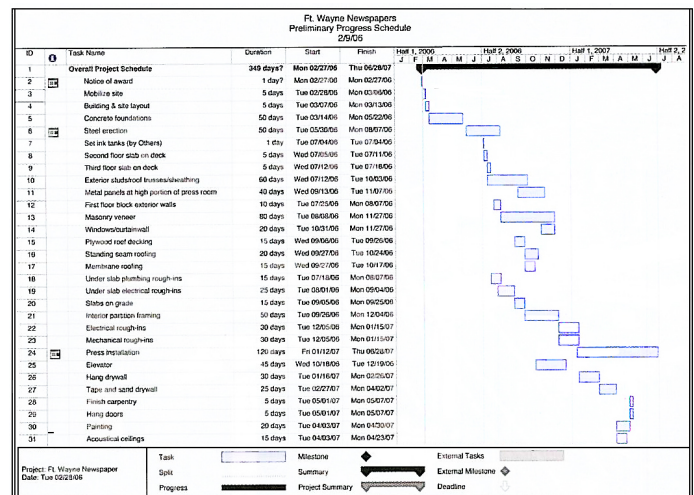
We will discuss the timing with respect to the traditional design-bid-build approach. Fast track and design-build can go several months quicker, but our experience is that the construction would cost 15 percent to 20 percent more for fast-track and 20 percent to 30 percent more for design-build.

These methods are often used when completing a new facility more quickly might save a publisher millions of dollars, thus making the 15 percent to 30 percent construction premium well worth the investment.

A newspaper project usually consists of seven distinct phases, with the seventh phase somewhat unique to newspapers and manufacturing:

- Phase 1: Masterplanning, consulting, and feasibility
- Phase 2: Schematic design
- Phase 3: Design development
- Phase 4: Construction documents
- Phase 5: Bidding and negotiating
- Phase 6: Construction

Phase 7: Training and commissioning



The progress schedule for Fort Wayne (IN) Newspapers projects shows the steps that must be considered.

Phase 1: Masterplanning, consulting, and feasibility studies can take anywhere from three months to more than one year, depending primarily upon how prepared and ready the newspaper is to make important, critical, and long-term decisions.

A newspaper must have a strategic business plan in place with clear goals and direction. This makes the process much more efficient. (Consulting can help expedite the process, if desired).

Phase 1 is by far the most important portion of the project. Of all phases, this one should not be cut short. Less than 2 percent of the project cost will be incurred in this phase, yet more than 90 percent of the cost decisions will be made at this time.

Phase 2: Schematic designs consists of drawing very basic floor plans, site plans, elevations and building sections. When designing a newspaper facility, the drawings should also display major equipment. (Editor & note: Some architects would exclude including the placement of the newspaper equipment due to liability and safety issues.)

This phase, which generally takes about two months, is usually part of a complete architectural and engineering contract and would be considered the first phase in the traditional approach of A&E. When this portion of the project is complete, newspaper execs would sign off on this with a pretty clear idea of the look and feel of the facility, and the design development would begin.

Phase 3: Design development consists of ironing out the major facility design issues. The structural systems are selected and shown, the mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and fire protection systems are shown, the site plan is resolved and the scope of the project is clearly defined enough to make a very good cost estimate. The materials and finishes are defined in the drawings and preliminary specifications. With this phase complete and the costs reviewed, the newspaper would sign off on this and its involvement would lessen during the next phase. Assuming no major changes are required in this phase, this segment should take about two months.

Phase 4: Construction documents primarily consist of the A&E firm detailing the job out for construction. With most of the client decisions made at this point, the goal is to bring the drawings up to final completeness to enable a very clearly defined scope for the bidding process. This phase takes approximately two months.

Phase 5: Bidding and negotiating consists of sending the complete set of drawings and specifications out to bid to several general contractors. (We typically involve several contractors in the previous three phases to ensure they are familiar with the drawings prior to receiving the bid set. This allows for multiple value engineering prior to bidding.) There are many questions being answered and shared with all bidders during this process. This typically takes about six weeks.

Phase 6: Construction is just that. The facility gets built during this phase. There are certain things that can be done to get a newspaper building completed a little quicker during this portion, such as preparing the press hall first. This will enable the press manufacturer to portion, such as preparing the press hall first. This will enable the press manufacturer to start the press installation sooner. Due to the fact that the press is the piece of equipment requiring the most time to install and commission, preparing the press hall first is fairly common. This also allows training to take place a little earlier as well. We have had projects built in eight months to 24 months. The major variables affecting the construction duration are project size, complexity, permitting, timing, phasing, site conditions, weather and the local economy. Average construction time: 12 to 14 months.

Phase 7: Training and commissioning consists of the newspaper getting up to speed (no pun intended) on the press, packaging equipment, computers and building systems. For what it's worth, do not expect the press to be running smoothly for at least six to 12 months. This is probably one of the most common disappointments in a new facility. It is not a press manufacturer issue, but rather vendors are always there to help the paper's press operators learn to use the equipment, but new presses are so sophisticated that it takes more than a few months for operators to become proficient.

We recommend a refresher course after about six months. You would be surprised how much those little tricks that were either too many or too trivial to pay attention to at the initial commissioning can really help later on. This phase can take from two months to six months, depending on the phasing of the construction and amount or complexity of the equipment.

Add up the numbers: 30 months.

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