by: Walt Sparling

2017 and the Future of AutoCAD

Like me, a lot of you may have recently returned from the 2016 Autodesk University event. Between walking to and from classes, touring the exhibit hall, and making the long trek back and forth to the hotel room, I managed to rack up a lot of steps on my Fitbit (17,500+ in one day alone!).

As these events typically go, attendees get a glimpse into the future for both hardware and software. This year it seemed that "Reality" was a big theme.

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) were popular themes among the vendor booths, Autodesk's included. Of the 186 vendors represented, at least 12 had some form of Reality going on.

Back in our own Realities at home, depending on your exposure it seems as if AutoCAD® software's imminent death is right around the corner. All the Revit and Fusion folks are confident that AutoCAD is a thing of the past and its users are just dinosaurs who have not seen the light.

AT AU, AutoCAD had a booth which, while not as big as the Autodesk Architecture, Engineering, and Construction zone, still had a decent footprint. Seeing all the amazing technology out there and knowing that is likely to become a real part of our daily lives, I am sure many are wondering just how long before AutoCAD goes away.

AutoCAD has been around a long time—since 1982, in fact. At 24 years old, AutoCAD is older than many of today's Revit users. AutoCAD also comes in a variety of offerings (see Figure 1).

AutoCAD	AutoCAD Map 3D
AutoCAD 360	AutoCAD Mechanical
AutoCAD Architecture	AutoCAD MEP
AutoCAD Civil 3D	AutoCAD OEM
AutoCAD Design Suite (renewal only)	AutoCAD P&ID
AutoCAD Electrical	AutoCAD Plant 3D
AutoCAD for Mac	AutoCAD Raster Design
AutoCAD Inventor LT Suite	AutoCAD Revit LT Suite
AutoCAD LT	AutoCAD Utility Design
AutoCAD LT for Mac	AutoCAD WS (now AutoCAD 360)

Figure 1

That is a lot of products with an equally large number of customers.

In a normal week, I will deal with anywhere from three or four consultants or clients to a dozen or more—and all use AutoCAD. About 95 percent of all interactions with outside design software users are AutoCAD based.

Although I work with a small firm, and many members of the various teams I am on are also part of similar sized firms, collectively there are hundreds of AutoCAD users interacting in just my business circle. The firms I interface with cover a cross-section of the AEC industry, and include:

- Architects and architectural designers
- Interior designers
- Custom millwork designers
- Mechanical engineers and designers
- Electrical engineers and designers
- Civil engineers and designers
- Fire sprinkler engineers and designers
- Fire alarm system designers
- Low voltage distribution designers
- Sign designers
- Warehouse and distribution logistics designers
- Real estate developers
- And more...

So many different and unique design needs—and AutoCAD covers them all. AutoCAD may not provide the same level of detail as a fully coordinated BIM model or a Fusion 360™ mechanical model, but it offers the flexibility and power to create design documents for a multitude of project and product types.

Don't get me wrong—these and many other products that currently exist and are in development can do some pretty amazing things. With all the power and flexibility that AutoCAD offers, these other products offer speed, coordination, and viewing capabilities that AutoCAD cannot compete with.

So what am I getting at? As a longtime user of AutoCAD, I am very comfortable with it, which allows me to do my job with little to no learning curve. I can also experiment with tools and features I have not yet used. With many of the quick turnaround projects that designers deal with, that comfort level allows for profitable production. I believe this is a big reason why so many companies and individuals continue to use it and why it will continue to be the go-to product for many users for years to come.

Being comfortable with a tool does not mean you have mastered it, though. So unless your career is wrapping up, keep pushing the limits of AutoCAD and learn as much as you can to make yourself more knowledgeable, efficient, and valuable.

AutoCAD is going to be around for years to come and, like it, the other technical tools we use regularly are getting faster, smarter, and cheaper. Don't let the tools be your crutch—keep learning, keep experimenting, keep up!

P.S. If you are a long-term user of AutoCAD or even a short-term user that really loves it and wants to share with others how to maximize its use, consider writing an article about it for *AUGIWorld*. If you're interested in writing about AutoCAD, drop me an email at Waltspar@gmail.com and let's get you published!

Walt Sparling has worked in the building design industry for 25+ years, starting as a hand drafter. He moved on to CADD in the mid 1980s and then into CADD and networking training and consulting. Walt has served as project manager and designer in the mechanical and architectural realms and currently works with an electrical engineering firm in Tampa, Florida. In his spare time, Walt maintains a couple of blogs and a personal website: FunctionSense.com and waltsparling.com