

Whether the client contracts directly with these consultants or they are contracted through the interior design firm on behalf of the client, these consultants should follow the directions of the interior design firm regarding meeting deadlines and coordinating their work.

When specialized interior projects, such as trading floors, present themselves, it is prudent to have the MEP and FP consultants contract directly with the client. As a user group, traders have a heavy reliance on the mechanical systems' design to support the trading floor environment and operations, provide redundancy backup in case of failure, and to build in operational security within the space. Because of these sensitivities, the project is better served if the client has direct control of these services. This is also true in the case of retaining information technology (IT) consultants for all types of clients, not just for heavy IT users such as traders.

If the predesign commission includes a search for new buildings or locations, the engineer provides a scope of services similar to the interior designer's. In most cases this can be summarized as a due-diligence study to investigate whether enough capacity exists in the base building systems to meet the client's systems needs. If the services provision falls short, the engineers need to quantify that shortfall. At a later stage this can support the client's lease negotiations with the building owner.

In a tight property market the client's real estate consultant needs a quick turnaround on confirming the viability of potential locations from both the designer and engineers. The interior design firm needs to respond quickly in providing empirical information that leads to an informed decision about why the prospective location is or is not viable. The key to this process is making an informed decision. To make this process credible, the bases by which one judges a candidate location must be consistently applied by using an "ideal" benchmark. These benchmarks are determined by designer and engineer in the project initiation phase at the outset of the commission.

In projects where the client is considering an equity stake in a building, the number of consultants needs to be expanded to include waterproofing, vertical transportation, structural, curtain wall, and other specialty consultants to ensure that the building complies to the specifications and drawings prepared by the owner's consultants. For projects of this nature it is common for a construction manager to be retained by the client to consult on the owner's contractors means, methods, logistics, and costs. If the client's design team

requires building modifications, they need to be properly priced as additions and deductions by the owner for charge-back to the client.

Where any type of property search is involved, the client should have a professional real estate advisor involved as well as legal counsel. With today's reliance on IT, the client's communications and IT advisors (in-house, outside, or both) should be involved in the project from the beginning. How those are managed vary from being completely in-house to completely outsourced, depending on the client's organization and the size of the project.

As you can see, these teams can become quite large. How they are organized, the reporting structure, and approval processes differ greatly among different clients. The Internet and project management software enables us all to communicate more efficiently and deliver information that is readily accessible to all parties.

Regardless of which of the three typical predesign services one may be performing, the common thread through them all is to gather enough information at an early stage to truly understand the challenges of the project. This, in turn, will result in a more informed design process and better design solutions in later phases.

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