Construction Industry Solutions Ltd
COINS Building, The Grove, Slough, Berkshire, SL1 1QP
www.coins-global.com

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COMIT Conference and the Martini Effect

Construction Industry Solutions (COINS) and sister company COINS-mobile were very pleased to sponsor and attend the 2012 COMIT Projects Ltd conference on Thursday 15 November 2012 at the Building Centre in London, which was attended by more than a hundred contractors and solution suppliers.

This year’s theme was Building Information Mobility and there was a full day of interesting and informative presentations. Here’s a summary of some of the highlights.

The Keynote Speaker was Bill Price, Systems and Technology Director for Costain. He kicked the conference off with a look at the speed of change in mobile technology, from the 25lb Osborne portable computer in the early 1980’s to the lightweight tablets of today. He then went on to talk about the mobile challenges facing the construction industry today. Despite the connectivity step change from 3G to 5G giving five-fold increase in speed, problems with interoperability between devices still needed resolving, as do the issues of connectivity (i.e. mobile bandwidth and Wi-Fi) across a project, particularly underground. He also said that quick obsolescence of devices was bringing with it cost implications, and there are also the problems of handling the sheer volume of data as megabytes turn into terabytes!

We then had a sneak preview of some of tomorrow’s mobile technology with Google Glass, the World’s first wearable computer in the form of a smart pair of glasses. Using a transparent LCD display incorporating a camera and GPS to make it location aware, the Glass puts information in front of your eyeball. Available in 2014, Google Glass provided an excellent example of how touch will be superseded by gestures and voice input and output. Google Glass heads-up display uses Augmented Reality (AR) which will become a real game changer in our industry. AR provides an interactive means of simultaneously engaging with the virtual and the real.

Matt Blackwell, Group BIM Manager for Costain, and Ben Feltham, Programme Engineer (CAD Manager) for Network Rail, gave an interesting presentation about how the two organisations have been working together at London Bridge to deliver the benefits of BIM to site operatives using mobile devices, some incorporating Augmented Reality. On a day-to-day operations level, mobile solutions are being used by engineers to capture images on a tablet and send them from site to the design team for checking and review whilst receiving an instant response that allows work to continue. This solution is making the site team more efficient and negates the need for operatives to
return to the office as they can retrieve drawings, access 3D models and publish information from out in the field.

Using tablets at a more sophisticated level, the two companies are using point cloud data with temporary work models such as hoardings, embedded into the laser scan. This was demonstrated to conference delegates using an iPad, showing how a meeting to discuss where the hoardings would be situated could be held using the virtual programme without the need to go to site. Another example of how AR is being used is to real benefit is in asset management, for recognising and tracking assets on site.

In the afternoon there was an eagerly awaited presentation from David Philip, Head of BIM Implementation for the UK Cabinet Office. He talked about the reasons behind the drive for BIM, and how the adoption of information-rich BIM technologies is central to the Government’s ambition to reduce capital cost and the carbon burden from the construction and operation of the built environment. The Government believes that technologies, process and collaborative behaviours will unlock new more efficient ways of working at all stages of the project life-cycle.

David said that technology is not the problem with BIM, it is changing behaviour. However, he believed that industry is waking up to BIM and thinking about data management. The Construction Industry Council is engaging with BIM, and the Department of Business Innovation and Skills has it as part of their growth strategy.

If there were three words that could sum up the desired outcomes of Building Information Mobility, it would be The Martini Effect! According to the old advertising campaigns, this means anytime, anyplace, anywhere – and that is what COMIT members are striving for.

**About COMIT Project**

COMIT stands for Construction Opportunities for Mobile IT and began as a two-year research and development project part-funded by the Department of Trade and Industry, led by Arup, in partnership with BSRIA and Loughborough University.

Following the success of the initial project, COMIT became a self-funded organisation in 2005, and now has over 40 members from the construction, technology and research sectors. The organisation facilitates the understanding of business benefits gained from the adoption of mobile information and communication technologies, and demonstrates this by way of case studies, reports and demonstration projects.

COMIT also continues to share its experiences and knowledge with the wider world through conferences, exhibitions, press events and a university lecture programme.