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FOR THE CONSTRUCTION SPECIALIST

Taking Charge

We talk to F+G's Paul Doherty about his new role and growing horizontally

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What role can consultants play in an automated future?

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Jason Lewis is the founder and CEO of Limah Design.

The Future of Design Consulting without Humans

Limah Design's Jason Lewis sheds light on the role and opportunities of consultants in a future dominated by artificial intelligence

computing will allow us to communicate faster, and in real time, as part of collaborative teams, with all work visualised instantly on VR headsets. From here, it's not a great leap to create the algorithms that will automate complex sets of tasks, thereby making a number of disciplines in architecture either obsolete or dramatically changed. Disciplines based on calculations and data, such as engineering and costing, will likely be the first needing to change and adapt.

Deep learning could be one of the biggest changes for design consulting. While today any single designer may come up with dozens of concepts based on a single theme – which may take from hours to months to complete – deep learning with the correct parameters can bring to light thousands of concepts in mere seconds. These concepts could be developed further by AI into fully working drawings, and could then be sent directly to 3D printers, where construction could begin almost instantly.

The question for designers and design firms then becomes: what role will they play in this automated future? I contend that designers will always have a role. Creativity and curiosity cannot easily, if ever, be simulated. I also believe this is a time of great opportunity for those who embrace and lead

the charge into these new areas. The future for those who are successful will be in the holistic and strategic approach to design – those who focus on humans who actually use these spaces will thrive.

This human-focused design is what we call experience design. It is design that first digs deep into human needs, wants and desires. In our work, experience design is a methodology to make people's interactions with complex spaces more enjoyable. Environments and products are developed around these needs, thereby making environments that are more connected than ever to humans.

How often today do we visit a mall or health care facility, and likely our first step is to go online to get information or directions to these places? Upon our arrival, however, we feel disconnected from the space. The digital experience had nothing to do with the space, the brand we see has nothing to do with the architecture, and we are not greeted by any memorable or special interaction with staff. We are left simply visiting a building. This building has made no connection to us personally or to any digital devices or wearables we use, and therefore it's just another stop along a journey of countless other built spaces.

Much of this has to do with the current

development cycle of architecture. Developers engage architectural teams and later bring on management teams to manage these spaces and the end customers. Due to this process, very often, little to no primary research is done, and there's no research or interviews with potential end users to gain insight into what they are looking for in their future built spaces.

A small group of architects and specialist consultants see that this model won't result in exceptional experiences and connections to end users. Instead – from day one in the planning process – they combine all the disciplines from architecture, landscape, product design, facility management,

customer service design and experience design. This approach has the goal of making environments more useful, more usable and more enjoyable. That means a greater bottom line for developers and longevity of developments.

Just as the architects and designers of the future will have a greater focus on human users, so too will the most successful developers understand that merely building a site is no longer a mark of success. Success is rather the creation of an exceptional experience that makes for truly great architecture and design.

So just where then does the future lie,

and who will succeed in this future? I believe that a future where the business of design consulting is done without humans will not survive. Technology will certainly change how we do our day-to-day work, and may even result in reduced workforces and rapid development of projects. However, creativity and a deep understanding of human need and desires is the area most underserved in the world of architecture today.

As we go into the future, I see more amazing projects being developed that will be more than mere spaces. Instead, they will connect to me on a personal level and create exceptional human experiences. ●

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