

JBIM

Journal of Building Information Modeling

An official publication of the National Institute of Building Sciences
buildingSMART alliance™

National Institute of Building Sciences: An Authoritative Source of Innovative Solutions for the Built Environment

Spring 2010



buildingSMART ME: Bringing BIM to the Middle East

By Janette Jellings

THE VAST MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH Africa region is home to one of the most vibrant construction markets in the world today. In recent years, it has expanded at a remarkable rate. The landscape of Dubai has been transformed by unprecedented construction activity. Iconic structures, such as the Burj Al Arab and the Burj Khalifa, court much media attention as well as the interest of construction professionals worldwide.

During the boom years, there was little incentive to address the massive waste that is endemic in construction across the region. Imported manual labor was cheap and cost overruns were easily absorbed by increasing sale/rental prices. With demand outstripping supply, quality inevitably suffered and “sustainability” was not yet part of construction vernacular.

However, the years of rapidly rising

property values have come to an end. With supply now exceeding demand, basic principles of economics can explain much of the impact on the market. Prices are, at best, leveling out and the trend is downwards. At the top of the chain, owners and developers have to look at ways to safeguard their investments.

The bottom line is that construction in the Middle East needs to eliminate waste and inefficiency, improve productivity and quality, while taking on the requirements of new legislation for eco-friendly construction.

This is a tall order, but one that astute players in construction acknowledge may be solved by the adoption of collaborative and integrated processes.

BUILDINGSMART ME

It was from this premise that the idea

of bringing buildingSMART to the Middle East was born. Discussions between long-standing professional colleagues, Bjørn K Stangeland, co-CEO of buildingSMART International and Tahir Sharif, moved from informal, through tentative, to definitive—buildingSMART ME was going to become a reality.

Tahir Sharif is a building industry consultant specializing in BIM, who has 20 years experience at the senior management level. He has written articles and presented papers internationally on BIM. In the Middle East he has been instrumental in promoting awareness regarding the use of 3D, 4D, 5D and 6D as central tools in the construction and design process.

As with any region, there are “ways” of doing business in the Middle East. From the outset, it was clear that at a strategic level, business planning would have to incorporate innovative ways of addressing challenges. There was no out of the box solution for buildingSMART ME.

Mindful of these issues (**FIGURE 1**), Sharif had a clear vision in mind of how buildingSMART could maximize its impact on the Middle East construction sector. His high level strategy detailed the need to:

- Develop an **industry-wide framework** for the sharing of digital construction information throughout the whole life-cycle of a building project, using guidelines on interoperability.
- Administer and deliver a **certification process** to accredit the above.
- Provide a **framework for consistent quality of delivery** to maximize the benefits of BIM and interoperability to projects and businesses.
- Establish a quality assured **delivery mechanism** to facilitate the implementation of BIM and interoperability technologies and processes.
- Provide a **forum** for members to work together on technical and promotional programs to advance the buildingSMART International standards for interoperability.

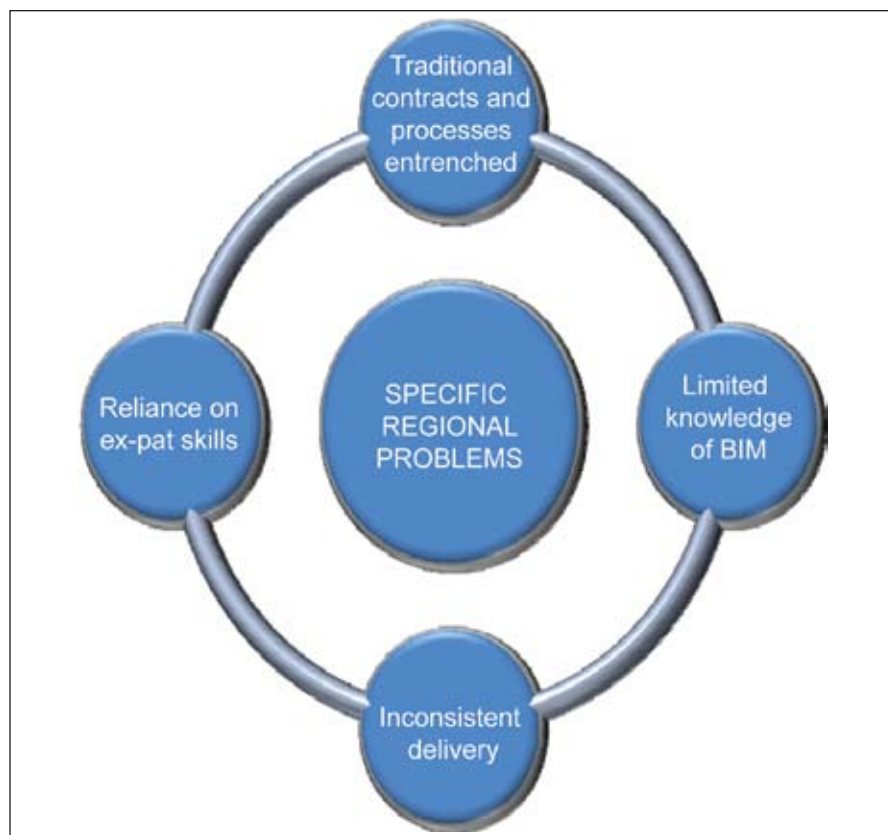


Figure 1.

- Provide a **channel** for members to keep abreast of and contribute towards international best practices spearheaded by buildingSMART regional alliances worldwide.

To engage effectively in the Middle East it was critical that a proactive buildingSMART ME team was created. As President, Sharif firstly appointed Sabri Ismail as Vice President (Ismail is an entrepreneur with extensive, hands-on BIM expertise) and David Jellings, as Communications Director—a role which includes the management of operations (Jellings is a Business Consultant who is an authority on the way business operates in the region).

The rest of the start-up team comprised of industry experts, consultants, trainers and media representatives, all of whom were conversant with BIM process and technology.

Thanks to the commitment and dedication of the start-up team, the strategy was in place by the time buildingSMART ME was officially launched, (in November 2009 at Build Smart 2009, in Abu Dhabi). It went from concept to reality in just over four months!

The launch itself was very successful. Marketing for the event had increased awareness of buildingSMART ME and the conference ran at capacity. The response was extremely positive and corporate membership now exceeds twenty. When combined with the substantial number of individual members, this collectively represents numerous active industry professionals.

HOW DOES BUILDINGSMART ME OPERATE?

buildingSMART ME works with its international partners to develop and accredit standards and programs that reflect the specific requirements of the region (FIGURE 2). As with its international and regional partners, buildingSMART ME is a not-for-profit organization owned, financed and managed by its member organizations. This membership develops, delivers and uses the standards.

Members who deliver the BIM and interoperability standards (technology, training and process) are accredited to do so by buildingSMART ME. Businesses and

individuals who attain the required standards are certified by buildingSMART ME.

BIM SUPPORT BUREAU

Delivery teams are made up of members operating under an umbrella organization known as the BIM Support Bureau. Due diligence of the programs delivered and fees charged is undertaken by buildingSMART ME. The process of delivery can be summarized as followed:

- Assessment, to establish the current business process and skills.
- Production of a development plan to meet the milestones for certification.
- Delivery of those programs.
- Progressive certification as the milestones are achieved.

BIM JOURNAL

The *BIM Journal* (www.bimjournal.com) is part of buildingSMART ME. It is a well-regarded electronic newsletter that reports on BIM and interoperability in a clear and concise way. It promotes the use of BIM technologies and processes by furthering the knowledge of and encouraging collaboration between, professionals working in the construction industry.

The *BIM Journal* website provides a comprehensive reference point for solutions that can take the construction process forward by eliminating waste and inefficiency, while improving productivity and quality.

LATEST NEWS

- buildingSMART ME is already having influence on a number of major projects and is promoting buildingSMART, open BIM (IFC) standards in these projects.
- Following the lead of successful deployments in Singapore, Norway and the United States, buildingSMART ME is working towards government endorsement.
- New buildingSMART ME FORUMS are being set up in Jordan and India.
- buildingSMART ME will be hosting the buildingSMART International Conference in 2011.
- Build Smart 2010 will be held this Autumn in the UAE.
- buildingSMART ME and *BIM Journal* also have active groups on LinkedIn. www.bsame.org/resources.

The journal is aimed at everyone involved in the construction process—owners, developers, project managers, consultants, engineers and contractors—at all levels. Through a series of regular editions, it focuses on particular issues facing the industry and presents potential solutions. Subjects covered are led by member contributions, which are actively encouraged.

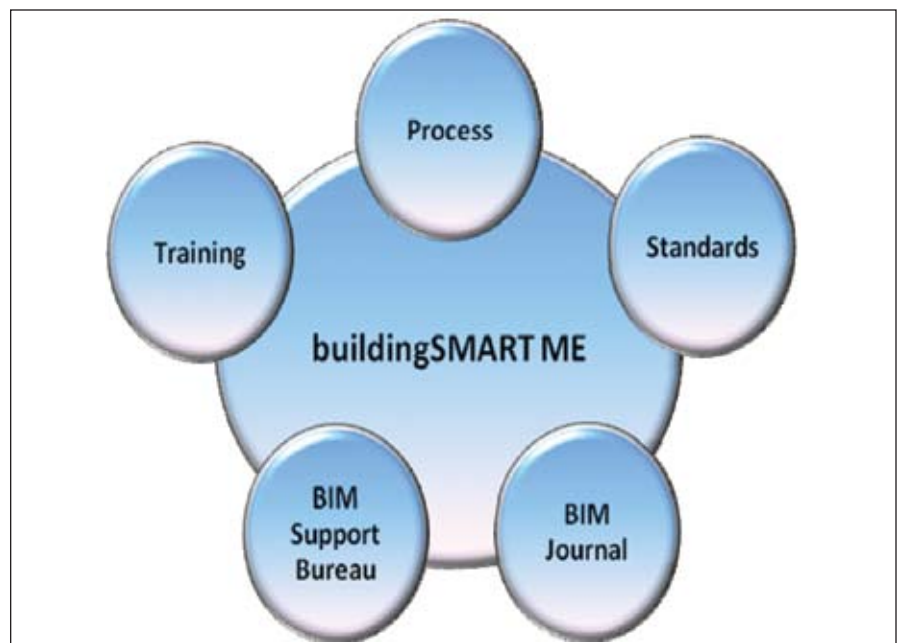


Figure 2.

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WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE THE LAUNCH OF BUILDINGSMART ME?

Following the launch and promotional activities that stressed the need for consistency, efficiency and sustainability, interest in buildingSMART ME has continued to grow significantly. Membership now includes key developers, contractors, academia, vendors and service companies. All are eager to benefit from the direct support and advice offered by buildingSMART ME.

Consequently, the demand for buildingSMART programs is rising. The limited expertise currently available inside the region is being stretched as buildingSMART ME allocates resources to initial requirements.

The biggest potential problem buildingSMART ME faces is being a victim of its own success, in that additional resources are now a necessity if the overwhelming demand for assistance is to be met. In response to this, buildingSMART ME is looking globally to meet that need. This provides an opportunity for professionals from around the world to share in the success of this ground-breaking venture.

TAKING THINGS FORWARD WITH BUILDINGSMART ME

If you would like to get involved, please make contact via the buildingSMART ME website, www.bsme.org. Some of the biggest names in Middle East construction are already members. buildingSMART ME also invites organizations from outside the Middle East to participate in all aspects of its operations.



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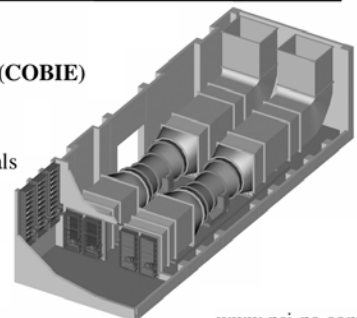
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