

UNCOVERING THE VALUE OF CONTENT MANAGEMENT

Customer Success | User-Friendly Interface



SERA

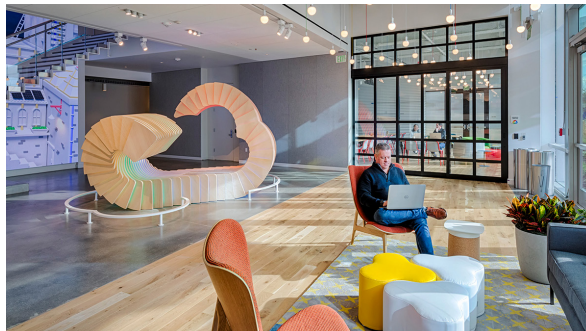
Employee-owned architecture, interior, and urban design firm specializing in sustainable place-making at all scales. Founded in Portland, OR, in 1968, SERA has held a key role in the development of the city, now recognized nationally for its livability. Today, the firm builds on its early experience of adaptive re-use and historic renovations with design and planning for hospitality, workplace, mixed-use housing, and public sector projects.

The firm's second office is in Oakland, CA, where clients welcome SERA's expertise in designing supportive, resilient built environments and sustainable communities.

WALKING THE TALK

SERA is a national architecture firm with a clear focus: to design sustainable public spaces with the needs, interests, and inspirations of the local community at heart. They offer to all their clients a holistic design process that yields long-term economic benefits, healthier people, and stronger communities. But they know that sustainability starts from within.

As a 100% employee-owned firm, everyone at SERA is accountable for the integrity of their work. Each employee is personally invested in the company's growth and success. Decision-making is a collaborative effort — from creating innovative designs, to choosing the most effective and efficient content management software platforms to help create, assist, and manage all aspects of the design process. The team is very discerning when it comes to choosing the right technology, and that is exactly why they switched to AVAIL.



Google Cloud Space | Photo: © Marco Zecchin



SERA team designing | Photo: © Fred Joe

THE USER REIGNS SUPREME

If the users at SERA are not happy with their Content Management System (CMS), then the problems they are encountering need to be addressed quickly because the demand for their time is constant and intense. And their number one complaint with their previous CMS was the lack of a clean, crisp user interface and ability to control content. Despite having all the bells and whistles, the software was just not user friendly and did not meet their needs. For SERA, it was important for the user interface to be visually clear, and to provide easy access to improving their workflow. "For us, the ideal situation would be to have a standard set-up for certain types of content and the ability to control who creates this kind of content, but then make it available and easily accessible to everyone," explained Katalin Czégé. In sharp contrast to their previous platform, AVAIL is intuitive, easy-to-use, and visually clean — providing users with a visual representation of what they're looking for.



Hyatt Centric Portland | Photo: © Lawrence Anderson



Majore General George A. White Headquarters | Photo: © Pete Eckert

CONTENT CHAOS

Originally, content management was solely controlled by SERA's BIM manager. Unfortunately, the CMS platform they were using made it difficult to maintain this control. Although the content was in the cloud, with limited editing permissions local backups were saved to the network, and anyone would be able to modify those backup copies. As a result, the entire library became out of sync with the standard library in the cloud. When downloaded content got altered, users had to download a new copy from the library to replace the altered content. The challenge of identifying what was clean content, what was modified, and what was altered became unmanageable. According to Cristina Land, SERA BIM specialist, "This is what fueled the whole chaos of what was clean content and what wasn't." With AVAIL, what you see on the platform is what we have on the network.

“With AVAIL, you push a button and you get what you want. It is super user-friendly, straight to the point, and also customizable.”

— Cristina Land, BIM Specialist

Another issue SERA encountered was that their previous platform's search function was not streamlined for the users, making it difficult to find what they needed. There were no visual tags. Files were duplicated and it was impossible to tell which file was created when. There were no efficiencies and no consistency. With AVAIL's platform users can organize loads of content by seeing it visually in thumbnails, rather than just viewing a list of unknown families, which is more efficient and less time-consuming.

THE PATH TO CONTENT MANAGEMENT

SERA's approach to content management has significantly evolved over the past 5+ years. SERA started with one person — and then later another — working with an inefficient CMS platform that was not at all user-friendly. Just the two of them. They were, as Cristina Land puts it, “the two gatekeepers. And we had to approve all content before it went into the CMS.” They could not keep up with the demand, so people wouldn't put in requests. Instead, they would just get their own content — ad hoc. This formed a barrier where there was little communication with each other about the content they were putting into the platform and using on projects.

With AVAIL in place, they needed a fresh start, so they brought Ann-Helen Wirtz on board as BIM librarian. Ann-Helen spent her first eight months reviewing and cleaning up every single family (1000+) that was on the previous platform. Now, instead of doing their own thing, people give the content to Ann-Helen. She, in turn, cleans it up according to consistent smart features, and then it goes into AVAIL.

“ Nobody who is doing billable work should be spending time vetting basic content. We’re supporting every single project in the firm when we have good content. ”

— Katalin Czégé, BIM Strategist

Keeping up with all the requests for content is still a challenge, and so the BIM team has begun to explore the idea of creating an unvetted channel (sort of a stash drawer) where people can share their content. It may not be clean content, but automated processes can take care of the initial cleanup and the channel will be clearly identified/labelled as unvetted. With AVAIL Analytics, they can then see what families are being used the most and then target those to be fully cleaned, vetted, and then moved to the correct channel. The objective is to give the power back to everyone (no more gatekeeping) while maintaining standards and following protocols.

Today, SERA takes the need for content creation and management very seriously. Hiring a BIM librarian like Ann-Helen is proof-positive of that.

BETTERMENT EFFORTS

Challenging times often put us to the test. They can also be harbingers of change. Change for the better. In light of the pandemic, everyone at SERA is now working from home and much of the work has been redistributed so that everyone can stay afloat. This has given rise to new betterment efforts, allowing the company to focus on internal assets to create, share, and improve both content and workflows across studios. And that is where the whole idea of BIM Liaisons originated; a person from each individual studio that will help bridge the BIM Team and the users they support by sharing ideas and content. The BIM Liaison is directly involved in projects and knows what their studio needs are and what does not work for them. “They are knowledgeable, both architecturally and technologically. Let’s empower them to guide their studios — in terms of content” said Pete Heibel, SERA BIM Specialist.

The clearest path to growth and success (in every organization) is to nourish and sustain the workforce. The culture that the SERA BIM team is trying to promote is one that focuses on more interaction, more engagement, more sharing of ideas, thoughts, and knowledge. And, as their CMS technology partner, AVAIL will champion their betterment efforts and be on hand to help as and when needed.