

Web cams a new tool for managers of construction

BY JOHN SEELMEYER

Sidewalk superintendents don't need to find a knothole in a construction fence outside the big construction project at Washoe Medical Center in downtown Reno.

Three Web cams provide a steady stream of photos of the construction to anyone who logs onto Washoemed.com — but big value of the photos is their use in management of the \$240 million project.

Keeping track of the far-flung construction — a parking garage, hospital tower and central plant on 20 acres — is challenging enough, says Jarrett Rosenau, project manager on the job for Clark & Sullivan Constructors.

But things get substantially more complicated.

Sellen Construction, the joint venture partner with Reno's Clark & Sullivan, is headquartered in Seattle. The design team and subcontractors are based everywhere from Pasadena, Calif., to Nebraska, Texas and Florida.

Shots from the Web cams, Rosenau says, allow all of them to tune in and see what's happening on the site in something close to real time.

And because the site includes an archive of past photos, builders and designers have another tool to trace the origin of problems on the job. About 45,000 photos have been archived in the five months that the cameras have been in operation.

Even folks working on the site sometimes turn to the Web cams and their bird's eye views to get a sense of the job that's not available from the ground.



Web-cam views of the construction at Washoe Medical Center provide information for construction crews and their managers — and are public relations tools, too.

"I check with it every hour or so," says Rosenau. "It doesn't replace walking on the site. But it gives you a quick snapshot."

Executives of Washoe Medical Center also found some surprising uses for the Web cam photos, says Newton Chase, the hospital's director of facilities service.

In a couple of cases, he says, hospital accountants have checked photos of the construction site to make sure that materials had arrived before they signed off on a suppliers' invoice.

Once, Chase says, he even used the Web photos to check if someone was at work before he made a call. The construction executives' truck was pictured in the parking lot, and Chase picked up the phone.

The Web cams also have proven to be a good way of communicating with Washoe Medical's 4,600 employees.

"It's an excellent opportunity for people to check in on what we are doing," says Chase. "It provides a visual reality to the rest of Washoe."

And they're taking advantage of the service. Visitors log onto the site at the rate of nearly 20,000 a month, and visitors take a look at an average of five photos every time they're on the site.

The Web cams didn't present significant

technical challenges, says Kris Hughes, a Web content specialist at the hospital.

Oxblue Corp., an Atlanta company, specializes in Web cams at construction sites, and it operates from a centralized server. Installation costs about \$4,000 per camera and monthly charges run about \$400 per camera, says Rosenau.

For the money, customers get a turnkey system that's both high-resolution and wireless, says Chandler McCormack, president of Oxblue.

The Washoe Medical Center project isn't the first in northern Nevada to use Oxblue's Web cams to record progress.

The Nevada Department of Transportation installed three cameras to track construction of the Galena Creek bridge on south of Reno, part of the work to extend the Highway 395 freeway south of the city. (The Web cams are found at www.freewayextension.com.)

Scott Magruder, a spokesman for NDOT, says the agency installed the Web cams exclusively to allow the public to watch construction of the bridge, which will have the longest concrete arch in the nation when it's finished.

"We're proud of it, and we want to show it off," says Magruder.