



ciency and the efficient use of resources, along with the use of recycled materials and locally available and indigenous materials are rewarded, as are water efficiency and indoor environmental quality, he said.

"It's a rigorous, yet flexible, standard," said Luzier, agreeing with NMHC's Cino that the mandatory requirement to achieve minimum levels of performance across all categories, preventing builders from bunching all their points in one area, is both unique and essential to a standard to which adherence will result in a truly green construction.

The option to choose among four performance thresholds — bronze, silver, gold and emerald — adds flexibility to the green rating system and the opportunity to earn discretionary points in most of the categories provides the very dark green builder the opportunity to truly shine. "That's important because that's another place where the market is going to differentiate where a builder or consumer seeks to get those points and we'll see some regional variations there," he predicted.

Another element that is particularly important to the Research Center is the very rigorous verification and certification program, developed in partnership with the ICC, for which the center will be the certification agency. "Every point claimed under this is going to be visually confirmed by one of my inspectors or it will not be granted and that's important because we know as an industry that it is essential for us to be able to substantiate any green claim we make," said Luzier.

Don Ferrier, a custom homebuilder in Texas who was named Green Building Advocate of the Year at the 2007 NAHB National Green Building Conference and joined Luzier, Sims and Killmer in their discussion of the NGBS approval by ANSI, said the newly approved rating system not only sets a new benchmark for building green homes, but also serves as a great educational tool.

"If anybody wants to know more about what green building is, I don't think there's any better place to go than this study," Ferrier said. "It's voluntary. It doesn't put a lid on things. And it allows us to choose what's best for us and best for our clients." ■

## Give your technology a KISS

If our business community could remove the word technology from our daily vocabulary and leave it for the network engineers and programmers, we would all be better off.

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Why not replace it with something dramatically less emotional like "office electronics?" It works at home. We don't think twice about spending countless hours mastering our televisions, Blu-rays, DVD/CD players, digital video recorders and desk top computers. Simply put, home theater is technology, but it's entertainment, not work.

When we apply the term "office electronics" to the systems we rely on every day at work, our typical fear-based reactions are defused. The reality is that the desktop or laptop computer you interact with every day is chock-full of sophisticated technology and software applications, very similar to the entertainment systems operating in homes across America.

What can be done to make our personal experience more impressive and fruitful when it comes to our personal interaction with office technology? As an industry, we can begin by taking a different approach and give it a KISS; "Keep It Simple, Silly."

Creating a technology KISS program is easy and needs only three elements: position, products and people.

Computers can be programmed to process applications without human intervention, but in our office, the computer is just the facilitator of our own knowledge and business skill. Technology products in a business environment are both hardware and soft-

ware built to transact business. Even a product as simple as Microsoft Office is actually technology.


Last in our equation, is the position of the person interacting with the technology and his/her expectations for improved productivity and business knowledge by using the above tools.

No company today would dream of operating without a hierarchy of applied management, employee positions, and related responsibilities. Nor should they think to operate without matched technological systems.

It is unrealistic to expect a team member to contribute effectively to their position without access to the necessary information to make good and solvent business decisions based on solid data. Do not merely apply this philosophy to executives and management, but also to entry level site operators such as leasing associates and maintenance technicians; especially considering the sheer numbers of those involved.

Recently updated versions of the property management software dramatically improves economic trend data and reporting tools allowing management and executive-level employees the ability to massage their results into valuable deliverables.

Our leasing and maintenance teams should be given access to recent versions of Microsoft Office so they, too, can generate effective management communications,



Keep It  
Simple, Silly.

spreadsheets and access Internet-based vendors and services.

A good technology KISS program also requires an honest and sincere review of the physical and software components of each corporate position. Yes, the words honest and sincere are included in the previous sentence because in business today, cost controlling measures take precedence, when the skills and business needs of each position should lead.

In the multifamily industry where technology is perceived as a necessary evil and not a core platform, cost containment and misappropriated needs-based purchasing become the standard.

Often, there is an over-investment of hardware in IT equipment because the purchaser, i.e. senior network engineer, finds personal joy in cutting-edge equipment and applications. Software upgrades are deployed, not just for sake of revenues for the distributor, but rather due to need for security enhancements, easier user platforms and more robust data management.

Features and functions available today save users time and energy, delivering soft dollar savings in management expense and operational transparency. When completing a technology inventory, note equipment and software over three years old. It is often subject to technical vulnerability and security exploitation so plan for upgrade or replace-

ment. The return on investment is greater team productivity and personal commitment.

To solidify the KISS program, address each person involved in the organization. Depending on the organizational resources, an individual employee assessment of computer knowledge and skills will determine the direction management should take. If your organization is blessed with an IT department or computer/software trainer, you are in rare company. Typically small to mid-sized management companies rely on a contract technical service provider, or an inherently knowledgeable team member to participate in break-fix efforts.

Regardless of who participates in these appraisals, every company should have a solid, documented, knowledge base of each employee's skills and a training path envisioned.

Elements that should be assessed are emotional affiliation to desktop systems, basic and advanced Microsoft Office skills, Internet based communications, and proprietary company related content systems (Intranets, industry and company specific software programs). Executive and management development programs throughout the organization must include computer training and intrinsic knowledge-based coaching.

Many employees and management members typically won't ask directly for training opportunities, but rather find undefined ways to learn new features and business

processes through peer input. When your organization engages employees to advance their computer skills and office system expertise, team members will gravitate to personal strengths and additional corporate contributions.

Business procedures and practices continue to evolve right along with technology and information systems, and those adept in this ideology will excel. When things are going well, it is easy to lull ourselves into blind success, and enjoy economic returns, regardless of our core contribution.

Economic standards in our industry remain solid, but margins are being squeezed in every form, and not just financially. The promise of life-changing experiences, thanks to computers and technological applications, have not come to fruition because we are still the same characters we always were: humans living under a constant barrage of thoughts and emotions.

We understand that computers are just equipment and software, but somehow we get lost in translation. Organizations who appreciate this relationship and apply knowledgeable and effective consideration to purchasing decisions, an economic commitment and employee training, will be the receivers of great reward and recognition.

Those who continue with marginal commitments will find it hard to compete and may get squeezed out entirely. ■