



CET DESIGNER **USER** CONFERENCE



Configura CET Designer User Conference: A Work Conference the Swedish Way

by Mallory Jindra

Design software company **Configura** held its 7th annual **CET Designer User Conference** on October 21-23 in Grand Rapids, MI. The **CET Designer** software is an all-in-one tool for all of a company's design and specification work.

An obvious goal of the conference is to bring together Configura's tightknit community of users and support members (and it is *very* tightknit) to exchange tips and tricks, receive the latest information on software updates, and, as we expected from this bright, quirky Swedish company, to celebrate users, and their projects, and to have fun. It certainly exceeded expectations on all of these fronts.

Altogether *unexpected* was the presence of a few very significant questions reaching deep down to the central role of interior designers in relation to their sales and customer service counterparts. The dialogue that developed around these questions, sparked mainly by conference attendees, are inspiring a re-think regarding the primary roles of all people stretching across the A&D industry.

But, the first order of business is the bustling activity of a work conference that Configura injects with quite the inspiring mix of work and pleasure. If this is the way the Swedes do it, count us in.

After being located in Las Vegas for five years, the conference has been hosted in the Midwest for the past two, closer to the headquarters of Steelcase and Haworth, two of its biggest customers. After a Tuesday evening full of Grand Rapids-themed welcome events that conference participants could choose from, such as brewery, winery, and cemetery tours, Wednesday morning kicked off with a bumping light show introduction set to music fol-

lowed by a quick debriefing of all good contributions the small, 10 million-strong nation has made to the world (pop group ABBA, Gevalia coffee, self-assembly furniture giant IKEA, we could go on but won't).

A welcome by VP of Business Development **Peter Brandinger** and Support & Training Manager **Tracy Lanning** was followed by Chief Product Officer **Nicklas Dagersten's** update on the new and upcoming software updates, many of which are gleaned from a voting process from



Conference attendees

users. It was Configura Co-founder and **Goran Rydqvist's** discussion on "Why We Do What We Do", however, that cued the inquisitive mindset users carried around throughout the conference.

Mr. Rydqvist is the senior creative mind at Configura and inventor of the technological philosophy **Parametric Graphical Configuration (PGC)**, the programming language the CET Designer platform uses. The software's origin stems from the office furniture industry, but Configura positions the technology as perfectly suited for other industries that deal in configurable, complex products requiring space planning. Configura's resident "Swedish surfer dude" and VP of Research and Development, he spoke about the principles and motivation behind CET Designer, which admittedly can be difficult to distinguish, even to its users.

Mr. Rydqvist described his software as not quite fitting into any of the pre-set boxes of CAD, calculation tool, drawing system or spec tool. But the goal has always been to help designers save time and money by giving them the flexibility and freedom that many functions embedded into the industry business process, such as part numbers, prevent.

"We want the Lego mentality that gives you the opportunity to play around with the whole and with the pieces," said Mr. Rydqvist. "We needed to cre-

ate something completely new because nothing out there today can give us the flexibility and freedom we want."

With that, users were on their way to a first round of seminars, with topics ranging from software-specific "tips and tricks" for various skill levels, to industry trends and conceptual discussions about how best to employ the software. **Studio O+A** Co-founder and Principal **Primo Orpilla** acted as keynote speaker. In his Paradigm Shift presentation, he discussed Studio O+A's 10 Typolo-



Studio O+A Co-founder and Principal Primo Orpilla, the keynote speaker, with Configura CEO Johan Lyreborn
-Photography: lizziphoto



Configura VP of Research & Development and resident "Swedish surfer dude" Goran Rydqvist
-Photography: lizziphoto



Wine and painting welcome event on Tuesday -Photography: lizziphoto

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gies, the firm's own methodology for communicating and explaining types of spaces to its clients. His insights gave the audience a peak at how Studio O+A ticks. Stay tuned for an in-depth officeinsight look at Mr. Orpilla's typologies in November.

Another round of seminars concluded the work for the day, and we were off to the infamous annual Halloween party, held at the B.O.B. restaurant and bar in Grand Rapids. Each year, the entire Configura staff dresses up in the same costume, and each year, they perform a dance routine, often in conjunction with their costumes. Past years have seen ABBA (of course) and Village People performances. This year, the costumes riffed on the movie Madagascar, and Configura employees twirled around to Reel 2 Real's "I Like to Move It" and chanted the company's catchy user slogan, "Click it and flick it", referring to the software shortcut for how CET users exit out of a current command.



Donald Stratton of Power Notebooks at the Halloween Party. Mr. Stratton's company provides the laptops to be equipped with CET Designer hardwarePartycaption

People from all parts of the design process, in various roles and from different companies, attend the CET Designer User Conference to connect and discuss design, technology and management issues together, all within the context of the CET Designer software. The seminars are helpful to them, as well as the co-workers they will pass their new knowledge to once returning home.

This is obviously the point of most work conferences in general, but the CET Designer User Conference also provides Configura with the perfect place to decipher what their users need and want from the CET Designer.

At the conference, the company CEOs, VPs and training support staff are constantly gathering feedback and asking probing questions of users that will help feed the software's next wave



Configura team members performing their dance routine at the annual Halloween party -Photography: lizziphoto



Configura team members with their caricature drawing -Photography: lizziphoto

companies

of improvements. All of this is in addition to customizable Q&A sessions, webinars and videos, and a support staff that makes itself available by chat, email, and phone Monday through Friday, 8:00a.m. to 8:00p.m. With two large updates each year and smaller ones arriving each month, one would be hard-pressed to find a company more in-tune to its customers.

While **Johan Lyreborn**, the CEO of Configura, notes that the company's primary goal – to help companies sell their products with more ease, efficiency and accuracy – has never wavered, he contends that continuous evolution of the software is crucial to the company's success.

"This gathering is where evolution takes place, through idea-sharing," said Mr. Lyreborn. "It is impossible for

us to do this without our users coming together to help steer our future."

Configura brands its CET Designer as "a single, industry-wide solution" in which users can "produce layouts, quotes, renderings installation drawings, movies and reconfigurations. CET Designer doesn't require AutoCAD, but it seamlessly integrates with it. CET Designer is a total solution so users

work faster, do more and provide a higher level of service to their end customers."

CET Designer is a rules-based software program, meaning it handles complex calculations behind-the-scenes (all product knowledge is imbedded into the technology), preventing users from committing time-consuming errors as they design.



Isela Cadena, a designer with Papsa, a Haworth dealership in Mexico, won first place in the Rendering Category and Best Success Story and is the grand prize winner in the 2014 Best of CET Designer Awards. Cadena won a trip to Configura's headquarters in Sweden for receiving the top honor in the awards program. -Photography: lizziphoto



*Configura CEO Johan Lyreborn with conference participant
-Photography: lizziphoto*



*The winning rendering, by Isela Cadena, in the 2014 Best of CET Designer Competition – Rendering category
-Photography: lizziphoto*

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“How many meters of something, or pieces of aluminum, or how much something can weigh – these companies don’t have separate departments for pulling these types of calculations,” said Mr. Lyreborn. “We want to embrace and work on this calculation aspect of the business that holds up business.”

The program consists of the core CET Designer software technology, in addition to manufacturer extensions and numerous free extensions, such as the RevLink Extension that allows the transfer of files between CET Designer and Revit Architecture. The

software is easy enough to jump into, with a clean, straightforward interface, and the 2D and 3D working views suit many comfort levels.

Conference attendees raved about features such as the “fly-thru” video capability and 3D PDF generator that many cite as reasons they won bids for projects against tough competition. It’s clearly a powerful tool that has the ability to help companies earn and retain more quality business, should they fully implement CET Designer. And fully implementing the software is crucial to getting the full return on investment.

The way Configura designed its CET Designer software calls for a fundamental change in how many of its customers operate today in order to achieve the highest return on investment. Because it simplifies workflow by removing steps from the traditional sales and order process, it requires businesses that want to use CET Designer to essentially revamp their processes in sales, design and specification, order entry and installation to support the change.

One seminar led by Configura Business Development Manager **Brooke Snow** and Mr. Brandinger, called “CET Designer and Business Strategy Discussion for Dealer Management”, acted as an open forum for participants to voice concerns and ask questions. The session, and a book recently put together for dealers, addressed the difficult changes being asked of dealers and provided guidance on how best to execute a full CET Designer implementation.

The implementation guidebook reads, “CET Designer helps experienced salespersons to sell better, and it helps new salespersons and those who work in design to also present with confidence. With CET Designer, designers can be cross-trained in sales, and salespersons cross-trained as designers – building a better team for the customer.”

“Just buying the tool and using part of its capability, for instance as a rendering tool, is not enough,” said Ms. Snow. “This process must be an evolving one. We know you’re having trouble using it start-to-finish, but we want CET Designer to be that all-in-one tool. If your company is really buying in, it needs to revamp its processes to support it. You need buy-in from all levels, particularly the higher management team, who can help redefine and articulate the roles of each job function.”



Peter Brandinger, Primo Orpilla, Johan Lyreborn and Tracy Lanning



At lunch: Renee Fischer of Color Art Integrated Interiors, Karin Worcester of SmithCFI, and Nicole Hostetter of SmithCFI

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This is a big ask, and conference attendees expressed doubts about whether the higher-ups at their employers would ever agree to the degree of sales and design team integration. They're frustrated, too, in many cases, due to the interior designer being tasked with responsibilities that typically fall in other roles. In other situations, some design responsibilities are being shifted to the sales side, leaving interior designers asking, "What's *my* role, then?" The frustration is certainly understandable.

"We're doing a chunk of everyone else's job, but where is the compensation?" said **Kristin Lundin**, designer at

OEC in Boise, Idaho. "I've asked others what their sales to design ratio is, and it's all over the board. Designers are now the full package, but we need to communicate our value to better establish compensation."

In her "Winning with CET Designer" seminar, Business Furniture Design Manager **Heidi Dellekamp** presented a case study of her company's pilot program that trained members of its sales force in CET Designer.

The goal was to train part of the sales team to use CET Designer to manage the more standard, repetitive projects, freeing up its design team to partner with the New Business team to focus

on larger, more strategically complex projects. Ms. Dellekamp noted the involved change management process.

"The business is growing more and more complex, and we wanted to guide our designers toward roles where they will make the biggest impact," said Ms. Dellekamp. "The change wasn't perfect right away, but it helped designers be more in line with their sales counterparts. It highlighted the knowledge gaps between our designers and sales people, so we developed a product training platform, and now we're communicating better. Our clients are happy because things move a lot faster."



All dressed up: Red Thread employees posing as participants from the reality TV show *The Bachelor*



A Wizard of Oz band jamming out to classic rock tunes at the Halloween party



Training consultant/guru Cate Sword and Diane Twa, of Configura

companies



-Photography: lizziphoto

In its call for users to reshape their business processes around CET Designer, Configura is asking a lot of its customers: it's asking them to trust. The return on investment for these companies is the ultimate payoff, and feedback from its users, by way of case studies showing fully implemented CET Designer-centered companies to tangible sales number gains, is positive.

The staff at Configura, from the c-suite down to each training support member, believes that the company's software has yet to reach its full potential. We're intrigued and staying tuned! ■



Having a blast at the CET Designer user Halloween party



The Whole Group -Photography: lizziphoto

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