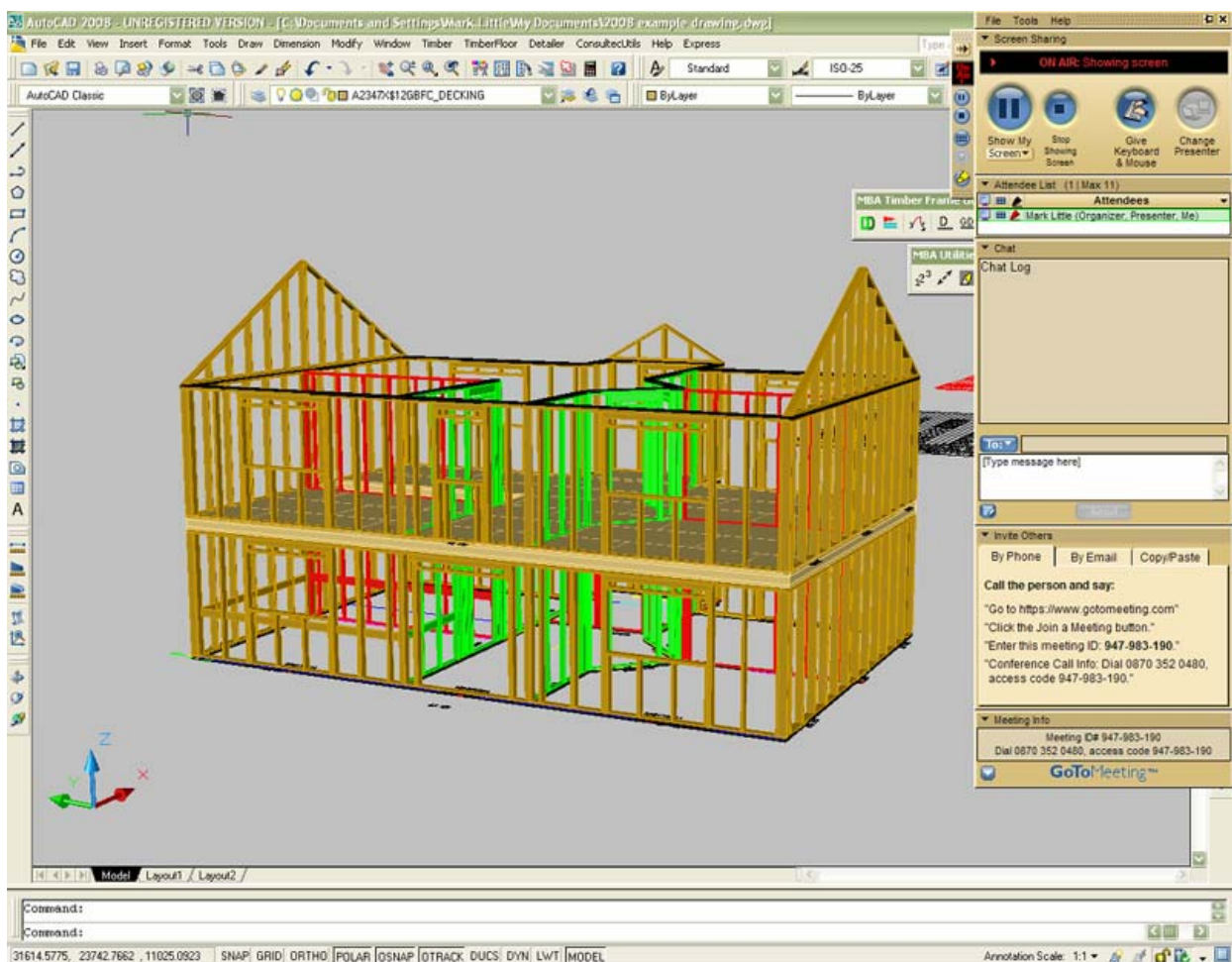


Life as an AutoCAD Support Engineer

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Mark Little is an Autodesk Approved Instructor working for Eleco Software. He has been using AutoCAD and a variety of other CAD systems for over 11 years. Much of this time has been spent in technical support and training, assisting users implementing AutoCAD-based FM products such as FMDesktop.



Well I guess I have been providing AutoCAD support for well over 10 years now and it's changed considerably in this time. When I started out, we were busy installing ACAD r12 on DOS based systems; if you had 16MB of ram on your PC you were the office power user. In fact your PC was probably called a workstation. This might even have earned you the right to have a high-end 17" screen but that would probably cost around £500 for a decent one. Changed have the days now that we are now talking about 20" plus widescreens for under £300, never mind the increase in processing power you hard earned £ can buy in this day and age.



From the support point of view one of the biggest changes is the ability offer remote support to users, once this was the preserve of corporate IT departments. There are now a lot of Internet based online meeting tools such as GoToMeeting®. I have used GoToMeeting® for a about a 1½ years now and it's a real lifesaver; there are several similar products out there on the market. As long as the customer has broadband Internet access then you can either show your own desktop or share the users desktop. You also have the option of taking over their mouse and keyboard of the users PC with their permission. This really does help with the speedy resolution of support problems and is equally of use when it comes to running short training sessions. There is nothing quite like seeing the problem for yourself even if the customer is at the other end of the country and now you don't have to leave your desk.

I currently work for Eleco Software Limited as an Application Support Engineer; we develop the Consultec Timber frame package. This is an Autodesk Developer application that bolts on to full AutoCAD or Architectural Desktop (ADT) and allows you to design and build your timber frame structure in 3D. The model can then be used to produce the manufacturing drawings, cutting lists and CNC output that modern timber frame manufacturers require.

I spend a lot of time helping the Consultec Timber frame users find their way round AutoCAD and the timber frame software. This is through mixture of telephone support and online support through the use of GoToMeeting as well the usual on-site visits.

One interesting aspect of this is that no two customers work in exactly the same way (though they often think they do), so always give a thought to the engineer who is at the other end of the phone as he tries to get his head around your particular problem. There is a wide cross section of issues that are thrown up often centering around installing and configuring AutoCAD, customising menus, generating output (plotting) and also questions on the drawing and modifying tools.

I thought I would include few AutoCAD variables that I often get asked about: -

The file Open/New dialogue box does not appear and I only get options on the command line

Enter "**FILEDIA**" at the command line and set the variable to "**1**"

The Layer drop down is no longer sorted in alphabetical order

Enter "**MAXSORT**" at the command line then set the variable to a large number say "**1000**"

Also there a couple of AutoCAD commands that prove valuable if you find you have a problem drawing that is crashing or not behaving as it should

AUDIT – Enter at the command line or you will find the command in the FILE > Drawing utilities. The command checks the integrity of the drawing file and will attempt to fix any errors it finds.

Purge – Enter at the command line or you will find the command in the FILE > Drawing utilities. This will remove any unused block definitions or styles from a drawing thus reducing the file size (often very useful on large drawings).



Right I guess that's enough for now I guess I better get back to working on some of your support calls.

Happy AutoCAD'ing

Mark Little
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