

LEADERS' FORUM



R & D builds hard dollars

FOR years the building and construction sector in Australia has been held back by industry organisations guarding whatever intellectual property they might have, to deny competitors any similar advantage.

It was always difficult for any sophisticated R&D to percolate through the industry as a whole.

So arguably the most significant innovation in recent years is the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Construction Innovation, because it harnesses industry, academia and governments into a powerful industry development body. The CRC comprises leading construction and consultancy companies, major universities, local government and CSIRO.

For the first time this important industry is realising that it is not static; that it is evolving within a global environment and must be at the leading edge of technological development if it is to match international best practice. There is a way to go, but we are beginning to see sophisticated research being applied. And it is already starting to transform the industry, particularly in fields such as OH&S, the use of sustainable materials, design technologies and construction methods.

For example, we have software that can tell a builder the life expectancy of every material he wants to use, plus a menu of alternative materials. It means that if he knows a building will be obsolete in 15 years for an industrial tenant, he can construct a building with a 17-year life expectancy; eliminating unnecessary cost and wasted resources.

We also have software that allows you to 'visit' the finished building while it is still being designed.

These are examples of the level of sophistication that becomes possible when an industry invests in strategic, globally-advanced R&D.

Before the CRC, many in the building sector regarded researchers as irrelevant attention-seekers. Those 'attention-seekers' are now delivering hard dollar outcomes – and have never been more relevant.

JOHN McCARTHY

chairman, CRC Construction Innovation