

## Users Conference: A Sparkling Event That Defies Easy Description

By Joe Salimando

Usually, as the editor of the McCormick Letter, I don't put my name on the articles that appear here. The chief reason for that is: The articles are written in the "third person"...the material should speak for itself.

This time, in writing about what I saw in my first-ever McCormick Systems User's Conference (April 10-13, in Arizona), I'm departing from that practice. Why? I can't adequately convey what you missed by writing about it impersonally. So: Since I'm speaking here for myself (my observations), I've put my name on this report.

### Important Notes

Here are some quick impressions:

1. The easy camaraderie between the attendees—chief estimators, contractors, and others—and the McCormick staff. What I saw over three days was not the "distance" one might expect between vendor and user. It seemed more to resemble a group of people all working toward the same goal.

2. An unstated assumption, which was, eventually, actually stated by President Todd McCormick at one point, was "the subtext"—beneath the surface, but present at all times. It answered a question I had before getting on the plane to Arizona: Why would a bunch of contractors and contracting company estimators come to Arizona to spend more than three days with a vendor? Was this about...golf?

Yes, there was a golf tournament. But that was over before the conference officially started.

It turns out the answer is quite simple—as Todd eventually gave voice to: "This is your research and



Attendees at the User Conference enthusiastically took part in the research and development process at McCormick.

### Highlights

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development money we're going to spend in the next year. What you say here will help guide us in what we do in R&D."

In other words, the improvements big and small, the capabilities new and refined, and whatever will be rolled out in the next year...was in large part determined by the feedback from the customers who came, and the give-and-take in small personal conversations, group "intake" sessions, and one-on-one time (a user with a staff member) in the laboratory.

3. What impressed me the most was the rapt attention and enthusiasm of the attendees. Frankly, during the event, I tried to put myself at a three-day event on software for writers and editors. Recently, I did take a one-day course on "Computer-Assisted Reporting," which turned out to be a two-day course on how to use Excel to unearth facts that would make good articles.

I paid for the course with my own money (and time away from work), just as the women and men in attendance at the McCormick Users Conference did. Unfortunately, toward the end of the first afternoon, my eyes were glazing over. I didn't make day two.

Yet in Arizona, the meeting room was filled quite often. This even carried forward to an "Industry Insight" presentation that I made. I really expected the "Lab" (right outside the meeting room) to be filled during my presentation. Instead, the "Lab" was empty—and every seat was taken.

4. Finally, I stayed at this event until the last day—Saturday morning. From 7 to 11 a.m., there were no scheduled sessions, but the "Lab" was opened to all comers. I showed up at 7:15, to find a number of conversations already underway. Todd later told me that the first attendee showed up at 6:45 a.m.

## Conference Agenda

Sessions of note on the agenda were:

✓ A detailed explanation of Version 7.0 by Ed Bundy (Vice President and head of R&D), including notes of where McCormick has now provided in the new system many of the things that customers have been requesting.

✓ Sessions on the VDV database, CAD Estimating, change order, utilities, billing with a PDA, and more. Steve Schrader, the "poster boy" for advanced use of McCormick's CAD Estimating system, took the floor to help attendees get a better look at what that system can do.

✓ Two lengthy "give-and-take" sessions. One was called "What's Next," and featured Todd McCormick and Ed Bundy exploring customer wants and needs. The other, "Estimating Forum," was open to all questions—and again, consisted of more "give-and-take."

Also included was a live demonstration of the Web Ex online system. McCormick users Web Ex to provide customer support. "The thing that really separates the software companies is the level of service they offer you," said Rex Hylton, during the demo. "This is a double win.



**Jack and Todd McCormick ensure that attendees who have invested time and money to attend get more out of their estimating systems when they leave.**

Using Web Ex, we can cut the time that you need to spend with McCormick's support people—getting you back to work at estimating much faster.

“And if we can do that here at McCormick's support operation, then we can get to more phone calls in a given day—and provide even better support.”

Beyond intricacies of McCormick software and support operations, conference speakers addressed subtleties—such as estimating philosophy. “If you treat your change order estimating the same as you do the rest of a job,” said Dick Manrod of the McCormick staff, “you probably aren't going to be a happy camper.” He went on to delineate details on change order estimating, including how to use McCormick software to best effect.

### **Making Better Use of the System**

Essentially, what appeared to be happening was that the McCormick users in attendance were investing time and money to get one heck of a lot more out of their estimating systems.

Noteworthy give-and-take discussions (and on-the-large-screen demonstrations) were given of such “sidelights” of the McCormick software as its schedul-



***The User's Conference is, at heart, a “real-time” gathering of those who put McCormick's software to best use. Learning takes place in labs, forums, and even in hallways.***



ing function and making use of the proposal feature. Did you know these items were incorporated in that system you have on your desk? Many in the audience did not know—but they avidly pursued learning more about them, on-site, from

McCormick's developers and staff.

What emerged after three days of meetings (including a little bit of fun, such as golf and a group dinner) was that the User's Conference is,

at heart, a “real-time” gathering of those who put McCormick's software to best use. All together in one room, with the McCormick folks listening, they assembled their “master wish list,” if you will.

It's incumbent now—between this time and next year's User's Conference—for the McCormick staff to refer to their copious notes and tackle the task of making that wish list into reality...for the users in attendance and for all those of you reading this who did not attend.

Interested in the 2003 User's Conference? Stay tuned to the pages of this newsletter. We'll announce the dates late this year. ✖

*Joe Salimando, an industry writer and consultant, pens columns three times each month at [www.tedmag.com](http://www.tedmag.com) and contributes frequently to [www.electricalresource.com](http://www.electricalresource.com). He's the former publisher of *Electrical Contractor* magazine (1990-98).*

## Estimator's Corner

# The Specifications— Division 16!



At this time, most of the electrical specifications are found in Division 16. A new Division 25 plus other divisions for Telecommunications and other systems, may be added in the future. (Further information is available at [www.division17.net](http://www.division17.net) and [www.csinet.org](http://www.csinet.org).) However, this article is based on the 1995 Master Format of Division 16.

It is very important that you read and fully understand all of the Specifications, especially including Division 16. The specifications normally supercede the plans.

Division 16's first sections will talk about installation standards, codes, permit fees, submittals, warranty and guarantee, cutting and patching, alterations and demolition, temporary utilities, as-built drawings and manuals, and so forth.

Section 16050 covers Basic Electrical Materials and Methods. Note the conduit systems allowed. What type of wire and devices? Are there any special installation standards required? Note anything special or out of the ordinary.

Other Division 16 sections cover specifics such as High Voltage Distribution, Service and Distribution, Lighting, Special Systems, Communications, Electric Resistance Heating, Controls, and Testing.

I used a check sheet to note the various items in the specifications. That form is available at [www.mccormicksys.com](http://www.mccormicksys.com) (go to "Downloads"—"Tools and Forms"...it may be downloaded as a word file). Modify that form to match your needs.

Mark the specification pages and the items needed for future reference. You may need to send copies of particular parts of the specification to various suppliers. If copies are used, errors in the translation are less likely. ✖

*Next month: "Users and CAD Estimating."*

## Get Training in the East!

With training classes filling up regularly in Arizona—despite an expanded schedule!—McCormick Systems is working with veteran estimator and trainer Erle Howard to explore tomer interest in obtaining training in an East Coast facility. Howard will be ready to hold training classes in two facilities near Baltimore in September. To sign up, or to get your name on our list for future East Coast events, please call Loriel McCormick or Jody Dougherty at 800-444-4890. ✖



## Get Windows Training Now!

### Standard Estimating

The class is structured to take you from "Job Startup" through "Bid Summary". It provides in-depth instruction, including good manual experience and "brush-up" exposure for those who want to get more out of the product.

### Advanced Management

Designed for the database manager or chief estimator, this class drills down into the bottom of the program. You will learn how to build specification formulas, write reports and reports formulas, and more. Before taking the class, you should be proficient in all takeoff phases of the product and understand your company's needs.

### Upcoming Schedule

Unless specified, all classes are at the training center in our office in Chandler, AZ. Classes start at 7 a.m. and wind up about 4 p.m. daily. We make hotel reservations using information from the registration forms sent in from participants. We must receive your registration form in order to reserve a space in our class. To obtain a registration form, call 800-444-4890. ✖

*June 5-7*

Standard Estimating

*June 26-28*

Standard Estimating

*July 10-12*

Standard Estimating

*July 17-19*

Advanced

*July 24-26*

Standard Estimating

*August 14-16*

Standard Estimating