



Move Past the AutoCAD Ties That Bind

You've invested a lot in your CAD software —
but don't let that cloud the reality that it's
time to consider other options.

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Advancing Infrastructure



In the world of business and economics, a sunk cost is money that's already spent and cannot be recovered. It's a concept that's said to stem from the oil industry, where the decision about whether to abandon an oil well is based on its expected cash flows, not on how much money was spent to drill it.

In the oil well example, big decisions are black and white. But in other business, it's not always so easy to see when it's time to cut the ties that bind. For example, the more we've invested in our CAD software, the harder it is to move on, even when we realize it's no longer the right choice. According to TechTarget:

“The sunk cost effect is the tendency for humans to continue investing in something that clearly isn't working. Because it is human nature to want to avoid failure, people will often continue spending time, effort, or money to try and fix what isn't working instead of cutting their losses and moving on.”

And even though we live in an age of constant change, most of us (and our companies) would rather avoid changes that disrupt business operations. But the truth is: change is essential if you hope to continually improve operations and grow business.

If you've been contemplating a move beyond AutoCAD — whether because of recent Autodesk licensing changes or a greater sense that the software is no longer working for you — but are feeling held back because of past investment, it's time for a reality check. This article will help you recognize when you're falling victim to the sunk cost fallacy and overcome the reluctance to move beyond AutoCAD.

Overcoming Sunk-Cost Inertia

A manager's challenge is to identify opportunities and reliably weigh the costs vs. the benefits of making changes that could improve productivity, reduce long-term costs, or help win new business. It all sounds pretty logical until it comes to something like changing CAD software — in which case you might have so much history, money, and data invested in your current solution that the idea of moving is emotionally overwhelming for you and everyone involved. The result is a sense of inertia that's difficult to overcome.

How do you see beyond emotion and tackle this inertia? You're likely too close to the situation, so your first step should be a backward one. Take that step back by comparing this decision to one that's even bigger — say, the decision to fix an aging bridge. Do you retrofit what you have now, or tear it down and start over?

If you allowed sunk costs to enter into the bridge decision, you'd likely decide to keep the old bridge. You'd patch it, shore it up, nurse it along, and the bridge would hold up — for a while. But users would be frustrated by traffic conditions, crews would struggle to keep up with maintenance, and you'd be exposing your organization to the unpredictable costs and risks of relying on aging infrastructure, with no relief in sight for any of those drawbacks. All the while, your sunk costs would grow. And grow.

In contrast, consider the reality of starting over. Funding, designing, and building the new bridge will be difficult and disruptive for all involved and, yes, it will take years to complete the project and begin reaping the benefits. But those drawbacks are inevitable, whether you build the new bridge now or later. The reality is, progress comes at a price, but once the price is paid, you're left with — progress. And you will have cut loose from the emotional, practical, and financial baggage of something that was never meant to support indefinite growth and other ever-changing conditions.

Do you recognize similarities between maintaining an aging bridge and maintaining CAD software that you've outgrown? If so, don't allow the sunk cost fallacy to taint your decision-making process. Take the black-and-white approach of the oil industry and focus solely on future ROI and other benefits of starting over.



MICROSTATION MYTHS VS. FACTS

If you're considering MicroStation as an AutoCAD upgrade, be sure to separate fact from fiction. For example:



MicroStation is only for very large organizations.

In fact, while MicroStation is powerful enough to design and deliver the world's largest AEC projects, its flexibility and ease of use make it equally well suited to small-scale projects. Even if you're not working on big projects yet, you may aspire to do so, and MicroStation's scalability means you've got the horsepower you need to take on any job. To better understand whether MicroStation is right for your company, see or take the quiz.



We'll lose AutoCAD data by moving it to MicroStation.

In fact, all your RealDWG data will transfer to MicroStation without cumbersome file translations or loss.



New CAD software is too hard to learn.

In reality, many MicroStation functions work similarly to those of AutoCAD, and you can even use a majority of any existing PGP files. In addition, MicroStation provides access to an adaptive learning system that makes all available online help and learning content accessible from the software interface, including hundreds of hours of videos and course materials, and even recommends learning content for tools and workflows used by others on projects similar to your own.



Most people use AutoCAD, so it must be the best solution.

In fact Bentley software users number in the millions across virtually every discipline in the architecture, engineering, construction, and infrastructure operations industries all over the world. With more and more AutoCAD users advancing to BIM workflows or considering products like MicroStation that support a blend of CAD and BIM workflows to achieve greater productivity, it likely won't be long before AutoCAD users are in the minority.



If we move, we're on our own.

The truth is, Bentley customers have direct, 24/7/365 access to technical support, developers, and training professionals that would surprise most Autodesk customers — and that's in addition to support from your software reseller. That means that any time you need help with licensing, purchasing, or technical issues, Bentley is just a call or a web visit away to make sure you have uninterrupted productivity.

In Summary

If a friend told you she was unhappy in her relationship but couldn't bear to move on "because we've been together so long," wouldn't you find that a terrible reason to stay committed? Doesn't her future happiness depend on starting over? The relationship with CAD software is no different.

According to Lifehack:

"We fall victim to the sunk cost fallacy because we are emotionally invested in whatever money, time, or any other resource we have committed in the past. The most important step to freeing yourself from making poor decisions based on sunk costs is to recognize the logical fallacy. Simply being aware of it will help you tremendously in making more rational decisions in the future."

Decisions are rational when based on the future value of objects, investments, and experiences. When we make them based on past investment, decisions are emotional. Isn't it obvious which approach is optimal for business?

Don't get hung up on the sunk costs of your AutoCAD software; evaluate change based on what it promises for the future. As is true for an oil well, a bridge, or a boyfriend, sometimes the key to long-term success is starting over.



Bentley is a global leader in providing architects, engineers, geospatial professionals, constructors, and owner-operators with comprehensive software solutions for advancing the design, construction, and operations of infrastructure.

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