

EMAIL INTERVIEW Tom Shircliff, Rob Murchison & Ken Sinclair



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[IntelligentBuildings®](#) is a Charlotte, NC based company co-founded by Tom Shircliff and Rob Murchison. IntelligentBuildings® provides strategic consulting and software services for real estate development and management in commercial, institutional and corporate environments.

Convergence in Action

Take action with convergence and intelligent buildings strategies, use technology for the right reasons and deal with the real roadblocks.

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Sinclair: Our theme for this month is Convergence in Action. How does your message support that?

Shircliff & Murchison: Ken, we believe that “action” is a key for the industry right now. There are many ideas, strategies, certifications, technologies and theories, but the bottom line is that the industry has all the tools necessary to create intelligent, converged buildings now. Not only do we have the tools, but those tools are made up of proven, reliable technologies, protocols and procedures. Who could argue that CAT6, fiber optics, switches and routers, IP, BACnet, LONworks, Modbus and the rest are “new”? We don’t need to wait for all-IP building systems controls and devices or the perfect suite of products and services. Many traditional manufacturers, sub contractors and service providers have open-system options. Owners need to select a consultant, architect or similar advisor who will help set a convergence approach and filter all vendors through that approach.

The first two steps are:

1) Develop a strategy that supports current business goals and uses your existing financial measurement criteria. Technology is not THE strategy but rather should support business goals and strategies. Owners and managers should achieve higher asset utilization and improved cost structure in addition to improved productivity – all in ways that you can describe measure and manage. You aren’t going to have a sustained effort without addressing the

business fundamentals.

2) Commit to do “something” and not “everything”. When it’s all or nothing in real estate it’s generally nothing.

Sinclair: What is the main reason why corporations, institutions and developers aren’t doing more with convergence?

Shircliff & Murchison: Organizational alignment is the reason why most projects, both new and retrofit are not more intelligent or converged. There are only a select few developers that have a true CIO and even fewer who venture outside of the “back office” technologies and into building systems proper. The same goes for corporate and institutional projects whose IT departments are typically not working closely with other internal departments such as facilities, finance, HR, planning, purchasing and others. There is a clear need for organizational alignment and eventually all out change management. Whose department is it when access controls pull data from an HR database through building systems middleware over a single switched building network and then bills back for afterhours activity? Is it HR, IT, Finance, IT or Security?

Prior to such organizational changes the important step is to have senior leadership endorse a converged, intelligent real estate strategy potentially using a facilitating influence like a consultant or progressive architect to direct the rest of the team.

Another barrier to convergence is the traditional divisional construction process which is structurally set up to keep things in silos. So, that makes it even more important for owners and executives to communicate clearly to architects and engineers that they want to pursue a convergence strategy. Use of the MasterFormat 2004 would also be a good guide and help raise important questions.

Finally, there is often a misperception that convergence means everything in the building on “one wire”. Convergence still allows for common sense. In other words, two or three networks are still a more efficient approach than a dozen. Look at the building requirements for networking and develop a practical approach to the connectivity infrastructure.

Sinclair: How can an owner pull all of this together? Do we need an overall technology GC of some sort?

Shircliff & Murchison: That may come to pass but we don't think anyone should discount subject matter experts or current, trusted vendor relationships. Thus, it is optimal to work with your existing team so long as they are willing to be progressive and cooperate with others. It is best for owners or senior managers to make their desires known and clear. As mentioned we are not dealing with new issues or “bleeding edge” technologies. It's only a matter of keeping focused on using “current day” as your standard.

Sinclair: What do you mean by “current day”?

Shircliff & Murchison: Two things mainly:

1) Use of accepted and proven open standards for building systems and networks.

Generally, this means staying away from proprietary, closed, legacy protocols. i and i limited in the U.K. states in a research report that global sales of proprietary protocols for intelligent building controls is on a steep decline, while open or IP-oriented controls sales are rising rapidly and in fact were projected to pass proprietary systems sales this year.

2) Use of contemporary IT standards and practices for building systems networks.

Nearly every subsystem and application for buildings utilizes a network consisting of cabling, controllers, switching and servers. However, some traditional vendors are not qualified to design and install a robust, reliable network. Whether converged or not those networks need to be properly designed and implemented for reliability and security.

Sinclair: How does this all support sustainability and “green” strategies – especially energy?



Shircliff & Murchison: LEED-related systems and the verification of their performance are, to put it simply about “monitoring something” and “controlling something”. That could mean daylight harvesting through shade controls, tenant sub metering, HVAC performance, lighting controls, load shedding, water usage, air quality and more. You monitor and control through some sort of network. Additionally, most of the aforementioned are directly related to energy, which might lead one to argue that convergence and networking is the foundation of an energy strategy. Thus LEED, sustainability and energy conservation are directly supported by convergence and intelligent building strategies.

Sinclair: What other issues are important for owners and senior managers to consider?

Shircliff & Murchison: Operating expenses and property management procedures should be powerful and even determining influences on strategy and the specific tactics. This can be done with a return on asset (ROA) and a return on investment (ROI) financial analysis and an evaluation of what the property and facility management requirements are and how these management procedures could be made more efficient and provide better occupant services with certain technologies. With rising energy costs and an uncertain economy, operating costs are more important than ever. There are several key technologies for both retrofit and new construction that can have significant positive impact on operating expenses, net operating income and ultimately the overall value of the building.



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