



GOOGLE SKETCHUP AND 3D WAREHOUSE

A Powerful Visualization Solution

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A growing number of companies

providing products and services to the architecture, engineering, and construction (AEC) industry are diving into virtual reality. For instance, Whirlpool Corporation has a division dedicated to translating its entire product catalog into digital 3D files, while McGraw Hill Construction has created a platform to distribute 3D files from building product manufacturers seamlessly online. And wouldn't you know it... Google is at the bottom of it all with Google SketchUp and the Google 3D Warehouse.

Google SketchUp is a 3D modeling program. SketchUp has enjoyed widespread adoption by AEC industry professionals, largely due to the fact that SketchUp is easy to learn, and integrates with nearly every major 2D and 3D CAD application. People use it for designing, problem solving, a what-if tool, a consultation aid, brainstorming tool, and some users even call it therapeutic. Apple calls it "deceptively simple." Companies such as Whirlpool and McGraw Hill use SketchUp as a platform to quickly and inexpensively build product catalogs that can be shared online.

The Google 3D Warehouse is the online repository for storing and sharing 3D models that can be uploaded and downloaded by SketchUp users around the world. The 3D Warehouse, allows designers to easily drag and drop real products into existing 3D computer design "sketches". The Best part is that both SketchUp and the 3D Warehouse are Free!

The number of companies participating in the 3D Warehouse has grown rapidly in 2007. The rise in participation is largely due to the fact that it is necessary for companies to utilize the Warehouse to remain front-of-mind during the design and build process. This is the strategy: Companies supply professionals with virtual products early in design development, increasing the odds that designers will specify the products later during construction documentation. The standard marketing strategies such as banner advertisements and email newsletters are far too limited in their ability to engage the end user, compared to what's possible with 3D Warehouse. Creating 3D models as well as educating designers on how to leverage those models offers a new opportunity for meaningful interaction online.

Imagine how incredibly useful these tools really are: An architect working a late night is faced with the need to outfit an entire home with realistic skylights. She can either spend the next several hours researching and precisely modeling those skylights herself, or she can visit to the 3D Warehouse, search for 'Velux,' and drop the skylights into her design - all in a matter of minutes. Think also about the general contractor on-site who is struggling to see how a construction detail of a particular installation will actually translate in the field. In this instance, a 3D SketchUp model of the construction detail of a real-world product cuts down on the waste of time and the potential for error.

During its first year of existence, the 3D Warehouse has attracted over 75 companies offering some or all of their product catalogs as SketchUp models. Designers can find anything from Marvin windows and Whirlpool ovens, to Tyvek house wrap and Sherwin-Williams paint. However, there are a large number of big and small brands that haven't taken advantage of this unique tool, due either to a lack of awareness about this trend or a lack of resources to create 3D assets.

Fortunately for manufacturers, there are two factors of production that are shifting in their favor. First, specialized individuals and companies are stepping forward to offer SketchUp modeling services, sparing manufacturers the added expense of developing, hiring or contracting that expertise in-house. Second, SketchUp's rapid rise in popularity amongst professionals in the AEC industry has caused the development of software tools that can convert the SketchUp file format (.skp) into the majority other 3D file formats. This means that companies can develop and maintain a single digital product catalog on the 3D Warehouse, and use it to service the needs of designers working on a variety of 3D platforms.

We expect the widespread adoption of the 3D Warehouse by designers and builders to continue in 2008. It will be essential for brands to play a new role as marketers. In order to have a meaningful conversation with target audiences, brands will look to create tools that help professionals on the job.

- Alex Oliver
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