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# DAILY INTER LAKE

Online Edition

Tuesday June 08, 2004

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## Business

### Internet Plans Room saves time

By [Alan Choate](#)  
The Daily Inter Lake

When Dan Ruud, an estimator for Kalmont Distributors, needed to look at construction plans in order to bid on a project, it used to be necessary to drive — sometimes across the state — to look at plans in a regional plans room. Or, he could jump through the hoops to have plans shipped to him.

Difficult? No.

Inconvenient and tedious? Yes.

And if he forgot to write down a piece of information, often he'd have to repeat the entire inconvenient, tedious process to dig it up.

Not anymore.

Kalmont, along with about 80 other companies across the state, has joined the Internet Plans Room, a partnership between the Montana Contractors' Association and **iSqFt**, an Ohio software company.

Plans rooms are a "blueprint library" for those bidding on projects.

"What we have done is taken this library and placed it on the Internet," said De Dee Johnson, the MCA plans room manager in Helena. "In doing so, we expanded our user area from the Helena area to most of the Rocky Mountain region."

The MCA is offering **iSqFt** (pronounced "I Square Foot") seminars at 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. Monday at the



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• WestCoast Kalispell Center Hotel.

• The service brings the advantages of online access to the construction bidding process — project plans are now available at any time and in any place that a subscriber has an Internet connection.

• It also gives businesses access to more projects in more places, said Ruud, and is often more comprehensive: "It opens us up to more jobs." Kalmont sells metal and wood doors, hardware and building specialties to commercial projects.

• As blueprints arrive at the MCA's office, they are scanned in and uploaded to the **iSqFt** site. Subscribers can then view the plans, contact owners and search specifications.

• "It's pretty handy, I'll tell you that," said Alisha May, president of Rocky Mountain Rebar, which provides reinforced steel to highway and heavy construction projects.

• Her company used to maintain subscriptions to plans rooms in Kalispell, Bozeman and Missoula, and people spent a lot of time traveling to make sure they kept up with available projects. It often was hard to get to the rooms from construction sites during business hours, May added.

• "Now, you have no need to be running so much," she said.

• At one point, dozens of software companies were competing to establish online plans depositories, said Will Hammerquist, the MCA's director of member services.

• Associated General Contractors of America sorted through the competitors and recommended **iSqFt**. The MCA joined with contractor associations in Idaho, Washington and Oregon in setting up the service about a year ago.

• It's not perfect, Ruud said. A computer monitor can't display an entire blueprint all at once, and scrolling around a building plan takes getting used to, he said. The printouts sometimes aren't as good as an original drawing, either.

• Subscriptions cost \$995 for MCA members and \$1,450 for nonmembers. May and Ruud said they're satisfied with what the service provides.

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"If you get one or two jobs off it that weren't in your book, you're ahead of the game," he said. Said Hammerquist: "This is the direction the industry is moving in. In a few years this is going to be how it's done."

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