Framing

Framing Software Enables Freedom and Flexibility to Freelance in Timber Frame Design

Summary: The Timber Design Studio delivers an expert timber design resource that is accessible for any manufacturer or self-builder.

Its physical location has become irrelevant, since designer Luke Walker is able to use his experience to design remotely, deliver designs electronically, and adapt to the standards, supply chain and CNC manufacturing needs of any client quickly and easily.

He can do this thanks to his choice of Framing software from Elecosoft. It delivers a digital timber design working environment that he uses daily to delight his clients in the UK and elsewhere, working on a freelance basis as a virtual member of their team.

THE TIMBER DESIGN STUDIO

Luke Walker is an experienced freelance timber building designer with more than a decade of professional design expertise. He now runs The Timber Design Studio, a successful independent design consultancy based in Dubai. It delivers projects for numerous UK based timber manufacturers and works on behalf of ambitious self-builders.

A traditional training background in timber manufacturing design gave Luke an enviable set of design capabilities and skills. When his satisfaction with the standard working environment waned, he became convinced that he could successfully deliver his services from anywhere.

He took a leap of faith, equipping himself with the best essential resources available. Among those, he chose Framing software from Elecosoft.

Freedom to work anywhere

His path led him to Dubai, where now he spends most of each day working within Framing, using it on every project across his client base in the UK and elsewhere.

Luke described an extraordinary degree of freedom to work when, how and from wherever he wishes, enabled by Framing and other digital technology. "All I have to do each day is decide where to work. If I go to one of the many freelance hubs here, I just take my laptop, dongle with Framing on it, and my mouse. That's the beauty of it. It's so simple."

Not having to print anything is another huge advantage, he continued: "When I was working in office my desk was always

covered with clutter and paper. With the Framing software, I don't need to print a single thing, which means I'm not just free of an office but am paperless and very green."

Framing is Luke's default working environment, as he explained: "I'm in the Framing software all day. It's the first thing I open when I get to the computer. I plan my day the day before, so if I have multiple jobs I know what I'm working on and for which client. When I stand at my desk, I change the database to the company or project I'm working on. It's the only programme I need to do my job."

Freedom to work for anyone

A key benefit of the software is the flexibility it gives Luke to work for any number of different clients easily, by storing all the configuration settings and specific needs of each one. He explained "It is quite amazing how differently each manufacturer does things – there's huge disparity. I knew when I started that building individual relationships would be critical, but so would the ability to flip my thinking and work out how each client did things – then make that practical."

The software has all he requires to operate as a virtual member of every client's team. He told us "Having a single global database or settings would make working for a new company impossible, without many mistakes. In the Framing software I have a materials database including stock lists for each client, which means I can't use anything they don't stock. The Framing Configs feature lets me set up different options for parts of a client's build, with options set specifically for that manufacturer, and it imports a lot of their settings and processes for how they build their frames. It means that, when I start designing, it automatically does it they way my client does it in their office. When they update their database, they can simply send it over and I load it into the software."

The precision of Framing enables Luke to set anything between 50 and 100 specific settings for each customer. The detail it enables is something that Luke values highly: "The software is simply invaluable. With timber frame there is a lot to consider. Tiny details make a huge difference, and the time and cost of getting those rights can be a big factor. Taking those concerns away means I can focus on the design and know I will meet their standards."

Driving future manufacturing

Many timber frame manufacturers have embraced digital manufacturing increasingly in recent years, and Framing enable Luke to adapt to the production process of the most forward-thinking clients. He outlined how one customer had leaned on his ability to adapt: "I have a Welsh customer who has been very good to me over the years. When flooring capabilities were added to Framing software, they saw the opportunities right away. Now, designing floors is a doddle, and it's fast. I can take previously designed cassettes and resize them, and never have to start from scratch any more. I can get materials lists easily too."

He continued "This aspect of the software has been brilliant for me. What I produce from the software now directly drives their machine saws. There are so many options for different outputs in Framing overall that I know if they, or another client, gets a new piece of equipment, I can simply go into the software and change the settings to output for a new machine."

Easy, flexible and fast

Using Framing to help deliver a turnkey timber design service means that Luke can not only get up to speed for a new client quickly but deliver speedily too. He reflected on the transition to digital: "Timber framing used to work differently. A few years ago, it was all lines and node points and putting specific information on every line. Now, the speed of being able to frame a job is incredible. Clients are starting to skip the need to draw frames out in sections, and just move straight to complete models. I can just draw frames in the software, and straight away the client has a 3D model."

He believes that the ease of use is critical to timely delivery: "Everyone wants everything tomorrow, so speed and ease are absolutely vital. When things are too complicated, it takes

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too long. There are other software packages around, but they are far too complex. With Framing they've taken out so much of the manual aspect that it's now easy for designers. Even though there are lots of options, once you know where everything is then putting models together is very quick."

The speed, coupled with the flexibility of using a freelance service, adds to the business benefits for his clients: "Many manufacturers are cottoning on to the sense of using independent services. They get all the experience, but they don't need to train skills in or build them over time. Plus, I don't need a salary, and they don't need to fund expensive software or equipment because I have all that I require to deliver for them, to high standards, and fast."

Solo but supported

With Framing such a critical enabling element, Luke relies very much on accessing good support when it is needed – and he has no concerns about that whatsoever. He said: "The absolute best thing about Framing is the people supporting it. Having Elecosoft's support guys on the end of the line, for technical issues or when I can't find something, or don't know how to do something. Just five minutes on the phone, and it's sorted. If I had to go through endless phone calls or search around trying to find the right person to help, it would be very hard work."

Elecosoft's support team have become a valued sounding board, almost becoming part of Luke's own virtual team, as he explained: "When you work alone you have nobody to pass ideas off or discuss things. In a studio when you're with other designers, you can gather round a computer to discuss a problem. Alone, you don't have that luxury. When you start working with a new company and they ask for things you've not done before it can be a bit daunting. But with Framing, I

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can give Elecosoft a ring and they'll explain things and help me sort it out, all over the phone and Team Viewer. That enables me to work for a new client, and it takes some of the stress away."

Confidence for the future

Luke is bullish about the future for his services and for the timber frame sector. He is convinced that timber frame usage will continue to grow – whether on Britain's housing estates or in Dubai's cities of concrete and steel. He added: "I drive past house-building sites in the UK that are being built from concrete blocks and think: why? They could design faster, build faster, have walls standing in days, and get them watertight in weeks."

"I believe that offsite, and timber frame, will eventually be the only way people manufacture for construction. Not just because it can be designed and manufactured digitally, but because it can be delivered on a lorry as a jigsaw that can be built in a fraction of the time of traditional methods – plus, it's greener, and much more sustainable."

Just as offsite makes sense for construction industry overall, outsourcing design for manufacturing seems an increasingly smart business strategy. In closing, he said: "Manufacturers like control, but they are realising that they have just as much control with an independent and could save a lot of money without losing anything. The world is so connected now, and I'm only an email or Skype call away. With my skills, plus Framing software, I can work for anyone, anywhere."

IMAGES NOTES:

Photograph of Durrants Farm, West Sussex: A luxury bespoke, contemporary farmhouse-style building, designed on behalf of Lowfield Timber Frame based in Wales, incorporating attic roofs, oak framing and high specification walls, to achieve above average U-Values (which measure insulation effectiveness),

3D model produced in Framing software of Cherry Orchard House, Pershore: A multi-storey assisted living care home, designed on behalf of Midlands Timber Engineering in Leicester. With such a large project it's essential to be able to easily view all aspects of the design in 3D, which Framing easily allows you to do.