Robert Green's "An Open Letter to CAD Software Companies" and a Response from IntelliCAD

If you're one of the many folks out there who don't believe that the developers of your CAD software are listening to you… you're not alone and you should take the time to read **Robert Green's** "**An Open Letter to CAD Software Companies**" in **Cadalyst**. And, as to the part about feeling like you're all alone, here is Robert's follow up describing the **overwhelming response to his open letter**.

I receive email versions of **Robert's bi-weekly CAD Manager newsletters** but had fallen behind and didn't see the original post until yesterday. If I'd read it when it was first released, my response would have been, "Amen brother!".

Just yesterday morning I had a conversation with a colleague whose company does Landscape Architecture, Civil Design and Land Planning. They are fully invested in Civil 3d (including much blood, sweat and tears in addition to money, money, money) but they're as productive as any company I know of with the program. Their main complaint? They feel like Autodesk is pushing them toward Revit and they have no need for the software.

In my own experience, I see the push toward NavisWorks and 3ds Max. I had two seats of Civil 3d until I downgraded one of them to Map last year – only to be "rewarded" with an upgrade to Infrastructure Design Suite (and more money for Subscription) this year. This was supposedly something that owners of a Civil 3d and a Map license were able to opt-in to. I didn't opt-in. So, it took me several days to get them to un-opt-me-in and revert my licenses back to what I'd purchased. Is it any wonder

I'm suspicious of any "bonuses" that come my way **because of this**?

I don't know how much Robert intended to point the finger at **Autodesk** in the original column but, with my experiences described above, the references to BIM (which **we've long argued** was a way for Autodesk to avoid talking about Esri and GIS) and Cloud and other buzzwords, that's certainly the connection I made in my mind.

Because the **Carlson Software** I sell now includes **IntelliCAD**, an alternative to AutoCAD, I passed links to the open letter and the responses to a few folks to get their reaction. Dave Lorenzo, the Development Director for the **ITC (IntelliCAD Technology Consortium)** took the feedback to heart and, considering the interest in the future of IntelliCAD the past few years, I asked his permission to post his response. I very much appreciate his willingness to let me do so…

> *I agree that the features mentioned are focused on AutoCAD, but the article is not so much about features as it's really about the user's perception if someone is listening. While Autodesk is moving too fast providing features that users don't want or need, we are not moving fast enough to provide the basic productivity features users are requesting, so it appears we both are not listening to our users. That is the perception we need to fix too.*
>
> *Our next release has several user requested productivity features and I hope our users will see we are listening. Actually we have always been listening but our rewrite of IntelliCAD 7 took so many resources that there was little time for new features – that situation is finally changing. I believe that there are a lot of unhappy AutoCAD users who want IntelliCAD to be successful, we just need to listen and add*

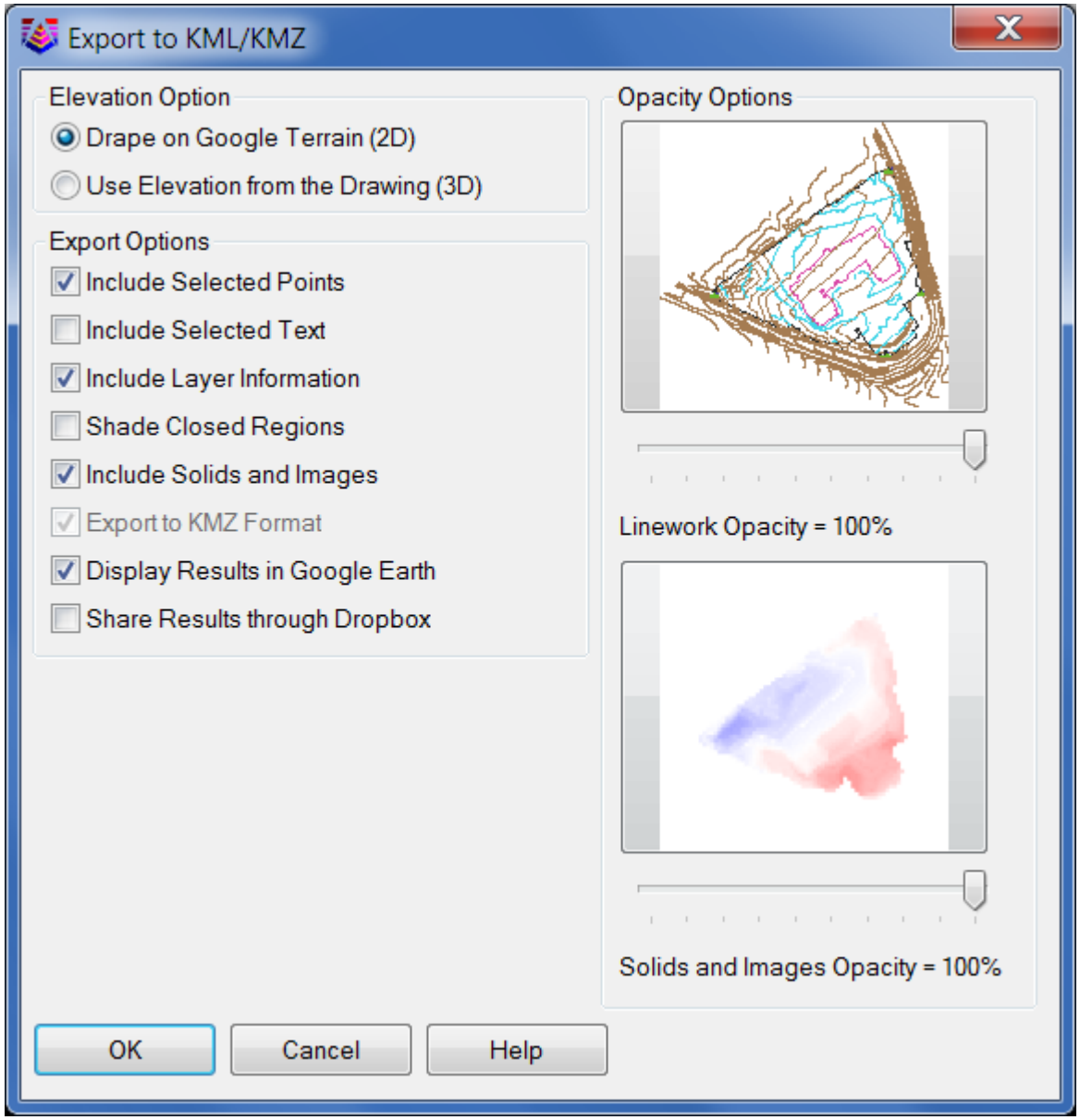
those remaining productivity features that are keeping them from making the switch.

Did You Know… About Carlson's Export to KMZ (Google Earth) Command?

Carlson Software gives you the ability to export drawing entities directly to the Google Earth application or, alternatively, to a .kml or .kmz file that can be opened in Google Earth. At this time Carlson supports the export of points, polylines, text, solids, images, lines and arcs to Google Earth or .kml/.kmz files.

In Carlson 2014 they have also included the option of sending the Google Earth file directly to a Dropbox account for sharing with clients or other project team members.

The Export to Google Earth command is found in the File menu in all Carlson desktop programs.



Does Carlson Still Work With AutoCAD?

File this under “Myths”…

I hope this isn’t widespread, but I received the following email

yesterday and think it’s important to respond publicly. The email is posted in its entirety except for the name and contact info of the author.

Hello Jen & Jeremy,

> *I became acquainted with your site (and I believe Jen was on a “webcast” or video I had watched) when my former employer made the switch from Civil 3D to Carlson Civil several years back. I am an engineer and have been put into the role of upgrading AutoCAD and Carlson or making sure that my current company can continue to do what is necessary, which involves using CAD much less that in my consulting life.*
>
> *A local Autodesk reseller paid us a visit and indicated that Carlson and Autodesk as companies have not reached an agreement to continue further compatibility. Sounds like a licensing ($$) agreement issue, to me, that may or may not be temporary. This salesperson also indicated that the new version of Carlson would not work with anything beyond AutoCAD 2010 which we are currently running with Carlson 2011. As a note, My former company did not update AutoCAD every year depending upon what features were actually new so I am very OK with not upgrading if not entirely necessary.*
>
> *I would greatly appreciate any information or insight you could give on the subject. You can reach me via this e-mail or the phone number in the signature.*
>
> *Kind regards,*

I contacted Carlson and requested a direct reply:

> *Hi Jennifer,*

> *Carlson Software is a current member of the Audodesk Developer Network (ADN) which gives access to the current Autodesk products. We expect to release Carlson's 2014 products, including those running on top of IntelliCAD, AutoCAD 2014 and AutoCAD OEM, in the Summer of 2013.*
>
> *Dave Carlson*

Also, for the record, I currently run Carlson 2013 on top of IntelliCAD and on top of Civil 3d 2012.

Software Review: AutoCAD and IntelliCAD

The May 2012 issue of Professional Surveyor magazine has been published. This month they are featuring a software review I submitted: AutoCAD and IntelliCAD.

You can order your FREE subscription to the print version of Professional Surveyor here.

You can click here to learn more about Carlson Software's offerings that include IntelliCAD.

IntelliCAD Webinar – Do Over

Last week I presented a webinar sponsored by Carlson Software on the topic “Updates and Overview of IntelliCAD 7”. Unfortunately we had some technical difficulties and didn’t get a complete recording to post to the Movies collection on Carlson’s website.

For those who are interested, we will be re-doing the webinar on Thursday, March 29th. By that time we expect to have additional updates and improvements to announce.

Keep an eye on this site to register for the next IntelliCAD webinar

You can register for these future webinars by clicking the link below:

- Tips and Tricks for Setting Points
- Debunking the “Carlson Isn’t Dynamic” Myth
- Carlson Annotation and Labeling

Another Happy Carlson Customer

Here is a great story about another customer of mine, John Prevette with Gooden & Associates out of Hope Mills, NC, and his successful transition from Civil 3d to Carlson Civil Suite.

http://info.carlsonsw.com/blog-1/bid/121528/Moving-to-Carlson-from-Civil-3D
And, I know what you’re thinking but the answer is “No.” Carlson did not pay him to say this – I asked just to make sure! In all seriousness, it’s great he was willing to be interviewed and

confirm just how great a design tool Carlson is and just how quickly you're able to get up to speed.

Feedback from Aaron Hahn, Hahn Engineering & Consulting

I've been a little slack in requesting feedback from my customers over the past year so I was very pleased to receive the following unsolicited feedback from Aaron Hahn this week:

> *I purchased the Civil Suite last month and I wanted to thank you for all your pdf tutorials you posted on your site. They have been extremely helpful and they have made the switch from Civil 3D to Carlson quick and easy.*
>
> *I can confidently say, that I prefer this software over Civil 3D already (used Civil 3D for years)! It's faster, has more control, and is generally cleaner than Civil 3D. Clean and simple.*
>
> *Thanks for all your help! Looking forward to getting up to speed on more of your tutorials and webinars*
>
> *Aaron Hahn*
> *Hahn Engineering & Consulting*
> *British Columbia, Canada*
> *Software Purchase – December 2011*

See other testimonials here

Carlson Software VS Civil 3D® – Revisited

There is a looooonnnggg conversation comparing Civil 3D and Carlson Software that is taking place across two websites: www.civil3d.com and Autodesk Civil 3D Discussion Group: Carlson VS 3D.

I give kudos to James Wedding for extending the discussion on his website www.civil3d.com and also to Autodesk for allowing the conversation to happen in their Civil 3D Discussion Group. This topic is of vital interest to many people and, I think, will be a valuable resource.

I have posted a lengthy response to the comments from both sites below. In order to make it follow-able for those here on www.thatcadgirl.com, I have included links to the comments I was responding to.

Neil – I'll cede several of the points you made in your post. (Read it here). Both programs have dynamic design capabilities; but, if you define dynamic as, "like Civil 3D does it", then: No, Carlson doesn't do it like Civil 3D does. And I definitely agree with the pad template example. You do have to pick the "Process" button to get it to re-design and there is no Undo for the surface model. Dynamic? I'll agree that's a stretch; however, I don't think I've ever cited it as an example of Carlson's dynamic reactions.

But, even with those and other supposed drawbacks such as the

number of files Carlson creates, can I get my job done and out the door on time and under budget? Can most of my staff learn it on their own? Can I easily recover my data after an AutoCAD crash? Can I share my designs with others using any version of Land Desktop without having to explode everything? Can I avoid upgrading and the associated headaches every year? With Carlson, I can.

Bottom line, there will obviously be trade-offs. So, what is it worth to me? You cannot have this conversation without looking at what makes your company money. Dewberry probably has the moral high-ground here: Dewberry – CE News Article. They went through all the motions with Civil 3D and undoubtedly put their checkbook behind that effort. But Civil 3D must not have returned the favor. If they'd met productivity and profitability goals with Civil 3D, would they have given it up?

I'm not trying to deny that there are people and companies out there who are able to be efficient and turn a profit with Civil 3D. If you have figured it out and it works for you and your company as it seems to have for Arthur Miller, a gentleman who posted at James' site (Read it here), then more power to you – I think that's fantastic.

I've looked for good hard numbers and more "Arthur Millers" but they seem to be few and far between. Instead, Civil 3D defenders usually point to bells and whistles, whistles and bells…

MSpatz makes the argument for the bells and whistles very well here on this DG thread and then cross-posted the same thing here: (Read it Here). He states that it only cost his company $500 per person to implement. I must say that's the lowest cost I've ever heard. Is this typical? MSpatz knows Civil 3D well enough to be a contributor at www.civil3d.com. Do you need an MSpatz on staff to create and maintain Civil 3D installations in

order to keep those numbers that low? And what if an office only has one MSpatz on staff? There's a potential cost there too… Who picks up if he's out of the office or leaves the company? Redundancy in knowledge is pretty important. I'm happy to admit that I'm wrong, but I'd like to hear from others what it really costs to get it up and keep it going (training, upgrades, pilot projects, creating templates, assemblies, styles, etc.). Contact me here ContactUs@thatcadgirl.com.

He also states that, "It is not a layer thing, it is a style thing – KEY". No matter how KEY he believes "Styles" are, they don't pay salaries. I agree: dynamic objects are COOL! and can also greatly increase productivity. But they also have a cost and complexity component. How much money does, "Look how cool this is!" bring in the door on an annual basis? That's why, instead of touting the **features** of either Carlson or Civil 3D, I tend to focus on the **benefits** to a business as a whole. **Features** make money for Autodesk, their resellers and consultants. **Benefits** make money for the people using the software.

Sinc's post (Read it here) summed this up very neatly. As much as they like Civil 3D, he's just not sure they'll be able to justify the cost. And it sounds like they are extremely productive with it.

Which leads me to my last point: If and when they have to leave Civil 3D behind, Sinc's group will have a choice and that choice might lead them away from Autodesk entirely. It seems that in so many things Autodesk is doing these days, they are forcing everyone to, not just move to Civil 3D, but to move to the ***latest version of Civil 3D***. Retiring products so quickly… making 2010 C3D objects incompatible with 2009… punitive costs for letting subscription lapse… the list goes on. Business decision for them, too – I understand that. They must have decided it's profitable for them, but it's pricing many people out of

Autodesk’s civil/survey market.

I had a conversation with Jason Hickey at AU right after he started with EE. I think he was either just starting or just finishing up an implementation with Stantec. I told him that I thought that Autodesk was missing the vast majority of small to mid-size engineering & surveying customers out there because the cost/benefit just wasn’t there and they wouldn’t adopt Civil 3D until it was. I’m paraphrasing, but his response was something like, “Once the Stantecs of the world move to Civil 3D, the others won’t have a choice.”

I had just recently signed on with Carlson at that point and wasn’t yet sure whether Carlson would be competitive. But, I told him then what I’ve told many people since, “Whether it’s Carlson or another software company, someone, someplace will develop an alternative for that market. Because they just will not sign onto something that will make them lose money.”

PS – Working on putting together a real shootout, invitations have been extended… will keep you posted.

Why Carlson Civil Suite and Not Civil 3D®

I’ve worked with DCA®, then SoftDesk®, then Land Desktop® since 1990. Anyone I’ve worked with, sold software to or trained in that time knows that I’ve always been a huge fan of these programs. Not that the programs were terribly easy to learn, but mostly because they functioned in a logical, consistent manner. I, and many others, got to a point that, if I didn’t get the

result I intended, it's because the software had done exactly what I'd *told* it to do instead of what I'd *meant to tell* it to do. Frustrating? Of course. But manageable.

I worked for an Autodesk® reseller when Civil 3D was introduced to the world. Since then I've attended Civil 3D classes at Autodesk University every year, Autodesk reseller training on Civil 3D and at one time was even certified an "Implementation Certified Expert" (ICE) for Civil 3D. As a consultant I've also worked and collaborated with people I consider to be the PHDs of Civil 3D. In short, I feel like I have performed my due diligence with regard to Civil 3D. More than once I thought Civil 3D had gotten to a point where it would be a good option for some of my clients. But, after careful consideration of all the associated costs, my clients disagreed. They decided to stick with Land Desktop.

Initially, there were several reasons my clients weren't interested in moving to Civil 3D from Land Desktop: lack of stability, lack of survey features, inability to work with pipes, lack of H & H functionality, etc. Most of these have been addressed to some extent.

Now, however, the primary reason people aren't moving to Civil 3D seems to be: It's too complicated. They have come to the conclusion that, "Even if we wanted to, we can't manage it and learn it on our own."

That seems to me a nearly impossible problem for Autodesk to solve.

What makes it so complicated and difficult to implement? Here are a few of the reasons…

Project and data management
Because it doesn't have a single, centralized project structure,

the last recommendation for file and data management that I've seen involves 9 or 10 different drawings using multiple methods of linking such as XREFs and Vault.

Development of styles
This will be an ongoing effort. Most companies will find themselves needing new styles for every project. You'll need an expert on staff or will need to rely on a consultant or reseller to keep up with the technology and demand.

True Cost of Implementation
Unbelievably, the cost of the software, subscription and hardware is typically just the beginning. I've heard that, not including software, hardware or loss of productivity, the cost of implementing Civil 3D in an office ranges from $6,000-$10,000 per person.

Civil 3D doesn't play well with Land Desktop
Using Civil 3D on a project means KEEPING it in Civil 3D. You can't bail out and move it to Land Desktop if deadlines loom. And if a project was started in Land Desktop, don't use that data in Civil 3D. Yes, there are converters and importers and exporters of data, but the message boards and discussion groups are full of comments like, "Yes, you can. But don't."

A friend of mine in the industry recently said, "It looks like the programmers became too enamored by what they COULD do, instead of making it do what it NEEDS to do."

I think that's exactly right. It's become a program for programmers, IT personnel and consultants who spend a majority of their time figuring out how to make it work.

What is the evidence of this trend/mindset?

1. Try to purchase and implement Civil 3D through a

reseller without receiving a hard-sell on “consulting” or “implementation” services. This isn’t simply the resellers trying to make a buck. They understand that Civil 3D is impossible to put into production without significant help from experts. And the only experts are those in the reseller or consulting community.

2. Part of the “Implementation Plan” requires that new users try Civil 3D on a “Pilot Project” instead of an active project.
3. Considering blogs, websites, discussion groups, users groups, road-shows and all, I have never seen such a wealth of available support options for any piece of civil design software. And yet for all this, I might be able to point to a couple of dozen people I’d consider to be very knowledgeable or experts who would be able to support the software. And, these people fall into the reseller/consultant category. I have my suspicions whether even they could turn a profit on a project in an office setting with typical project flow and deadline challenges.
4. Everyone thinks everyone else is using it – but they’re not. I had heard for years that a certain very large (national) engineering firm in Raleigh had moved to Civil 3D. I spoke to someone working there a couple of weeks ago and found out that wasn’t the case. Only a couple of people in their Charlotte office are trying it out and it wasn’t getting rave reviews. Everyone else is still using Land Desktop Companion.I know of two and suspect that several other large firms who have implemented or have attempted to implement Civil 3d are in the same boat. My (educated) guess, based on reading

discussion groups, users forums and discussions during sales calls, is that they have now had enough time to study the metrics comparing the money they have spent versus the resulting productivity gain/loss. Unfortunately, so much money has been spent that they must decide whether to continue to throw good money after bad hoping that Autodesk finally comes up with the product they have promised or to start from scratch by re-evaluating the products available.

5. Outside of the reseller/consultant network, I can point to a lot of people who I'd consider experts in Land Desktop and Civil Design. These people might not know everything there is to know about Land and Civil Design, but they are incredibly productive and can design and develop a project with the best of them. Many in this group have tried to perform the same tasks and produce the same work with Civil 3D and have given up out of exasperation because either they can't get it to work the way they need it to or can't get it to look the way they need it to. When it is determined that this vast group of competent people needs to rely on the expertise of a reseller or consultant to produce their work, there is a problem.
6. Someone recently pointed me to a couple of posts on the Autodesk Civil 3D Discussion Group that expresses many of these thoughts:Message to Autodesk I know I'll be taged a Flammer for this but I don't care at this point

Now, Why Carlson?

1. It's easy to learnThe single biggest reason I have become a fan of Carlson Software is that it's so

easy to do the things surveyors
and civil engineers need to do. Especially for someone fairly competent with Land Desktop or Civil Design, learning
Carlson doesn’t take much time at all. And if you are totally new to civil/survey software, Carlson is intuitive
because they have a high percentage of civil engineers and surveyors helping to design the software. It works the way
we work.

2. They stand behind and support their productsCarlson provides free technical support to their users. Whether you are using a 30-day trial or have purchased any of their products, you can call or email them with questions.Providing tech support is also a way for Carlson to stay on top of their customers wants and needs. If they receive too many questions about how to use a feature, you can expect to see that feature re-worked in a future release. If someone makes a suggestion during a support call, it’ll end up on a feature wish-list for a future release.What happens if you find a bug? You (and any others encountering the same issue) will receive the updated files to fix the problem as soon as the programming team completes the fix. Others receive it when a service pack is released.They also don’t retire their products so there are no forced upgrades. Carlson only wants their customers to upgrade when they think it’s worth it.
3. I don’t have to give up what I knowCarlson works on top of AutoCAD, AutoCAD Map, Land Desktop or Civil 3D. As you start moving your projects over to

Carlson, you have the freedom to continue working in Land Desktop but take advantage of some of the tools that Carlson offers. As you learn more of the features of Carlson, you can do more of the project using Carlson. It's a relief to know that you can make the switch by taking baby steps or by leaps and bounds.

4. I have full 3D and dynamic functionalityWho *wasn't* excited the first time we saw that Civil 3D gave us the ability to grip-edit an alignment and have the profile update automatically? Or to see we could lay out and edit subdivision lots and have it automatically label lots for us? But then we tried to do it. It wasn't quite so easy to get it to work the way we needed it to or look the way we needed it to. Most of us ended up going back to Land Desktop. But, we'd seen what was possible with the dynamic features and Land Desktop no longer seemed up to the task.Carlson allows you to design dynamically but gives you more control. You have the ability to set each dynamic action to "Off", "On" or "Prompt". Turning it "Off" requires you to pick a "Process" button to force updates through the design. "On" will process those changes automatically as they happen. "Prompt" will ask you before applying updates.
5. Carlson Civil Suite 2009 meets or beats Land Desktop and Civil 3D in features and functionalityA feature-to-feature comparison of Carlson's Civil Suite to Land Desktop or Civil 3D shows that Carlson can do more for you than either of those products.

These are obviously anecdotal examples and I expect some people to take exception. All I can state is what I've witnessed and attempt to explain the reasons behind my decision. My eyes

aren’t closed and I’ll continue to do my homework with Civil 3D – if something changes, I won’t hesitate to express my opinion.

I’ve told the folks at Carlson that, as much as I enjoy working with them, the reason I’m selling and supporting their software is because I fully believe it’s the right thing for my customers at this time. If that changes and Carlson is no longer the best option, I’ll move on.

I encourage anyone to try out Carlson Civil Suite and try out Civil 3D and judge for yourself. Ask your Civil 3D reseller to mimic my 5 Minute RoadNet Video or my 5 Minute LotNet Video in Civil 3D and see how it compares. This isn’t a set up… I’ve never asked anyone to do that before. I’d just be interested to see the results.

Update 9/2/2009: Welcome to those from www.civil3d.com.

Other discussion of this topic can also be found on this thread on the Autodesk Civil 3D discussion group: Carlson Vs 3D.

Continue to watch this space for an update. I’m interested to see what comments will be left at civil3d.com and will post a response here in a week or so.

Update 9/12/2009: I’ve posted my response to the comments from both www.civil3d.com and the Autodesk Discussion Group here: Carlson VS Civil 3D – Revisited

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Carlson vs AutoCAD Civil 3D

This conversation heated up after I made a post to a thread on

an Autodesk Discussion Group. Since then we've started a valuable conversation about the strengths and weaknesses of both programs.

My response and the original discussion group thread can be found here: Carlson Vs 3D

Now, James Wedding of www.civil3d.com fame has started a thread on his website asking his readers to comment on the validity of my post Why I Chose Carlson Over Civil 3D.

James' post is here: View from the Other Side: Why I Chose Carlson Over Civil 3D

Keep watching this space for updates. I'm interested to see what James' readers have to say and will respond in a week or so.

Update 9/12/2009: I've posted my response to the comments from both www.civil3d.com and the Autodesk Discussion Group here: Carlson VS Civil 3D – Revisited