

Practice



SITE WATCH

Picture This (Again and Again)



by Tracy F. Sisser

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Professionals responsible for documenting construction are finding success with the Automated-Time-Lapse Systems (ATLS), which produces high-resolution 35-mm-film images of a construction site at regular intervals automatically.

The ATLS system, according to co-inventor Richard Latoff of Latoff and Company, Alexandria, Va., features a camera, lens, and control unit that are encased in a one-cubic-foot, 80-pound housing that is weatherproof and vandal-resistant. The system, developed in 1988, uses a “load and forget” principle requiring just one person to change the film each month.

Latoff counts the General Services Administration, the World Bank, and Disney among his company’s clients. He said the people who are most interested in “progress photography” are construction management firms and developers who want a record for change orders, repairs, or achieving certain milestones. ATLS is also useful for developing historical records, public information materials, and marketing tools. Latoff says he tries to get everything taken care of

in one shot.

Typically, construction administrators prefer film—where this is an “original”—to digital or video, Latoff says, because the newer technologies can be altered with relative ease. Film is therefore more likely to be admissible in court. Although one may be able to get more images with greater frequency with digital technology, he says, the quantity of images creates the need for extensive electronic storage capability.

Contract management firms, developers, and sometimes construction companies are Latoff’s most frequent clients. Architects are usually more interested in the end product than in documentation of the design/build process, he opines.

The ATLS system employs automatic exposure control and can accommodate lenses ranging from ultra-wide to telephoto. It will accept any 35mm film prerolled up to 250 exposures and can use off-the-shelf lithium batteries. On average, battery changes are required every six months, with an annual operating cost, including film and processing, of about \$250. Latoff rents his ATLS system—which retails for about \$15,000—for \$500 to \$700 per month, he is quick to point out.

The Latoff and Company Web site has more information on ATLS. <http://www.latoff.com> ■

