

The Role of Detailers in the Exhibit Industry

Exhibit Detailing

For years, there has often been grumbling and complaining throughout the exhibit industry that suggests an inordinate amount of time is consumed selecting or designing exhibit structural elements and preparing exhibit construction drawings and materials lists. This kind of work is known as Exhibit Detailing since it requires defining and documenting the details for turning an exhibit designer's visual concepts into a physical reality. The people who do this difficult work are known simply as Detailers. The purpose of this article is to help others in the exhibit industry gain a better understanding of the role of Exhibit Detailers and why so much time is often required to do their work. Are any of the complaints justified? Detailing requires a lot of skill and, unfortunately, there are some detailers who may not be qualified to do this kind of work. The result has sometimes been a bad rap for all Detailers.

Let the Race Begin

After a client company signs off on an exhibit design and presentation plan, it is up to the Exhibit Detailer to lay the groundwork for preparing all of an exhibit's elements. The CAD drawings and materials lists he or she produces will guide Production and I&D crews.

One can almost imagine a Stop Watch being started the moment a contract for an exhibit is signed. Looming in the future is the Show or Event move-in date. So often, that date is uncomfortably close at hand at contract signing since many clients will wait until the last minute to commit to a particular design and exhibit company. This puts pressure on the Exhibit Detailer because, except for stock assemblies that might be needed, very little can be done by Production until the detail drawings and materials lists become available.

Making matters worse, all too often, even after accepting an exhibit design, a client company may decide to request one or more (usually more) changes to that design. Those changes must also be reflected in the exhibit detail drawings. Many times the changes are fairly minor and have little impact on detailing. But, other times, especially when there is a substitution of materials or structural changes, the detailer must make new drawings and entirely new materials lists.

The Detailer's Defense

As a defense against that ticking Stop Watch, Detailers must use fast computer workstations, reliable and flexible CAD software tools, fast plotters and printers. It also helps if they have experience in the Shop or at least understand Shop practices, are thoroughly familiar with all of the materials they may need to use and are also familiar with various fabrication methods.

What Makes a Detailer?

Where do Detailers come from? Where do they learn so much that allows them to do this kind of work? Many great Detailers started in the Shop and worked their way up to learn how to use computers and CAD software. Some Designers became good at detailing since, to sell some of their design concepts, they also had to be able to define the details of how their concepts would be implemented. Other Detailers have engineering backgrounds, are used to contending with details anyway, and simply prefer the challenges of working in the exhibit industry instead of regular engineering work.

Few Seem to Understand or Know What Detailers Do

MALEKKO has talked with Exhibit Detailers located throughout the United States. Some work for large or mid-sized companies. Some have their own companies and specialize in providing design and/or detailing services to their clients.

One thing all of these Detailers have in common is their contention that not many people in their industry seem to understand what they do, the level of responsibility they have, or the pressures they face every day. They all love their work, though.

The Detailer's Defense Partner: Xzibitware

Xzibitware's First Incarnation

The earliest version of Xzibitware was created in late 1995. It wasn't even called Xzibitware at the time and it was a somewhat limited custom CAD application developed for GES, now known as Global Experience Specialists. It was only years later, in 2003, that the program modules were totally revised, new, more powerful features were added, and a product was born. It had a whole new look and feel and was far superior to its earlier incarnation. GES must have agreed since they quickly bought licenses for all their exhibit Designers and Detailers.

What's In a Name?

The name given to the new product was Xzibitware. After all, this was a software product that was developed to be used exclusively within the Exhibit Industry (exhibit + software -> Xzibitware). Since that time, we've recognized that it could also be used by furniture manufacturers, retail store designers, and any industry that creates things from parts that might fit into the categories of Metal, Panels, Accessories, and Other Items.

Xzibitware takes on the Detailer's 3 Least Favorite Tasks

1: Identify, Categorize, Group and Count Parts

One of the things we found that Detailers don't particularly like to do is identify, categorize, group and count all the parts shown in drawings. It's tedious and time-consuming and it's easy to miscount some of the parts. When mistakes are made, it's also expensive for an exhibit company to have to overnight parts to a show or event to make sure they're ready for opening day. Missing Parts can sometimes lead to the loss of a client as well.

Solution: Xzibitware software provides the "eXtract Data" command that automatically finds all the parts in an exhibit drawing, identifies, counts and groups them in a matter of 4 to 8 seconds. After extracting this data, Materials Reports and drawing BOM Lists can be created at any time. No parts are miscounted. Drawing data from multiple drawings can also be processed.

2: Document Parts in Printed Materials Reports or Drawing BOM Lists

Once all those parts are identified, categorized, grouped and counted, they need to be documented. This can be done by creating a materials list outside of the drawing (using an Excel spreadsheet, e.g.) or by creating a tabular Bill of Materials (BOM List) within one or more drawings using commands in AutoCAD. Once again, this is tedious work, usually requires a lot of typing, takes up a lot of time, and is also subject to errors.

Solution: From Xzibitware's *Report Selection* form, Detailers can choose from a wide variety of printed materials reports with or without cost and weight information. PDF files may also be created. Detailers can create customized BOM Lists within a drawing for any of four different categories of materials in less than 10 seconds per BOM List. Other than specifying a Title for a drawing BOM List, no typing is needed. As a result, there is little to no chance for typing errors. Materials lists may also be imported from or exported to Excel.

As important as these other benefits is the fact that Part identification, Descriptions, Colors, Sizes, Callout References, and other information are reported in a consistent, quality manner that helps make materials lists easy to read for Shop and I&D personnel. That can help reduce mistakes and loss of time in the Shop and in the field.

3: Annotate Parts Shown in the Drawings

The last thing that falls into the "Least Favorite Tasks" list is annotating parts in drawings to link them to an exhibit's materials lists. Within each drawing that shows structural details, text for each Callout Reference letter (or number or letter+number) in a materials list must be typed close to the part being identified. Then, most often, a short Leader Line extending from the Callout Reference text to the relevant part must be added to the drawing.

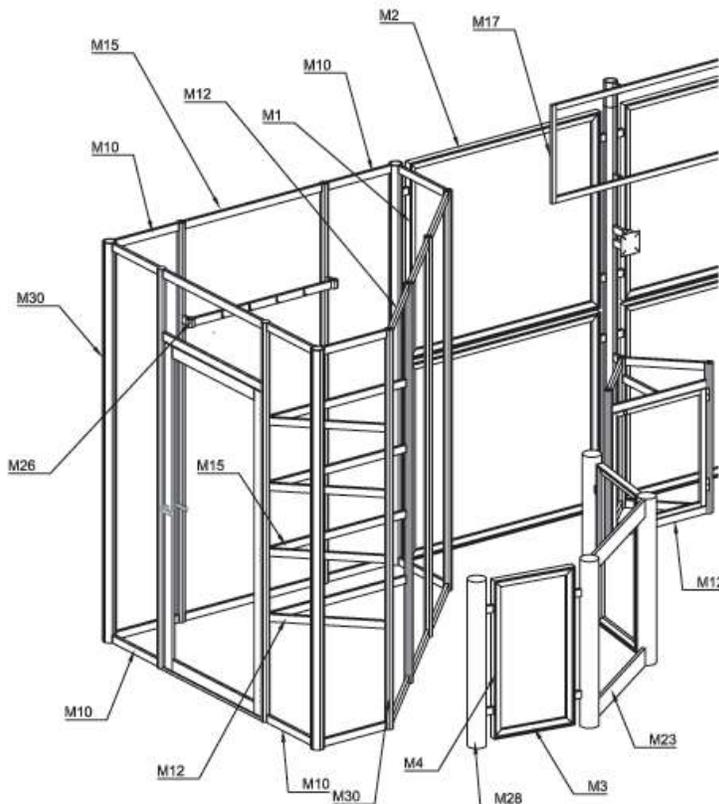
Xzibitware takes on the Detailer's 3 Least Favorite Tasks continued from the previous page...

3: Annotate Parts Shown in the Drawings...continued from Page 3

Sometimes, a Leader Line is not used and the Callout Reference text is placed inside a Circle or a Square to make the text stand out in the drawing. Colored text is also sometimes used. This process must be repeated for every part that should be identified in a drawing.

Solution: After being suggested by a long-time user of Xzibitware, MALEKKO developed the "Drawing Annotator". The *Drawing Annotator* totally eliminates the need to type in any Callout Reference text in a drawing. The user only has to 'pick' the Callout Reference in a materials list (using a mouse) and then point to where it needs to appear in a drawing. As an option, the text may be automatically enclosed by an auto-sized Circle or a Filleted Rectangle. Leader lines may also be constructed between the part being identified and the Callout Reference text string. *Drawing Annotator* also provides a Multi-Copy feature so that several identical Callout Reference text strings may be created in a drawing in one continuous operation. This is definitely the fastest way to annotate a drawing with information to link parts to their drawing BOM List.

Xzibitware's drawing BOM Lists and Annotation feature (solutions 2 & 3) have often been praised for making exhibit detail drawings easier to understand.



Created by Xzibitware:
An annotated drawing and its Detail Drawing BOM List

#	Qty	Catalog#	Length	Note
M1	12	DFSYS3C	1200	
M2	12	DFSYS3C	1332	
M3	4	DFSYS3C	507	
M4	4	DFSYS3C	966	
M5	4	PH1005	104.498	2lck new
M6	3	PH1005	1122.464	2lck new
M7	12	PH1005	1424	2lck new
M8	4	PH1005	189	2lck new
M9	2	PH1005	306	2lck
M10	12	PH1005	439	2lck
M11	8	PH1005	454	2lck
M12	12	PH1005	661.107	2lck
M13	2	PH1005	661.107	2lck new
M14	3	PH1005	924	2lck new
M15	6	PH1005	954	2lck
M16	4	PH1028	590	2lck
M17	2	PH1028	600	
M18	2	PH1028	714	
M19	2	PH1035	1213	1cbx
M20	2	PH1035	1213	1cbx 1in/line connector
M21	2	PH1035	714	
M22	1	PH1080	1721.767	4lck new
M23	2	PH1080	892	4lck
M24	6	PX8000	2438	
M25	3	PX8000	2438	new
M26	2	PX8000	46	
M27	6	PX8000	914	insert block
M28	4	VR188	1016	(3) pa5 for bar clip
M29	2	VR76	150	vertical connector
M30	12	VR76	2438	
M31	4	VR76	2438	1 floor base stem
M32	12	VS45	1200	
M33	15	VS45	1310	2lck custom curve

And There's Even More...

Xzibitware provides Solutions to the three (3) things that seem to take up so much of a Detailer's time when preparing Construction Drawings and Materials Lists. Each one of these Solutions saves a considerable amount of time and improves the quality of drawings while reducing the possibility of errors. These Solutions also mean that exhibit project drawings and materials lists that are easy-to-read and easy-to-use get to Production much sooner than when using AutoCAD alone. No parts are miscounted. There are no typos except where a Detailer may create text on his own. Each Solution is also extremely easy to learn how to use. There is no long "learning curve".

Besides those 3 Solutions, Xzibitware helps Detailers organize and maintain their Part Symbols Libraries. It also provides several automatic drawing creation features that help create detail drawings much faster and often more accurately than when using AutoCAD alone. In addition to the Annotation and drawing BOM List shown on the previous page, the structural elements in the drawing were all put in place with the help of Xzibitware. Xzibitware can also help predict materials shortages, an important feature when creating multiple exhibits for an overlapping date range.

Why Would Anyone Hesitate to Use Xzibitware?

Well...Here's a Few Reasons We've Heard About:

1> Call it the intimidation factor. Some detailers are concerned that bringing in Xzibitware might cost them or one of their fellow detailers their job through a layoff. After all, it's important to try to always look busy and Xzibitware might make them run out of work...or at least that's their concern. They don't consider that Xzibitware can remove a lot of the stress they face in their work, can reduce the chances to make mistakes, and might actually allow their company to take on even more exhibit projects...that is, create more work for them and, down the road, possibly get a pay raise with overhead lowered and more money coming in.

2> "AutoCAD can do it all. After all, software that expensive should be able to do anything we need done in our drawings. Right?" ...Well, no, not really. The reason AutoCAD has always had an open architecture to encourage development of 3rd party software is that it cannot do it all. There are literally thousands of 3rd party software applications that work with AutoCAD. Xzibitware is one of these and it does several things faster and easier than can be done with "off-the-shelf" AutoCAD alone.

3> Some companies assume that Xzibitware couldn't be that good because it isn't very expensive: that is, it doesn't cost at least 10 to 15,000 dollars. We like the idea that our product pays for itself very quickly. We're also going for a large installed base of users instead of gouging companies with a big price.

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4> Company Management doesn't even realize the time they are wasting on each project by relying exclusively on "off-the-shelf" AutoCAD alone. It's a "what you don't know can't hurt you" situation. Why use Xzibitware if you're supposedly doing just fine with AutoCAD?

5> "We might just be wasting money. What if it doesn't work for us?" Our answer to this is our 60 day unconditional money-back guarantee. Surely within 60 days a company is going to know that Xzibitware can deliver as promised. That is, if they let their Detailers take some time to learn how to use it (which isn't long at all). We'll give a refund if a company decides to not use Xzibitware after purchasing it.

6> "Our Detailers just don't have time to learn how to use new software." If that's the case, does that mean when any new software product becomes available, your competitors may try it and buy it, but your personnel are going to stay with the same software they use right now...forever? Didn't think so! We understand that, with work in process, it's almost impossible to stop to get training. That means Detailers must learn on their own time, sometimes over a weekend as we've seen some do. The good news is that:

Xzibitware is fairly intuitive to use once it's set up for use. There are video tutorials, product demos, and a User Guide available 24/7 on our Web Site. We are available by phone to talk a Detailer through anything they need us to cover. We can also provide on-site training on the weekend, if necessary.

7> "Our Detailers tell us it could take weeks to create a Parts Library and data records to be able to use Xzibitware." If your Detailers are currently using a thousand or more different Block Symbols for their parts, it just might take 3 to 4 weeks at that. We offer an affordable Symbol Library and Data Table creation service for situations like this. But, from our experience, most companies are not using more than 50 to 100 different Block Symbols to represent the parts they use to create the details for an exhibit. Our "*Block Builder*" feature, could convert all of a company's existing Part Block Symbols in one afternoon including time to create the data records with Part Numbers, Descriptions, Catalog#'s, Sizes, and so on. We are available to help you do this task or we can do it for you for a modest fee once you know what Part numbers to use, how you want to describe each part, part sizes, and so on.

Benefits versus Risk...Why you should consider buying Xzibitware

Benefits: We've explained many of the benefits of having Xzibitware available to a Detailer. In particular, consider the 3 Solutions Xzibitware offers that address a Detailer's least favorite tasks (tasks that also waste a lot of time).

Risk: There is no risk to try Xzibitware. Download a free, fully-functional Copy from our Web Site and use it for up to 45 days. There's no purchase risk either. Xzibitware comes with a 60 day unconditional money-back guarantee.