

editor's note



THE NEW YEAR ALWAYS BRINGS OUT A SLEW OF PROGNOSTICATORS AND WHEN IT'S THE END OF A DECADE*, THE PREDICTIONS FLY EVEN THICKER.

Here's my take on two of the most common predictions.**

An obvious no-brainer is the prediction that online shopping will continue to grow. But my biggest surprise over online shopping is that there isn't a bigger push to impose sales taxes on internet purchases. Almost every jurisdiction is looking to raise tax revenue and internet sales seem to be a simple thing to tax.*** However, if sales tax is imposed on internet sales, I wonder if they'll continue to be as robust. Yes, online merchants will still have the advantage of not investing in bricks and mortar (or glass and steel), but they still have to pay shipping costs. Still, it seems like online shopping will continue to grow. So what does that mean for the construction industry? As you prepare for the future, don't expect to see retail stores springing up as they did in the past; however, there will be an even greater demand for warehouses and fulfillment services (I'm almost positive I made this same prediction in 2000).

I'm a bit more skeptical about the predicted rapid growth in telecommuting. I have some friends who work for "virtual" companies (companies that don't have a dedicated office; rather, each employee works out of their house and they only get together online) and it works well

for small specialized groups. But I think two factors work against the widespread growth of this type of work arrangement. First, no matter how good the technology, innovation is created through personal communication and interaction. There is no substitute for the rapid byplay between groups of people. And second, people are social animals. As much as I enjoy the days when I don't have to commute to my downtown office, I also miss the camaraderie. What I anticipate is we will see some growth in telecommuting, but we'll see even more growth in a hybrid system where people spend some of their time in an office, some working remotely. And I expect this trend to have a minimal impact on construction needs.

What predictions have you made for the new year? I'd love to hear about them.

SCOTT MELNICK
EDITOR

*Yes, I know the decade doesn't technically end until December 31, 2010. But since our grouping of years is completely arbitrary anyway, I'm happy to yield to popular sentiment and group my decades from 0 to 9 rather than from 1 to 10.

**Many prognosticators are discussing the recession; I'll leave that discussion to my colleague John Cross. And if you want to hear his predictions, I'd recommend you attend his session on "Reading the Tea Leaves" at NASCC: The Steel Conference on May 12-15 in Orlando (visit www.aisc.org/nascc for more information).

***Yes, I've heard all of the tales of woe about the difficulty of figuring sales tax in three gazillion local jurisdictions. But how hard would it be for the federal government (or some private company) to create a nice database of rates based on nine-digit zip codes?

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