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## DEVELOPMENT: DIGITAL COMPANY PROSPERS IN PANDEMIC COVID Driving Gafcon Division Growth

By Ray Huard

Manday, October 25, 2021

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Photo courtesy of Gafcon. Gafcon Digital uses Gafcon's Sorrento Valley office as a model.

Gafcon Digital, a division of the Sorrento Valley property development firm Gafcon, has been on a growth spurt thanks to the COVID pandemic as construction companies, architects and real estate investment firms go digital.



John Turner Vice President Gafcon Digital

In the past three years, Gafcon Digital had 50 projects but has about that many so far this year alone, said John Turner, who heads Gafcon Digital as vice president of innovative solutions at Gafcon.

"We're growing at roughly 60% a year," Turner said. "Three years ago, we had five people working in this area. Now we're up to 30. If we could find people fast enough, we could add them to the team."

Turner said Gafcon Digital is prohibited by non-disclosure agreements from revealing the names of its clients.

### Risk Averse

Prior to COVID, getting people to go digital was slow.

Construction is "a very conservative industry," Turner said. "It's been difficult to change the industry because people are very risk averse but COVID has pushed them over the edge."

That's also changing as younger people who are accustomed to working with the technology enter the industry.

"They're experienced gamers. They're very comfortable in this virtual environment," Turner said. "Now we're doing the same thing at work."

Gafcon Digital helps companies connect the digital world to the real world so that architects and building owners, for example, can see how a building is being constructed or how it's functioning without ever going on site.

### Looking Inside

Gafcon Digital uses Gafcon's Sorrento Valley headquarters building as a demonstration model.

"We are 100% virtual. We live in a virtual environment. Because of this, our clients can appreciate and directly experience what we're advocating them to do," Turner said. "Because of COVID, we're now working in 22 countries around the world without ever leaving the U.S. because we've transferred our work from physical to digital."

The building is fully wired inside and out, including mechanical systems inside the structure, the rooms within the building and even the parking lot outside.

Using a software program known as digital twin, operators can see virtually inside building walls using sensors to monitor everything from air flow to temperature and humidity.

With tiny motors installed in air circulation ducts, they open and close vents remotely.

They also can take a bird's-eye view inside the building. They can tell which work stations are being used and which ones are vacant so the stations can be assigned to workers who divide their time between working at home and in the office.

They can tell which rooms are occupied and which ones are vacant, making it easier to assign cleaning crews.

Outside, sensors monitor parking spaces remotely, showing which ones are being used and which spaces are free.

The spaces can then be assigned to visitors and workers as they come and go so no one has to drive around the parking lot searching for a space.

Should they want to, operators could charge for parking as spaces are assigned, collecting the fee remotely via smart phones.

"What we're doing is providing a link between the physical building and all the processes that support that building," Turner said. "We can walk through that building completely virtually. We can experience it as though it's a computer game. We can see a wall, we can see through that wall, we can see plumbing."

### COVID Safe

In the context of COVID, the system can be used to make workers feel more comfortable about working in an office.

The system can collect data about a particular work station and send it to the smart phone of the person who would use it "if you were coming into a building and you wanted to make sure that you had a desk that was being sanitized and to make sure you didn't have to look for that desk and expose yourself to a lot of people," Turner said. "Maybe it's a building that you haven't entered before and you don't know where the desk is."

Prior to COVID, building owners and operators would manage a building by physically walking around it and manually making adjustments, Turner said.

Gafcon Digital takes that physical way of working and takes it digital so the information that was previously obtained manually is displayed on a computer screen or smart phone.

"A lot of these things that had to be done manually can be transferred into the virtual environment," Turner said.

For buildings under construction, architects and project managers can make design changes and monitor the work remotely, Turner said.

"It's almost as though you're walking through in the real world," Turner said. "Owners can see what that building is going to look like, architects can look at (building) scans and make sure construction is progressing as it should, they can look at any detail."



Gafcon Digital's home office modeled virtually, displaying work stations and rooms in different colors to indicate which ones are vacant and those that are being used. Illustration courtesy of Gafcon Digital

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