Naffa International streamlining building code business

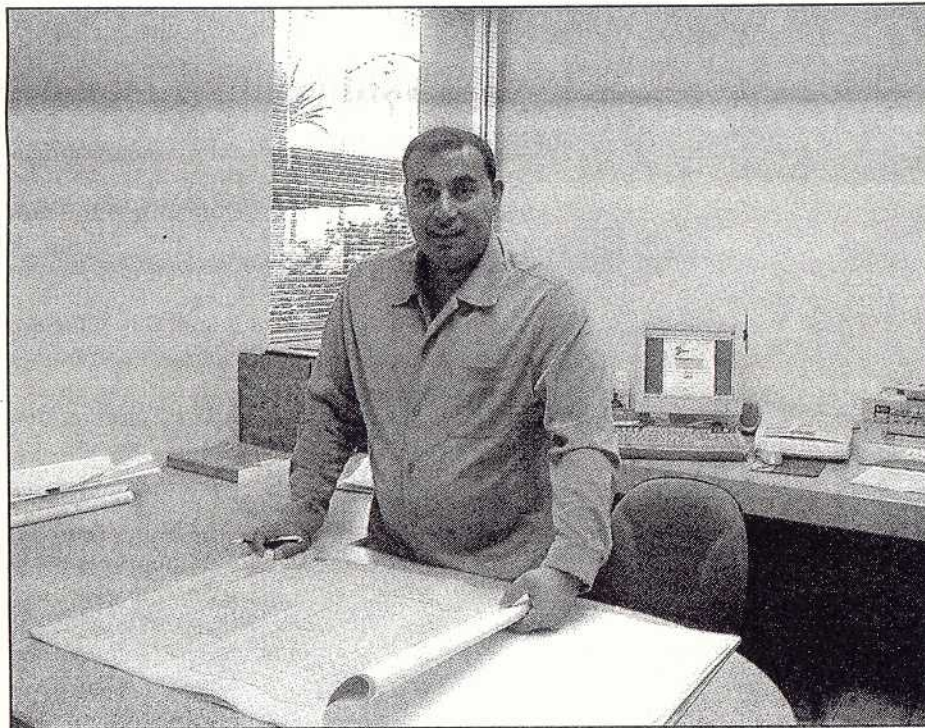By Halley Cornell

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After spending 18 years with local engineering company Carl Mileff & Associates, Imad Naffa, the developer of award-winning building code software CodeBuddy, decided to strike out on his own in August.

His motivation? To bring the 21st century to the building code business by way of online interactivity and other tools that simplify an otherwise exclusively technical genre for a general audience.

The language of building codes is vast and indecipherable to many regular home and building owners who are nevertheless subject to compliance with them. Naffa said the Internet allows for searchable databases and standardization that makes everyone more comfortable with the permitting process.

That was the idea behind

Photo/Halley Cornell

Imad Naffa of Naffa International, Inc. surveys plans that he will review online for a client.

CodeBuddy software — an encyclopedia, of sorts, of the building codes trade. And that is the driving idea behind Naffa International, Inc., which employs an army of one who says he can—do the job of ten engineers.

"I wanted to get into the Internet side in a big fashion," said Naffa of his solo move. "This is a niche market and I think a lot can be done with it."

Naffa said cities and counties normally mail a set of their customer's plans out to a company who in turn assigns the plans to an engineer for review. There is no interaction between the customer, the client (city or county) and the engineer until the engineer issues and sends out a report.

These days, people not only demand faster access to information, but access to input and explanations, Naffa said. In response, he created www.naffainc.com.

Naffa

"Once I get projects sent to me, it's entirely Internet based," he said. "We've set it up so clients can log into a database. The client, like the city, can access it at anytime, can link it with resources and can use downloadable reports."

A builder or homeowner who is a customer of the city can then obtain tracking information from the city or county, and can secure copies of his or her own reports through e-mail set up through the customized, templated database, Naffa said. CodeBuddy software works in conjunction with the developing system to explain results to those who may not be familiar with coding terminology.

"We're replacing the mundane and outdated with a mode that is much more efficient," he said. "They can see when reports came in, what stage they're at, when they'll be done, and can actually see the written comments on the report."

Because a consultant's fees are fixed based on the valuation of the project, there is no added cost in using Naffa International's system, Naffa said. And the project has great potential for improvement with plans to set up an interactive online database to exchange drawings and reports and to serve as a virtual conference room for those in the building code field.

A building code discussion group site with a searchable database spawned by Naffa's desire for an online community already has more than 3,000 members at the two-year mark, Naffa said.

"There are experts in every field you can think of — builders, code officers, designers. You simply register, ask a question, and a professional answers you, usually within a couple hours."

Naffa said ultimately, it's about providing the best, most up-to-date information and tools in as accessible a way as possible.

"It used to be that the information was somewhat taboo. People didn't understand," he said. "But now, they can see what the code requires, and they can act accordingly. With information at your "fingertips, the compliance rate is going to be higher, there's going to be less tension between builders and code inspectors. Eventually, I think the whole field is going this way." ■