

# The Catalanian Association of Architects

## The COAC automates manual project approval processes with Adobe® Acrobat® and Adobe PDF

### Migrating paper-based processes to a digital environment

The Catalanian Association of Architects (COAC) is a professional-based corporation of public law in Catalunya, Spain, to which practicing architects are obliged to become members. The organization's two main functions are the defense and representation of the interests of professional architects and the protection of the social interest of architecture and town planning. The COAC has over 8,800 architects registered as members and has approved 49,521 projects through its Endorsement Office.

To meet the needs of its members, the COAC decided to migrate its paper-based processes to a more streamlined digital workflow. "The Endorsement service undertook a restructuring of all its processes; a complete reengineering," explains Beatriz Ruiz, a PhD in Architecture and head of the COAC's Computer Applications Department (SAI, in Spanish). At first, the transformation was to focus on back-office applications but the time was ripe for a very important qualitative leap. "We wanted to achieve the highest attainable level of automation of a largely manual process," continues Ruiz. "As our assessment progressed, the idea of migrating the entire process towards a digital environment gained force."

### The road to Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF)

Bringing the project to maturity was complex and required a broad team including an outside company that programmed the entire back-office system, the COAC's Department for Infrastructure and Systems that was responsible for application and hardware maintenance, an outside consulting agency that handled security issues, the SAI, and the Endorsement office. "The first thing we did was to carry out an in-depth analysis of the Endorsement Office to make a distinction between its mission and its operational processes," explained Ruiz.

The mission of the COAC's Endorsement Office is to certify that a project has been completed by an Association of Architects member and that it complies with all current regulations. "The issue of digital signatures was considered at the forefront of all initiatives. However, at that time no existing certification organization allowed us to electronically certify an architect's membership in the Association," says Ruiz, emphasizing the need to create an independent entity that other professional associations could use when starting their own electronic processes for project approvals.

There was also the need to organize the rest of the COAC's existing processes including receiving, dating, and storing documents. The challenge was always the same: to find a truly valid and scalable electronic document format that would meet the association's extensive requirements including:

- Provide a single, common file format—independent of computer platform—that both the COAC and architects could use
- Enable architects to continue to work in their CAD and architectural design applications
- Provide a single file format and software application for authorities to review, approve, and digitally sign materials
- Prevent the COAC endorser or third parties from making changes to documents
- Require a minimal learning curve
- Enable streamlined and structured file storage

### THE CATALONIAN ASSOCIATION OF ARCHITECTS

[www.coac.es](http://www.coac.es)



Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya

### INDUSTRY

Architecture, Engineering & Construction (AEC)

### BUSINESS CHALLENGES

- Restructure manual processes into automated, digital processes
- Deploy one valid and scalable document format

### SOLUTION

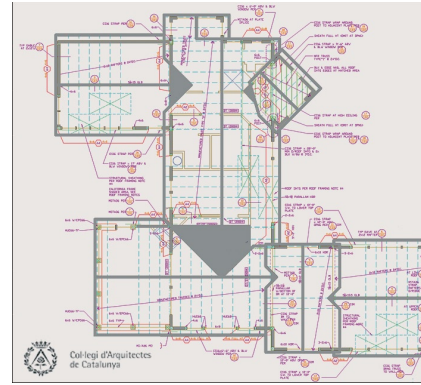
- Document creation
- Document collaboration
- Digital signatures

The COAC adopted Adobe Acrobat software and an Adobe PDF workflow to automate its project approval processes and deliver electronic, digitally signed project documents.

### RESULTS

- Accelerated review and approval of projects by combining multiple document types into one compact Adobe PDF file
- Achieved user adoption rate of more than 80%
- Streamlined document archival
- Improved customer satisfaction

As part of COAC's Vis@t system, Adobe Acrobat and Adobe PDF enable architects and authorized institutions to access approved and digitally signed projects online. This represents an invaluable savings in cost, time, and procedures.



**“Adobe Acrobat and Adobe PDF were the only option that met all of our needs.”**

Beatriz Ruiz,  
PhD in Architecture and head of the  
Computer Applications Department,  
Catalonian Association of Architects

“The truth is that the search led us to a good alternative. Adobe Acrobat and Adobe PDF were the only option that met all of our needs,” explains Ruiz.

**A foundation for success**

The COAC needed to continue to serve architects or other members who still submitted materials on paper, yet it wanted to streamline and automate its document review, approval, and storage processes. Therefore, the COAC needed to ensure that this new electronic document option would not replace its existing system or offer fewer benefits. “Although we use the two systems together, the new digital system has achieved widespread adoption and has become the preferred system among our users,” says Ruiz. “The migration to Vis@t, the name given to the virtual delegation that we created, has accelerated.” Ruiz also notes that once architects try the digital system, they stay with it.

A user satisfaction survey carried out by the COAC provides another important proof point: over 80% of current users leverage Vis@t to process all of their documents. The same survey made it clear that the main reason for using Vis@t was its convenience, followed by its speed. “Our team is proud that we envisioned the electronic project approval project because for us it is a premise for development. We knew that if we failed in this, the entire project would fail,” says Ruiz.

At present, the electronic system is used to approve and digitally sign nearly 10% of all of the projects that come to the COAC and the rate continues to grow. The Association has 15 local offices throughout Catalunya, each with its own project endorsement office. These virtual endorsement offices are part of the Association’s network of services and have become an increasingly useful tool. “We must not forget that the cost of a virtual office is a great deal lower,” adds Ruiz, who provides storage as an example. “The COAC has huge areas for storing and safekeeping projects that are approved using the conventional system,” she says. “However, all of the documents that were approved electronically in one year fit on just four DVDs.”

**Taking advantage of Adobe Acrobat**

Adobe PDF has allowed architects and authorized institutions to have online access to digitally approved projects. For everyone involved the savings in costs, time, and procedures are huge. What Ruiz values the most in Adobe Acrobat is that it is completely independent of the software used by each member of the Association. “For architects, it’s just another printer with additional capabilities that some architects’ offices have begun to discover,” she says. “They take advantage of the system to optimize their in-house processes and, above all, to separate finished products from drafts.” In her opinion, to be able to file a finalized project along with its previous revisions and changes is a big advantage.

**SYSTEMS AT A GLANCE**

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