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ABSTRACT

Level, the BRANZ Industry Sustainability Web Resource was created in response to an identified need in the building industry for how-to information on sustainable home building. Earlier BRANZ research (Stoecklein et al 2005) had proven that lack of industry capability was frustrating the delivery of sustainable residences in NZ. The Ministry for the Environment wished to increase sustainability demand from homeowners by creating a New Zealand version of the successful Australian Greenhouse Office publication “Your Home”. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007) Level was created to work with this consumer-facing website, to ensure that the industry had access to independent and reliable information to guide their decision-making. The website has already received 1,521,853 hits since launch, an increase of number of visits from 356 for June 2007 to 5201 for October, and is highly regarded by industry practitioners.

KEYWORDS:

Sustainability, web resource, sustainable buildings

INTRODUCTION

AIM: To provide an independent reliable authority on sustainable building, maintained by BRANZ to ensure that it would continue to offer the industry ready access to the latest information on sustainable building, providing the opportunity for our scientists to impart information in a practical and applicable way, adding new materials, systems and solutions as they become available.

DRIVERS

BRANZ involvement with SmarterHomes (<http://www.smarterhomes.org.nz>) began before the contract to complete the work was let, and it was felt that if successful, the consumer-focused web site would result in the industry being driven to deliver solutions that BRANZ had proven (Stoecklein et al, 2005) it was unaware of and not capable of delivering. Hence the need to provide a resource to meet that need and provide the direction required. It was important that the information provided be independent and robust, and aimed at those who would be getting their hands dirty in equal measure as those designing and specifying the sustainable homes.

PRODUCTION

Scoping

YourHome and the evolving SmarterHomes content were useful inputs into the process of defining what would be included in Level. Additionally, round-table input from BRANZ writers, scientists and engineers was used to settle upon an overall approach and structure. First and foremost it had to be practical, providing technical options for building professionals, the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Where sensible, schematic drawings were to be provided along with background explanations. Where there were regulatory requirements, these had to be explained and links to sources of more detailed and specialist information provided.

WRITING

A number of internal and external writers were briefed after the initial content scoping to research and prepare the materials. Each of these writers brought extensive experience in the particulars of their subject material, and as a result extensive editing of this material was required to condense it into a uniform style and language for a wide audience many of whom aren't interested in reading!

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL REVIEW

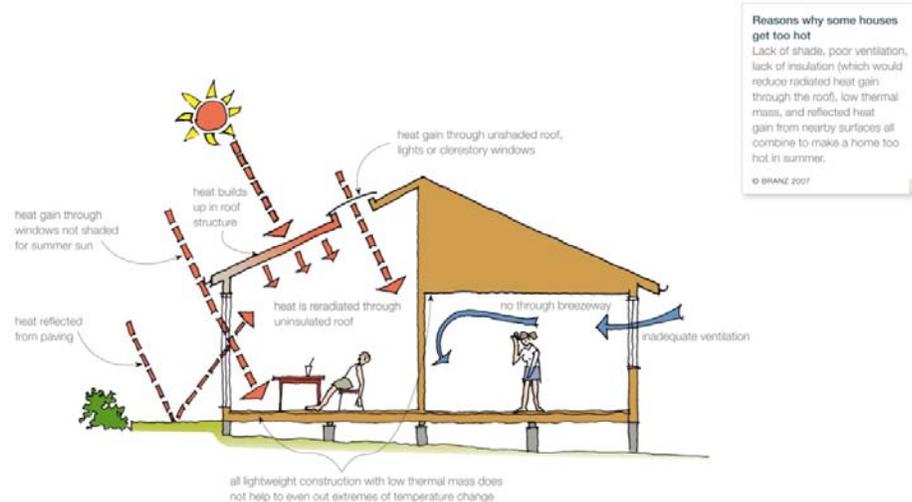
All areas were reviewed extensively internally and externally by well-regarded experts in the sustainability field. As mentioned above, this was a key element of ensuring that the information was impartial and reliable.

During the review process the key watchword was "HOW". All of the text and drawings were audited with this overriding concern in mind – that the material available on the site was aimed at explaining how to build sustainable homes. The operating assumption was that the question of "WHY" would have been resolved by the time the reader arrived at Level, either directly from Smarter Homes or from another site such as DBH or MFE.

After this process the content was loaded into the CMS (content management system).

ILLUSTRATIONS

The schematic drawings illustrate the site in a clear and concise way and were specially commissioned for the new site. Each illustration is a separate downloadable PDF. The process of populating the drawings is an ongoing one, with the intent of enabling practitioners to simply print out a drawing and follow it on site. These drawings will usually satisfy the requirements of a building consent, where an illustration is required.



DESIGN

The actual look and feel of the site is very much attributable to its designers – in the case of Level this work was carried out by Wellington-based web design company Chrometoaster.

NAME

The word has obvious meaning in the building industry, where spirit levels or laser levels are used on every job. It also implies balance, and sustainability is all about balance. There is also the meaning that something which is on the level is reliable and trustworthy. There was an interesting split amongst those considering the name, with definite love/hate reactions. This was felt to be a good sign, and Level was chosen. Ultimately, BRANZ expects that the content and function will speak for itself and the name attachments will become subconscious.

LEVEL WEBSITE ONGOING MAINTENANCE

Writing, reviewing, editing and management of the content management system will continue on a regular monthly basis.

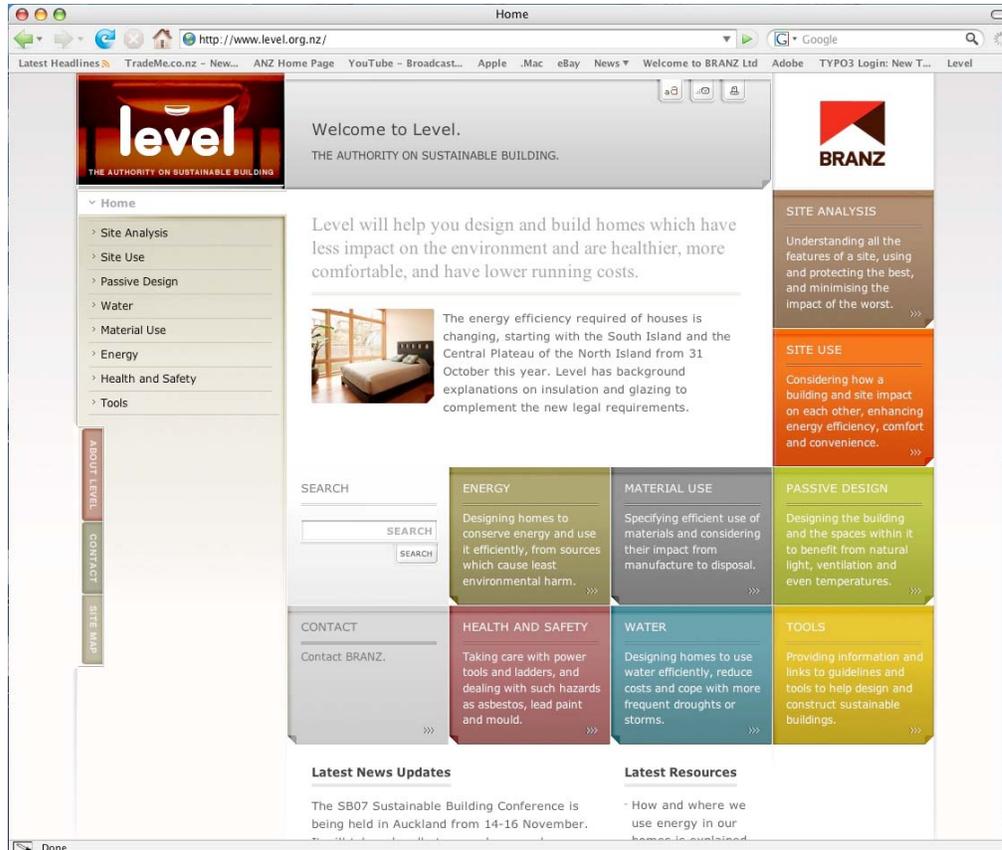
CONTENT

Level covers building site analysis and site use, passive design, materials, water use, energy, assessment and guidance tools and health issues. Much of the information applies to mainstream construction as this is where the biggest sustainability gains will be made in the coming five years. Topics such as straw bale walls, composting toilets and micro- hydro generation are also covered. As new solutions and systems become available, these areas will expand.

AUDIENCE

The building industry as a whole, which includes architects, designers, building officials, academics, students, as well as builders themselves.

WHAT DOES THE SITE LOOK LIKE



WHAT DOES IT ACHIEVE

Level has achieved its aim to be a reliable source of information. It has already resulted in further research into the Life Cycle Analysis of materials and has provided the foundation for the family of further publications being developed in digital, book and bulletin format. This gives the industry a comprehensive package of materials on Sustainable Building and in doing so, shows the expertise and sound sustainable building advice available at BRANZ.

Where Level will come into its own is in the coming five years as the industry as a whole becomes better acquainted with the internet. At this point, inquiries about the information missing from Level will signal new industry directions and hence lead the research programme.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The website, updated on a monthly basis will reflect recent trends and the outcomes of research including that specifically commissioned for Level, as mentioned above.

Further development of products and tools which link to or an integral part of the site will continue. An example of one of the tools is ALF 4, due to be released in web form in December.

BRANZ is proud of Level and is totally committed to its ongoing development.

REFERENCES

Stoecklein et al, 2005. CP111- \$100 Worth of Comfort: The Real Value of Energy Technologies. BRANZ Ltd, Wellington New Zealand.

Your Home. <http://www.greenhouse.gov.au/yourhome/>. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, Australia