

CASE STUDY

Simplifying Surveys

How to survey a complex building from scratch

Background

Peter Mowchanuk is a Lead Surveyor at SPM Assets, with over 7 years' experience in surveying thousands of commercial and residential buildings. Here are his tips on how to make surveys quick and easy.

The goal

Work as time efficiently as possible, yet at the same time produce a survey that is meaningful, accurate, with data that can be relied on. Peter uses Inspect by SPM Assets on his iPad mini to complete the required tasks on site.

The challenges

- Many of the challenges around surveying relate to optimising your tablet so it can keep up with you. Basic tips are to:
 - clear your cache daily;
 - only run the apps you absolutely need; and
 - keep the brightness level to a minimum to extend the battery life.
- Making surveys time efficient is crucial, although this can seem challenging when you have a large or complex site to cover.
- It can be all too easy to miss out or double up on survey components – but there are techniques you can use to help prevent this from happening.

Our solution

The SPM Assets approach is simple: **plan ahead, break it down, top down, outside in, and keep moving**. This enables surveys to be completed in a time efficient, thorough, and accurate manner. Where the software makes it easy, you still need to plan ahead and follow a disciplined approach.

Plan ahead

Your arrival should be expected, although on larger sites with multiple buildings, your arrival may come as a complete surprise, so ask if everyone involved has been notified. Sometimes reassurance about the process may be necessary: explain that your work won't interfere with anyone else's; that it's a visual survey only; and that you do need to visit every nook and cranny, even if briefly.

Ask for a brief tour before starting the survey, if possible, as this helps with orientation. Also ask where you can leave your gear.



Enquire whether building plans are available, these could be in hard copy or the preferred, digital. These may provide lineal and profile measurements that may be difficult to get from the ground. If no plan is available, you may need to draw one, room by room.

Arrange a time to talk to the maintenance team, especially about the plant, HVAC, lifts, and so on.

Ask the building users (ideally managers) about any known problems with the building: you may learn about roof leaks, electrical issues, jamming doors, and so on.

Survey with the weather forecast in mind. If it's fine today but rain is expected the next day, do the externals now.

Photos and location of poor condition components are necessary; also take pictures of unusual or uncommon items.

Break it down

Bring components into rooms, rather than surveying them in large areas. For example, a room would only have one door, but a corridor may have many, so if a door is defective or in a poor condition, then it's very obvious which component you are referring to.

The same applies to external windows: attach them to a room rather than the building exterior, so you can accurately condition grade them separately, rather than giving them an overall assessment. Keeping in mind there are always exceptions to the rule.

Top down

Start your survey at the top of each room, and work downwards. In other words, start with the ceiling, then survey the walls, and finally the floor.

Outside in

Survey the materials first, then the finish, for example, survey the plaster board before the paint. Then survey the fittings, e.g. lights, switches, smoke detectors, and so on.

Keep moving

When surveying a room, walk in a clockwise direction while collecting the components, and then in an anti-clockwise direction when doing the condition grading. That way you have two views and two chances to identify everything in the room.

Benefits

Surveying in this way is time efficient, and produces meaningful data that can be relied on for creating more accurate works programmes. SPM Assets has functions for applying templates, cloning, and virtual data – while also identifying the confidence of that data. The end approach taken needs to balance time available with the associated costs and the quality of data needed for your business.

Benchmarks to check your progress

Over the years, this is the type of progress that can be expected when following this approach:

- Houses – 6 to 10 per day – depending on the level of defects, the size of the house, and the time needed to spend with the tenants.
- Larger multi storey buildings – 70 m² to 120 m² per hour – depending on the number and size of rooms, the number and type of components needed to be identified in the rooms, and also taking into account significant time needed for externals.
- Recreational and aquatic centres – up to 3 to 7 days – depending on the amount of plant and equipment and the extent of larger rooms or spaces.



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