

USING THE URL PARAMETERS TO DOCUMENT FAMILIES

One of the most under used types of parameters is the URL type of parameter. Recently, in the development of some extremely complicated families, it became obvious, that the average user was going to need some instruction or "direction" on how to use the family. It started as a simply listing of some of the instance parameters the user needed to set to get the family to display the proper parametric behavior.

It ended up being a way to document the family, what the various parameters were to be used for, and general information on the background of the family. In fact it documented the family so either myself in a couple of years, or someone else could gain insight into how the family was originally created, and how it is supposed to function.

The use of a URL parameter is actually simple. Create a parameter, define it as a URL, place it in your family (or in your Project as a Project Information category) and provide the complete path to what you want to open. During this experimentation, several insights to the URL type of parameter were gained. First, the Autodesk documentation speaks to this "website" information, leading the majority of us to believe that it is only for linking to the internet, or HTML content. The documentation states: "Provides a web link to a user-defined URL." Bunk!! This parameter is far more flexible than this definition. You can link it to ANY file type, or directory that is defined in your computer systems defaults. That means it can open:

- Directories
- Word Files
- TXT files
- PDF files
- Excel files
- Manufacturer's websites,
- Office Standards

Another potential use is that of "documenting a project while the construction documents are being created. There have been posts about this using a drafting view for information storage, etc. Now you can use a word doc, or excel file, or even more than one type of file format by using multiple URL parameters, or hyperlinks within the file in the URL.

WTW has a directory on our server that houses a host of PDF files that have been created during the course of in-house training sessions. We then added a URL project parameter to the project information category in our template, pointed to this directory. The users now have this information available, without trying to remember a convoluted long path to something only used once in a while.

No more User excuses for not knowing the standards, or at least where they are located!