What exactly is a ‘Golden Thread’?

It’s an initiative where those responsible for a building need to create and maintain a detailed ‘thread’ of information about the building. This is important because it enables anyone to understand the building, know how to keep it safe, have easy access to its information, and ensure data is always up to date.

Everyone involved in building safety management will have access to critical details that help identify, assess, and reduce building risks. More than that, when we consider the needless loss of life at Grenfell, having access to up to date information will protect lives.

Improving building safety and decision making

Change is inevitable in buildings, whether it’s in the design phase, during construction or in post-construction. If changes aren’t correctly documented and are not accessible for those that need them, then decisions can be made based on the wrong information. As we’ve seen, this can ultimately mean the difference between life or death.

By mandating the digitisation of all building information, the Golden Thread removes guesswork from the decision making process. And by ensuring information is stored both digitally and centrally, it’s easy to access for those who need it – including building residents.
Why is it important?

While standards and safety are at the heart of the desired outcomes of the Golden Thread, the main crux of the 'why' is accountability. Each and every build input is tracked and recorded, meaning that not just those with overall responsibility for the building are held accountable. A Golden Thread means transparency across all contractors and subcontractors, corners can’t be cut, build quality rises and regulations are followed.

The consequences of cutting corners in the building process don’t even bear thinking about. Following the Grenfell fire, the threat of criminal charges and jail is very real for those who do decide to subvert the regulations. Aside from helping to avoid potentially terrible consequences, the Golden Thread presents an opportunity for construction professionals to showcase and prove the quality of their work. In many respects, it becomes a marker for reputation, repeat business and reliability. It’s something everyone involved with building and maintenance should aspire to.

What does this mean for my business?

If you’re reading this and you’re responsible for a building, you’ll need to put in place and maintain a Golden Thread — and that thread must be digitised. As a result, your business needs not only good information management systems, but a good understanding of how information management supports building safety.

That also means no more bundles of paperwork that can get lost and be destroyed (not to mention the sheer effort of producing it, the environmental impact of paper waste, and having to store the accompanying documents). Documentation should be completely electronic so it’s accessible and easy to update.

While this might require a mindset shift in the way you may have traditionally done things, digitisation also brings other advantages. The most obvious is the speed at which you can get things done, and the time you can save. We’ve worked with clients who report up to a 30% time saving among their people when using our own application. As such, time is now spent on adding greater value to the business, rather than being tied up in admin.

30% time saving
What information needs to be in your ‘Golden Thread’?

The Golden Thread relates specifically to building safety, but maintaining a record of everything to do with the building is the best course of action for any organisation.

During the design and construction phases, the Golden Thread should contain the information needed to demonstrate compliance with building regulations.

In occupied buildings, the golden thread should contain the information needed for the safety of the building and its residents. As a quick guide, this includes:

- Information around the dimensions of the building
- Materials and manufacturer product information
- Escape and fire compartmentation information
- A record of inspections, reviews and consultations
- Records of maintenance and testing, along with evidence of competence of those who undertook building works.

There’s literally no place to hide.

If you are undertaking a prescribed refurbishment, you will also need to store the documents approved by the regulator under building control applications for building work in existing higher-risk buildings.

How will it be implemented?

The Act allows the government to place a duty on those responsible for a building to create and maintain the gold thread. This duty begins at the pre-construction phase, and continues throughout the entire build and handover. A designated ‘Dutyholder’ is responsible for the construction phase and handover to an ‘Accountable Person’ once complete.

With so many people involved during the construction phase, ensuring every piece of information is captured and checked is no mean feat. The level of detail required varies based on the complexity of the project, but even ‘standard’ construction projects have hundreds, if not thousands of data points that need to be captured.
Going digital

We work with several clients impacted by the Golden Thread requirements. We’ve helped them produce highly granular reports that capture the audit history of almost any construction phase activity — from new build houses, right down to specs and photos of individual nuts and bolts. Further, using a mobile app enables anyone in the project to upload images, documents, specs, and comments to every aspect of the build on site, meaning it is fully digitised, collaborative and auditable.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE GOLDEN THREAD CONSTRUCTION

While there are several mandated items your business will need to be on top of as part of the Golden Thread initiative, there are wider cultural changes that will need to take place as the construction industry embraces progress.

Changing culture:
Building safety must be built into your organisation’s culture. And that begins from the top, highlighting the importance of ownership, accountability and having the right data as part of the decision-making process.

Going digital:
Knowing how to manage digital information appropriately will be vital not just as part of the Golden Thread, but for the long term sustainability of your business too. Begin using digital tools and systems and consider adopting a platform to support the golden thread of information.

Trusted partner:
There are many tools and systems that claim to cover all bases. But it’s also about choosing the right tool for your business too – something you’re likely an expert in! Ask around your peers and identify a partner that will not only implement a solution for you, but know that they’ll be there in the long-term as the industry evolves and changes.

For more insight on how to prepare for the Golden Thread initiative and make digitisation easy, talk to one of our experts today.

Hello@fonn.co.uk
+44 (0)800 520 0164
www.fonn.co.uk