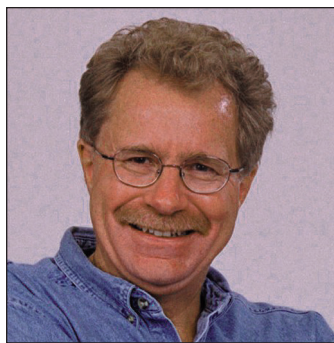


What you don't hear could hurt you



www.foundationsoft.com

Utilizing the technology, while a challenge for many low-tech field operations, can help save time and reduce costly mistakes.

Imagine your project manager has arrived at your company's largest building site to date, having traveled 30 minutes from the field office to get there.

No sooner does he arrive than the site supervisor approaches him and wants to know if he is under or over budget on site preparation. Minutes later, the owner requests an update on the status of a change order. He tries to call the field office only to discover that no one has that information readily available. His only option: make a 60-minute round trip back to the office and, in effect, bring all work to a grinding halt until his eventual return.

Sound like a familiar scenario? Or even a possibility? Hopefully your company's construction-site communications capabilities have advanced beyond the megaphone and the walkie-talkie.

Lagging behind

For most construction companies, though, field-level automation and communications continue to lag behind other areas. According to an independent study by Fiotech, a non-profit consortium for the development of construction technologies, information delivery and processing in the field has remained traditionally "paper-based," even while the amount of information supplied and required at the field level in construction has multiplied.

Combining traditional manual methods with increasing paperwork is

How using remote communication from job site to office can benefit your business

a recipe for stress, as many project managers will attest.

But there is a cure. Mobile wireless communication is perhaps one of the greatest breakthroughs for business in general, and for the construction industry specifically. It allows field personnel to stay connected, communicate more efficiently, and solve problems quickly. Utilizing the technology, while a challenge for many low-tech field operations, can help save time and reduce costly mistakes.

Some of the best options

The area of wireless communications is extensive and growing, so I have narrowed the topic to the following areas that represent good options for field-to-office communications for builders:

Smaller companies (and smaller budgets) may do well with multifunctional phones that combine cellular, two-way radio capabilities, text and numeric messaging, and Internet access. Small and portable, these phones can receive e-mails and provide access to the Internet and the web.

Multifunctional cellular phones with built-in PDA (personal digital assistant) are also available. Essentially, you get a mobile phone/fax with computing capabilities. A small built-in PDA, viewable through a very small screen, gives you added features of storing and updating information to company and job files from the job site.

Personal digital assistants (PDA), also called palm-tops and hand-held computers, help eliminate the paperwork at job sites by giving instant access to information (for instance, schedules and change orders), allowing manipulation of information (for instance, inventory reductions and field notes) and offering on-the-spot recording of current information (for instance, labor hours and tasks completed).

Size is an advantage (PDAs can fit in your pocket) and also a disadvantage (you can't possibly view an architectural drawing on its 3x5 inch screen size). Currently, there are "rugged" PDAs available as well as PDA software applications with features specifically for construction scheduling and project management needs.

For even greater access to important information and job data, as well as a larger viewing area, "wearable" and laptop computers with wireless connectivity let you bring the office with you to the job site. Although they may not be suitable for every field situation, laptops offer complete mobile office access and all the capabilities of a larger PC.

Going wireless

Each of these mobile communications options, of course, requires a wireless connection through a service provider. For added security of data transmission, companies are using VPN (virtual private network) connections that send data over the public

Mobile wireless communication is perhaps one of the greatest breakthroughs for business in general, and for the construction industry specifically. It allows field personnel to stay connected, communicate more efficiently and solve problems quickly.

Internet through secure communications "tunnels."

The only real disadvantages of wireless connections include slower transmissions (although a new turbo-charged technology will soon be available in our market), and reliance on battery-power that can fail at crucial times.

Overall, newer mobile communications and their emerging technologies promise to improve productivity, eliminate unnecessary mistakes, and save time and money for contractors of all types.

And the companies that utilize these technologies will undoubtedly have a competitive advantage over their paper-based, manually-processing peers.

Into the future. . .

Imagine a time in the not so distant future when your site manager uploads the daily activity plan to the project manager and sends him an instant message that the new plan has been uploaded.

The site manager connects to the Internet, logs into the web file system,

and accesses the new file, which appears on his PDA. Later that morning, a problem arises with a newly-built retaining wall. The foreman takes a digital picture and sends it to the site manager, who forwards it on with comments to the design engineer.

A redesign is made, and the drawing is uploaded to the site manager, who modifies the daily activity plan with the new design drawing.

Now imagine that the time is now. Using commercially available mobile devices, and good organizational skills, this construction site scenario is

possible *and* achievable.

Problems do exist, and data integration needs to improve, but the potential of mobile computing for the construction industry ranks high in the field of technology. **BXM**

Fred Ode is the founder and chairman/CEO of Foundation Software, Inc. Ode developed a construction-specific accounting software, Foundation for Windows, that suits a range of trades. For more information, visit www.foundationsoft.com or call 800-246-0800.

Communication

Playing on a winning team has its distinct advantages



Bank One Regional Office
Penton Media Building



By employing the latest proven office technology, combined with innovative workflow methods and state-of-the-art communication tools, D-A-S is never out of reach. Our staff of experts can be reached 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. For unprecedented service and quality solutions to all your construction needs, contact D-A-S Construction Co. today.



CONSTRUCTION CO.
9500 Midwest Avenue • Cleveland, Ohio 44125

216+662.5577
Fax: 216+662.1793
E-Mail: sales@dascon.com
www.DASconstruction.com