



ARE YOU READY FOR MOBILE SOLUTIONS?

BY MIKE ODE

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Mobile devices have become a major player in the construction industry, enabling contractors to use powerful construction applications on their smartphones and tablets to work effectively in the field. A wide variety of applications are available to the construction industry, spanning multiple aspects of the job, including remote time-card entry, equipment management, materials usage, completed quantities, project management, GPS tracking, service dispatch and more. But for all of these technological offerings, what are the actual benefits of mobile solutions? Further, how do you know when the time is right to implement mobile technology and which to choose?

BENEFITS OF MOBILE

Mobile solutions allow contractors to enter quickly and access data directly from the field, reducing double entry and the risk of errors that comes with it. They also offer flexibility, allowing employees to be productive out of the office and after normal work hours. This can have the added effect of making time in the office more productive as well, since less time spent on data entry and data verification means more time spent on quality data analysis and informed decision-making. Ultimately, mobile solutions help to bridge communication between the field and the office to keep everyone and everything on the same page with reliable and precise figures.



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There are a few things to consider before moving to implement a mobile solution. First, it's important to consider costs, which may include additional investments in mobile devices unless utilizing those already owned by employees or the company. This should take into account what mobile devices will and can be used, as different mobile operating systems may limit compatible applications and vice versa. Policies may be needed, then, to manage implementation, use and support on these devices. Contractors should have people and processes in place. Employees must

be willing to use the mobile devices properly to maintain both data integrity and security, and there should be a process set up that gets the most from the data received from these devices. In the end, of course, all of this hangs as much on the capabilities of the office software to perform the desired work and to integrate with mobile applications. For example, a mobile timecard app that tracks time by job, along with the proper cost codes, won't be very beneficial if it's sending data back to a program that doesn't track time the same way.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SOLUTIONS

When it comes to investing in new technology, particularly mobile solutions, it's important that each contractor look at the specific needs of his or her business and does the proper research before making any choices. Recommendations from colleagues and other construction professionals are useful, but bear in mind that just as all companies are not identical, not all companies will have the same best solution. Look at whether the application is device-specific or operating system-specific. It's also important to make sure that the solution has reliable support that includes knowledge both of the industry and of the technology. Finally, it's crucial that a contractor have people and processes in place before choosing an application or device, as these will help narrow down options and prepare the company for its successful implementation. It is only then that contractors can begin harnessing this new technology and receiving its many benefits to grow their businesses.



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