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Field Tested Technology

The most successful software implementations are those that are field tested. Experts stress the point of piloting a system with key project managers/superintendents and trade partners prior to rolling the solution out across the company.

Of course the first step in any technology implementation is establishing reliable and consistent manual processes. Once established, automating those procedures should help you drive even greater efficiencies, and eventually weed out some of the less efficient tasks.

Residential builders are finding great success in this strategy, piloting scheduling solutions on certain projects with top superintendents. Generation Homes, www.generation-homes.com, Fresno, Calif., piloted the use of wireless scheduling integrated with accounting and estimating in phase one of a 200 home development, comprised of 85 units, before rolling it out to the rest of its starts.

Scheduling software from BuilderMT, www.buildermt.com, Lakewood, Colo., integrated with accounting and estimating software from Sage Software, www.sagetimeberlineoffice.com, Beaverton, Ore., was at the heart of this implementation. Using a critical path method style, the scheduling application maintains standardized practices and processes for each model. Timely job progress information is then shared with subs and suppliers, thus reducing the overall cycletime.

The builder, which won a 2006 *Constructech* Vision Award with this initiative, proceeded to bring this efficiency out into the field, equipping each supervisor with a BlackBerry 7520 from Sprint Nextel, www.sprint.com, Reston, Va. This gives supers a secure realtime link to the company network, allowing access to documents and applications. Walking the site, a super can click a work item as completed and the update is instantly reflected on the schedule and advises the next work group to begin. In turn, the accounting system knows to move the pay order forward, giving the bank assurance of what funds to release.

Sometimes field testing a piece of technology can lead a company down a path towards change. This was certainly the case for BE&K, www.bek.com, Birmingham, Ala., which provides a full range of construction, engineering, and maintenance services in the

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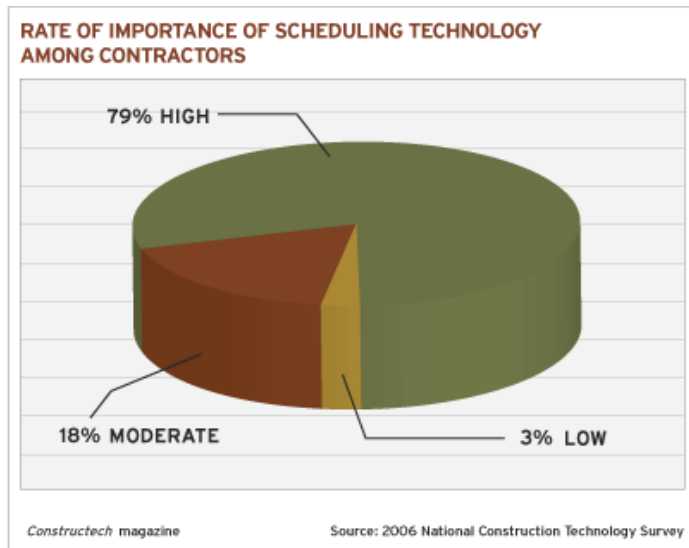
The company had long employed the strategy of using standalone project management programs at individual project sites. As projects began to grow in both scope and volume, it quickly became apparent that this strategy would no longer suffice. Without a centralized location for scheduling data, standard layout and activity codes were difficult to maintain and re-entry of data was often required.

Moving from a desktop project management application to an enterprise system from Primavera, www.primavera.com, Bala Cynwyd, Pa., the company is able to create customized project management solutions for project managers based solely on individual project needs. Each project has the necessary tools and capabilities to facilitate master scheduling in corporate offices as well.

The centralized database not only helps BE&K manage project schedules, but also serves as a resource for getting new project managers up and running on projects quicker. The standard templates act as a guide for these professionals to see how past projects have been completed.

Also a 2006 *Constructech* Vision Award winner, BE&K anticipated saving up to 27,000 man-hours per year with the solution.

With technology, the strategy of 'implementing it and forgetting it' will never prove successful. Through the process of field testing technology applications, companies will experience greater success in finding the right solution.



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