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## Field of Screens

### Veridian homes finds freedom in a wireless scheduling beta test.

Source: BIG BUILDER Magazine  
Publication date: 2005-04-01

| **By Lisa Marquis Jackson**

PITY THE POOR PROJECT MANAGERS and job superintendents of not so long ago. They spent their time in the field working from bulging clipboards, where a notation approving the concrete work on one job site was likely to be included among the “to do” functions scrawled on a legal pad.

With the best of intentions, that information might find its way into the back office to be documented into a work order, matched with purchase orders, or approved for payment. But often the information ended up lost inside the cab of a pickup or added to the mountainous piles of paperwork that keeps supers out of the field hours each week, causing delays and communication breakdowns between the front-line team, back-office staff, and area managers. The result? Frustrated subcontractors, conflicting schedules, and lost profitability.

### Enter Technology

Today, many big builders have systems link the operational information and financial elements of home building. Companies can integrate scheduling across the entire life cycle of a project—and do it remotely.

Taxed by the confines of in-office networking, Chris Luter, director of information technology for Madison, Wis.-based Veridian Homes, was determined to take technology on the road. So, as the company began planning to implement a “full,



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computer-based product within [the] organization,” a wireless construction scheduling tool was considered a critical part of their equation.

In this case, timing was everything. Just as Veridian was searching the industry for a solution, Lakewood, Colo.-based BuilderMT, a provider of production management software for residential home builders and business partner of Timberline Office, was ready to beta test the industry's latest wireless scheduling and purchasing application. Working closely through December 2004 and January 2005, the two companies collaborated to test a variety of theories, including the abilities to “increase the efficiency and accuracy of the construction schedule, eliminate time consuming paperwork for our production managers, and improve the vendor payments process,” says Bill Bublitz, vice president of finance and supervisor of Veridian's information technology department.



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**VERIDIAN UNPLUGGED: Chris Lut (left), and Bill Bublitz, with MIS manager Jill Schmidlkoff**

With new technology, two steps forward often yield three steps back. But if Veridian's beta testing proves correct, the industry's latest wireless scheduling tool may unchain job superintendents from the paperwork that plagues their productivity. With its reach, a user can be integrated with the back office databases and tap into the project management and accounting systems. “This product is generating a great deal of excitement among the construction department,” says Bublitz. “We are predicting that the benefits will be in the accuracy of the data related to job completion as well as the speed of updating job status.”

With beta testing now complete, BuilderMT released their wireless solution to the general marketplace in mid-March. Compatible for use on the Palm OS, Blackberry, tablet PC, or laptop, John Radi, BuilderMT vice president of business development, confirms discussion regarding a partnership with Nextel. “Our clients would [be able to] purchase the Blackberry model 7510 or 7520 devices and service directly from Nextel and then download the application for use with our scheduling application.”

The home building software sector has been plagued by high ownership turnover and instability. In addition to BuilderMT, companies such as Timberline, JD Edwards, FAST, NewStar, BuildSoft Enterprise, and TOM certainly have made inroads. But as the software sector ventures into new territory—with tools and enhancements like wireless scheduling—many builders, like MDC Home's Information Technology Director Tim Johannesson, say their policy will be to proceed with caution.

“We are planning on testing the wireless scheduling,” confirms Johannesson. “We don't want to be left behind [when it comes to implementing technology], but we'll never be leading edge either. I like to fall back a little and watch it unfold.”

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