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Technology and Automation's Hottest: Residential Advancing the Marketplace

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The old adage associated with purchasing real estate is location, location, location. These days, homebuilders are developing an adage of their own when applying technology and automation into their business plans: customer, customer, customer.

One can't help but notice that a large portion of this year's Technology and Automation's Hottest winners in the residential space provide either customer-relationship management (CRM) solutions or home automation products. This coincides with two themes that the editors of Constructech have seen from homebuilders throughout the past year—finding ways to better service customers and become more involved and educated on home technology to meet demands of their customers.

This certainly makes sense, as many builders and contractors in this space have addressed the need for such enterprise actions as accounting and estimating in recent years: whether through homegrown technology or packaged applications. For many, the focus has turned to increasing customer service, uncovering new markets, and developing tools for gauging customer satisfaction.

While CRM-type solutions have been available for years, current interest in this technology has been spurred by the more sophisticated offerings to hit the market as of late. Current technology that embraces flexible platforms and emerging technology standards allow users to customize packages, provide realtime communication with customers, and integrate with various backoffice applications, among other functions.

On the home automation front, while a vast majority of builders are still reluctant to fully utilize such things as multiroom audio/video and integrated home controls, a collection of forward thinking builders are helping drive the interest in these products.

According to a recent survey of homebuilders by the Consumer Electronics Assn., www.ce.org, Arlington, Va., one in four builders are not only providing value to their customers via home technologies, they are improving their bottomline in the process. Without a doubt, results such as these can only spur more builders to at least investigate home technology in their model homes.

Not to be overlooked, residential builders and contractors are still investing in such backoffice applications as accounting, scheduling, and estimating. As mentioned earlier, despite the fact that many have already addressed these critical needs within their enterprise, companies are continuing to explore these applications as the technology becomes more flexible, allowing them to do more with less and perform more functions. Those voted hot in these categories are continuing to come to market with solutions that meet the demands of the market, ranging from integrated functionality to collaborative platforms.

This past year was another stepping stone for technology and automation in the residential marketplace. While builders and contractors continue to invest in current solutions, they can also be confident the products coming down the pipeline will provide even further value to both their bottomline and customer satisfaction rates.

Autodesk
San Rafael, Calif.
www.autodesk.com

Provides a range of design and collaboration software for the construction industry.

Builder1440
Baltimore, Md.
www.builder1440.com

In an industry where the customer is king, it is vital for homebuilders to have the proper technology in place to better service clients. That is why Builder1440, www.builder1440.com, Baltimore, Md., has continued to provide the homebuilding market with a customer-relationship management (CRM) tool that allows them to manage the sales process from start to finish. Defined as an Internet-based sales force automation (SFA)/CRM system, Builder1440 provides such customer facing processes as options management, selection capabilities, and change order management to some of the leading homebuilders in the market. Built as an application service provider model, the Builder1440 hosts, maintains, and updates the system, eliminating a user need for additional information technology staff to support the product. Yet the benefits of the Builer1440 tool do not stop there, as its technology interfaces with many leading homebuilder accounting packages, such as Timberline, from Sage Software, www.sage.com, Reston, Va., and Geac, www.geac.com, Markham, Ont. For Builder1440, 2004 was its most successful year to date, adding 39 new customers, including Kimball Hill Homes, www.kimballhillhomes.com, Houston, Texas, and D.R. Horton, www.drhorton.com, Arlington, Texas, as well as multiple custom homebuilders. Overall, sales grew 35% in the past year and Builder1440 forecasts more than 50,000 homes will be sold in 2005 using its SFA tool.

BuilderMT
Lakewood, Colo.
www.buildermt.com

BuilderMT, www.buildermt.com, Lakewood, Colo., has made a name out of delivering process driven solutions for a process driven industry. Bringing to market customizable solutions focused on production management, production scheduling, sales management, and warranty management and integrating with accounting and estimating software from Timberline, from Sage Software, www.sage.com, Reston, Va., BuilderMT seemingly covers every process a homebuilder can throw its way. The company extended its process driven solutions to the field in 2004 with its release of Jobsite Field Management. This realtime wireless scheduling application helps users coordinate data between the field and the home office via a range of wireless devices. With its primary focus on scheduling and document management in the field via tablet PCs, Jobsite Field Management also allows wireless scheduling to work on smart phones, personal digital assistants, and various BlackBerry devices. Homebuilders have certainly taken notice, as it announced 115 new customers for its software recently. Based on strong growth to start 2005, BuilderMT looks to best the 79% revenue growth it achieved between 2003 and 2004 in the coming year.

BuildTopia
Rockville, Md.
www.buildtopia.com

Each homebuilder has a different set of customer-facing needs. BuildTopia, www.buildtopia.com, Rockville, Md., aims to please this agenda, serving the market with sales, scheduling, project, and warranty management solutions that can be implemented as either an enterprise-wide package or as individual solutions. Its BTSales module caters to sales options and contract management needs, while its BTService module tracks customer service and warranty needs and its BTBuilder covers scheduling, bidding, purchasing, and more. Being Web-based, each module can be implemented one at a time without the worry of losing critical data because the databases are integrated. Homebuilders definitely realized the benefits of BuildTopia throughout the past year. The company added more than 200 customers from 2003 to 2004 and grew revenues by 105%. In total, the company has experienced a 307% growth in revenue and 483% growth in customers since 2002. The latest release of BTService in 2004 offers online customer service order submission and tracking, service order collaboration with trade partners, defect and root cause analysis, and complete performance reporting both internally as well as to trade partners. BuildTopia also partnered with Microsoft, www.microsoft.com, Redmond, Wash., in 2004 to develop an enterprise accounting solution. BTAccounting supports multi-company accounting, centralized cash management, vendor management, job costing from land development to warranty, and enterprise reporting. BuildTopia has built a strong offering since its inception five years ago, allowing builders to better service customers.

ELAN Home Systems
Lexington, Ky.
www.elanhomesystems.com

With a range of products including touchpanels, keypads, audio and video (a/v) multiroom products, system components, music servers, structured wiring, and speakers, ELAN Home Systems, www.elanhomesystems.com, Lexington, Ky., covers the spectrum when it comes to multiroom a/v. Not only does ELAN provide a broad range of options across the board in home a/v, it does so in a manner that meets the needs of every homebuyer's lifestyle and budget. Its product offering strategy also allows homeowners to start at one level and slowly

layer in new products as they wish without disrupting the functionality of existing systems.

Among the products announced in 2004 for ELAN include the Systems12 Multi-Room A/V Controller, and the D1200 Digital 12-Channel Amplifier with Class T Technology. It also expanded its line of VIA! touchpanels and offers three new VIA!dj Digital Music Servers. ELAN is also developing XM Satellite Radio Tuners with plans to ship in 2005.

Dedicated on supporting dealers, ELAN launched two dealer support programs in 2004. Its TRIO event brought together more than 400 dealers and partners for focused presentations, training, and interactive sessions on how to best leverage its products. Its second program, ELAN REWARDS is an online program that allows ELAN dealers to submit client contracts for points, which they in turn can redeem for various items.

Sales have been on a steady increase from ELAN Home Systems for the past few years as it continues to come to market with high-end products and introduce dealer support programs.

HeadsUp Technologies

Overland Park, Kan.

www.headsuptech.com

Its iCPM integrates data collection, scheduling, project management, and collaboration.

Intuit Construction

Business Solutions

Santa Rosa, Calif.

www.intuit.com

They say 350,000 contractors can't be wrong. That is the number of organizations in the construction industry using accounting and production management products from Intuit Construction Business Solutions, www.intuit.com, Santa Rosa, Calif. Aside from QuickBooks, which is one of the most widely used accounting packages for smaller businesses, Intuit has a solution to fit every size enterprise, including QuickBooks Premier: Contractor Edition, QuickBooks Enterprise Solutions, and Master Builder. The company continued to come to market with new and innovative solutions in 2004, with the release of Master Builder 10 and QuickBooks Premier Contractor Edition 2005 while landing a bevy of new customers in industries ranging from remodeling, subcontracting, general contracting, and homebuilding.

One of Intuit's biggest appeals to the construction industry is that it continues to hone its Developer Network program, which enables third-party solutions to integrate with its QuickBooks and Master Builder products. Currently the list of third-party providers is at 30 and counting.

This past year also marked a restructuring into a regionalized network of Solutions Providers. This helps provide greater support for customers using Master Builder construction management software while enabling solutions providers to build their own business more efficiently for long-term success.

With its evolving list of customers, strong revenue growth, and dedicated partners there is little reason to believe Intuit is anything less than hot.

Pivotal Corp.

Vancouver, B.C.

www.pivotal.com

It provides homebuilders with customer-relationship management software for lead management and sales automation.

Russound

Newmarket, N.H.

www.russound.com

As a pioneer in the multiroom audio/video market and a company committed to staying on the cutting edge of developments in the home technology market, Russound, www.russound.com, Newmarket, N.H., continues to be the product of choice for more and more homebuyers.

Its proprietary technology platform RNET brings the element of a "smart component" to all of its products, such as its CAV6.6 controller, ST2 tuner, CAM6.6 multiroom receiver, and SMS3 media server, allowing them to interface with each other via two-way communications.

In 2004, the company introduced an online education program to help train and certify both its sales force and its customer base regarding its products. Russound also came to market with its Building Market initiative, which is aimed at providing production builders complete audio/video packages to spec in their tract homes. This is centered on making the process of choosing a multiroom audio/video package just as simple as choosing any other option in the home for both builders and buyers.

Throughout the past year, Russound has come to market with such products as the SMS3 smart media server, ST2 smart dual

tuner, and multisource/multiroom receiver. It has also grown its engineering, product management and marketing departments, which it believes will help provide further commitment to the home audio/video market in the years ahead.

Sage Software
Reston, Va.
www.sage.com

Parent company of Timberline Software, which provides a broad range of enterprise applications for construction.

WinEstimator
Kent, Wash.
www.wineest.com

When it comes to leaders in the estimating software market, WinEstimator, www.wineest.com, Kent, Wash., is among the most innovative. Its WinEst family of products includes the eTeam Collaborative Project Cost Estimating Edition, ProPLUS Project Cost Estimating System, WinEst Pro: Standard Project Cost Estimating system, and Virtual Takeoff solution, among many others.

You know you are hot when Microsoft chooses you as an initial partner for an upcoming software release. In 2004 WinEstimator announced that its Small Business Estimator has been chosen to integrate with Microsoft's soon to be released Small Business Accounting. This will enable customers that use Microsoft Office Edition for small business management to create estimates, budgets, and quotes for construction, manufacturing, fabrication, and professional services.

The company also released an update to its WinEst Virtual Takeoff software, which includes a range of enhanced functionality, such as the support of portable document format and drawing files. This coincides with the release of the latest version of its project cost estimating software, WinEst version 8.2.

Equipped with a range of software enhancements, a growing list of customers, and building on a strong growth in revenue from 2003 to 2004, WinEstimator seems poised to stay on its path of hot for years to come.

Companies to Watch

This category highlights companies the editors would like to keep an eye on, based on new products released or change of focus.

Corecon Technologies Inc.
Huntington Beach, Calif.
www.corecon.com

Many small to medium-sized construction companies make Corecon Technologies Inc., www.corecon.com, Huntington Beach, Calif., their provider of choice when it comes to integrated estimating and project management.

With the release of Corecon 4.0 in 2004, the company brings to market a Web-based solution that encompasses estimating, project management, and job-cost control that contains interfaces to some of the most widely-used accounting packages.

GiveMePower Corp.
Calgary, Alta.
www.givemepower.com

Through the use of PowerCAD software from GiveMePower Corp., www.givemepower.com, Calgary, Alta., users are able to manage blueprints and computer-aided design files from any Windows-powered computer—including desktop and laptop personal computers, as well as tablet PCs, handheld PCs, and Pocket PCs.

As the market continues to become educated on the power capabilities of its software, GiveMePower should continue to add to its already impressive base of customers.

Up and Coming

This category highlights companies with intriguing solutions that have been in business less than two years.

FieldRanger
Portland, Ore.
www.fieldranger.com

Founded in 2003, FieldRanger, www.fieldranger.com, focuses on the field force needs of small contractors, such as heating, ventilation, and air conditioning; plumbing; and electrical. Its FieldRanger Wireless Work Order software eliminates time and paperwork involved in the dispatching process for these companies. In 2004 FieldRanger redeveloped its application for use on the Web and introduced location based information service with global positioning system-enabled cell phones.