Integrating Construction Management Software

Construction management software is a powerful tool for a company's operations. Not only will computer software make a job easier but it also will save time. It could take a whole day to complete an estimate for a job using a pencil and paper; with a computerized estimating package the time to create the same estimate could easily be cut in half.

Construction management software can be purchased as separate software products or as a single integrated software package. Many stand-alone software products are available to choose from, such as Microsoft Project or Quick Bid estimating software. Contractors of all sizes can afford these products. Various packages on the market address all phases of the construction process.

INTEGRATED SYSTEMS
Integrated construction management software combines all aspects of a construction job—from estimating to project management, from document control to accounting—within one software package. Although integrated packages can cost more than stand-alone products, many benefits can be seen.

Stand-alone products offer little or no integration between products. Users must enter the same data multiple times into different software programs. With an integrated package, duplicate data entry can be avoided. Not only will significant time be saved but errors in data entry also will be reduced. Data also is available systemwide in an integrated software package.

Locating information is easier in integrated construction management software. Contractors don't have to remember which software product data was entered in or whether the data was updated from one product to another. With stand-alone products, information sometimes gets lost. For example, many contractors use Microsoft Word for document control. Often, the project manager cannot find in which directory file a co-worker saved a job document.

A UNIQUE NEED
The accounting process in the construction industry is unique. A generic accounting program may not have the capacity to capture job costs accurately. A true job cost system not only requires which job a cost was incurred on but it also requires an item code. Failure to capture job costs accurately can result in taking on unprofitable jobs, delays in critical management decisions, and an inaccurate picture of the company's financial status. Most integrated construction management software was developed with job costing in mind.

Integrated construction management software can report comparisons between actual job costs and estimated job costs by cost code or on a line-item basis. This level of detail may not be available with stand-alone products, forcing contractors to only compare the overall estimated profit to the actual profit on the job. Contractors may lose money on a certain line item and not be aware of it. Conversely, they will not be able to pinpoint highly profitable line items either.

No matter the size of a construction company, computers make all the difference in managing a construction company. To survive in this environment, a construction company must operate efficiently, cut costs and maintain quality performance. It makes sense to take advantage of all the software tools that are available.

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