

Q & A

FIELD POWER

CONSTRUCTECH:

Let's talk a bit about what the specific needs of the contractor are today and how that correlates with the direction On Center is taking its product portfolio.

PADILLA: I was an estimator and project manager for 25 years before coming to work with On Center Software. So I learned to estimate with pencils and calculators well before we each had computers on our desks. And one (of) the things that I learned was my productivity doubled over the years when I started to use the software, as opposed to using digitizers and Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheets. Using technology made us more productive in the sense we could double the volume we did in a year, or do more work during the day and get home at a reasonable hour.

When I came to work with On Center Software, one of the things we talked about was that while we did make the lives of estimators and the project managers easier, we didn't really help the guy in the field. This is the guy that does not have an office

or a computer—he has a gang box or, if he is lucky, a trailer. What we did do was bury him under 500 pages of reports that our wonderful computers generated. So what we needed to do was help his productivity and now extend the gains that we had given the estimator and project manager out to the field.

And that is the direction we see the technology moving today: improving office and field integration; letting the foreman or superintendent benefit from (the) same type of productivity gains that the office has already seen. So the future of technology, from our point of view, is around this higher level of integration, and making it so that the foreman can go home at a decent hour because he/she no longer has to do so much paperwork at end of the day.

CONSTRUCTECH: Digital Production Control was really the first step in this process you are talking about. Can you talk about how this product helps and where On Center sees it headed?

PADILLA: The technology is about putting that data into the hands of

Why should the estimators and project managers enjoy all the efficiency? Cecilia Padilla, vice president, On Center Software, www.oncenter.com, The Woodlands, Texas, believes we need to empower the field worker through better technology.

the people in the field. And there are many things you can do once you have that tablet. I would say the tablet is the aluminum clipboard of the next generation—everything you need is right on that computer. Foremen or superintendents can carry plans, RFIs (requests for information), submittals, timecards, daily reports, everything right on that tablet.

While I cannot speak to particular new functionality, what I can say is that Digital Production Control has been about measuring percent of completion, having a way of being able to proactively line out manpower before you spend the money. Rather than a job cost report telling you where you have been on a job, technology like Digital Production Control (can) tell you where you are going. And that is essential for

using technology today—where are we going? We want to provide the same type of insight to (a) user when it comes to other portions of the job.

CONSTRUCTECH: What factors do you see driving the need for this type of technology today?

PADILLA: It's obvious that the economy has had a big impact on the way contractors are doing their job. Whereas in years past, it might have been fine to have a bit of fluff in the budget, that has changed today. You no longer have any wiggle room (on the) labor production side. You have to make (a) budget; it's no longer an option. I cannot wait for payroll to close on Tuesday and find out on Friday if I made money. I cannot wait until I am 80% complete on (a) job.

The interest these days comes from companies that realize job cost tools alone are no longer good enough. One of the things they like is that when (a) foreman uses Digital Production Control he can identify how long tasks can take today. In other words, he is lining out crews of two or three guys and he can identify how many walls need to be built or how many ceilings need to get done before he makes (a) budget.

He/she can also use it to forecast when more manpower is needed on the job or when they need to start sending people into the shop because work is running out. So this is where the technology begins to become more of a planning tool than an accounting tool.

Overall, the big key moving forward is still integration. We have

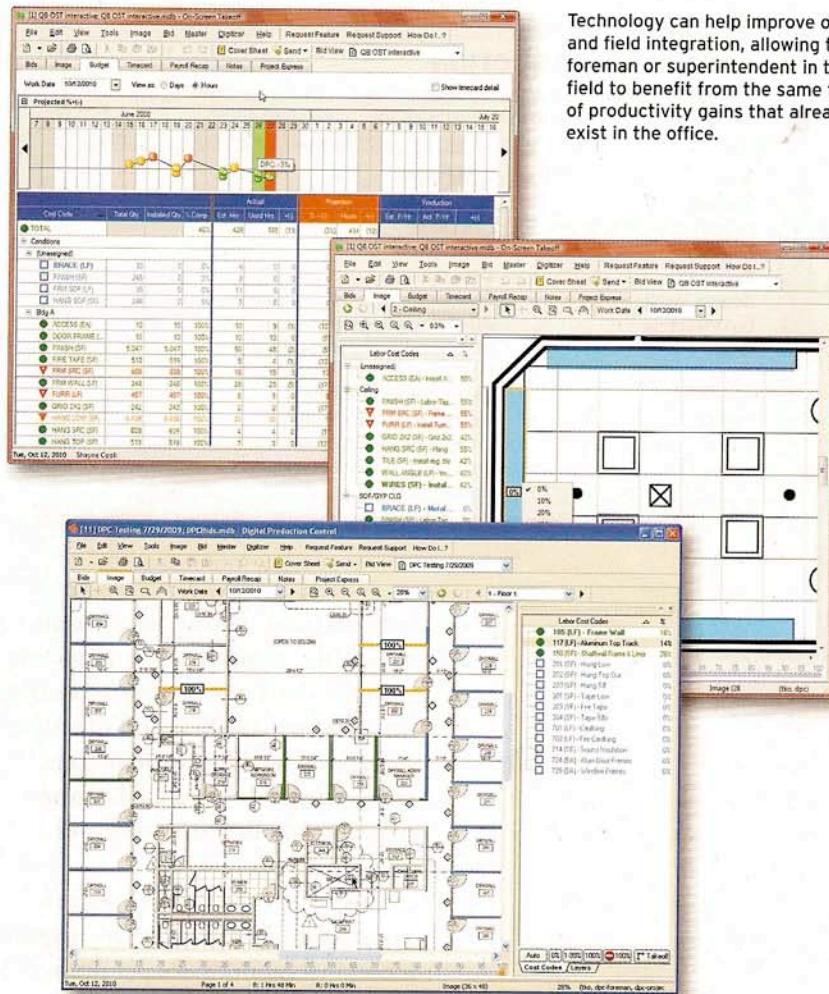
released about 10-12 accounting integrations this past year with all major accounting applications in use for construction. It's essential that we help our customers export budgets effortlessly so therefore they don't have to have someone doing data entry in order to update the budget into the job cost system.

CONSTRUCTECH: Another interesting product On Center has recently launched is the Digital Takeoff Table. Explain the impact this product can have on estimating.

PADILLA: For years people have used digitizers and really didn't want to get away from (the) comfort of (using this technology).

But with this product you can perform electronic takeoffs, simulating the feeling of pencil on paper. In a way, it feels just like coloring plans with a highlighter or a pencil. It has replaced the digitizer.

We had some customers that decided to race each other using the product for doing takeoffs, and found it to be 25-50% faster than using a mouse. •



Technology can help improve office and field integration, allowing the foreman or superintendent in the field to benefit from the same type of productivity gains that already exist in the office.