

A cloud-based business requires full commitment

In two prior *Qualified Remodeler* articles, we discussed our company-wide push to convert our enterprise to a completely paperless, 100 percent cloud-based operation. The impact on productivity has been immediate and dramatic. The impact on our overhead, in terms of technology spending, has been relatively modest. To date, most of these productivity gains have been office-based and primarily focused on getting our various forms of documentation and communication into one central repository. It's paperless, cloud-based, fully searchable and accessible from a number of platforms and devices.

To fully monetize this investment of time and money, we needed to find a way to push these productivity gains into the field. Our initial solution, which we've tested for the past year, involved laptop computers armed with wireless 3G cards. Hit the jobsite, crack open the laptop, initiate the 3G wireless connection, launch a Web browser and get to work.

In theory, this should have worked. What we saw in practice, however, was less than ideal. The laptops spent a whole lot of time sitting in the office or buried in the back seat of pick-up trucks. Very rarely did they actually make an appearance on the jobsite itself. Even when the laptop made a jobsite cameo, it was to look up or "consume" information.

Very rarely did our project

managers input new or edit existing project-based data. The flow of information was decidedly one way. There is no doubt, that as a repository for the latest, greatest information, our system was best-in-class; At least for a moment in time. What we were missing was the ability to act on this information in real time and, when necessary, to edit or add information directly from the field. This real time interactive capability was the missing link. Without it, our carefully cultivated information system was getting outdated and inaccurate.



“In just two short months, adoption of the tablet experience has been swift and seamless.”

What seems simple in retrospect had us baffled for the past year. It really came down to speed, simplicity and having the right tools. Put bluntly, laptops were a hassle to carry on a jobsite. They were difficult to utilize



Jeremy Martin, a third-generation contractor, is a graduate of the University of Texas with a Bachelor of Science in engineering with high honors. He is a Certified Graduate Builder, Certified Green Professional and recently attained the highest certification offered by the National Association of Home Builders: Graduate Master Builder. Additionally, he is current chairman of the Austin Area Remodelers Council and a member of the Home Builders Association of Greater Austin Board of Directors.

while standing. The keyboard was a woefully inadequate tool to navigate our cloud-based systems. These laptops were clunky, slow to wake up from sleep mode, crashed often and exhibited poor battery life. The time it took to make the wireless 3G connection was annoying. Is it any shock that the adoption among our project managers was limited?

At the end of the day, we knew in our hearts what the true solution was. Would it be expensive to invest in new Apple iPad Air devices for our entire field staff? Yes. Would it be expensive to turn on 4G data plans across the board? Yes. Had we sunk costs into our existing hardware and software? Yes. We did it anyway.

In just two short months, adoption of the tablet experience has been swift and seamless. Now when we walk on jobsites, we see our project managers huddled over their iPads, reviewing plans, making punch lists, reviewing subcontracts, approving shop drawings and marking up as-built plans. These devices are front and center at every job walk, every client meeting and every production staff meeting.

In retrospect, we should have implemented this technology at

least one, if not two, years ago. The hardware and software, in the form of native tablet apps that extend our already omnipresent cloud systems, have been readily available. What got in the way? Money, of course. We held on to our sunk cost infrastructure a little too long.

Don't make the same mistake we did. If you've made the investment to move your operation to a paperless, cloud-based infrastructure, don't stop. Take the final step. Look at the fully burdened cost of your field employees and weigh that against the revenue and gross profit they produce for your firm. Now, envision that same fully burdened field employee with a tablet and data plan. The incremental cost, I would argue, is negligible, but the increased productivity is anything but.

It's early, but we know it's working. Our punch lists have never been so thorough, accurate and up-to-date. Our as-built drawings, now fully digital, have never been so comprehensive. Our jobsite photo documentation has never been this orderly. These tablets aren't sitting in the back seat of the truck; they are utilized every day, all day, extending our enterprise to the jobsite. **QR**