

Keeping Your Technology Up To Date

Why this is the year to retire your
old construction management system

Contents

01	Why are there so many changes—and which ones will last?	04 →
02	Digital project management	05 →
03	The plethora of product options	06 →
04	Choose a software that's built on proven technological developments	09 →
05	Pick a software provider that solves your needs	12 →
06	Intuitive interfaces...finally	17 →
07	Details count	19 →
08	Future-proofing isn't magic	20 →



**If you find yourself thinking,
“How is it possible I have to
upgrade my software already?”
then it’s time to shop for a
future-proof solution.**

Technology’s rate of change can seem dizzying.

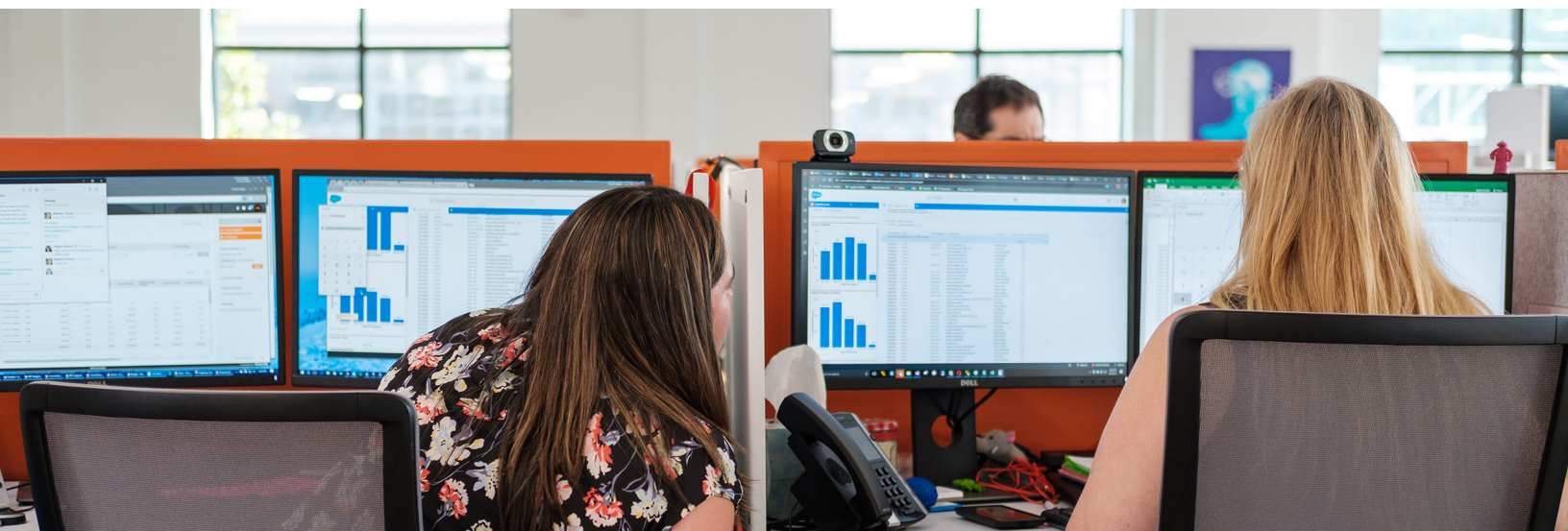
But rather than adopting an “any port in a storm” approach to buying software, using a few key criteria to vet products and determine the best fit for your company’s needs will help you select a solution that provides long-term benefits.

01

Why are there so many changes—and which ones will last?

As a new year begins, it is natural for companies and research organizations to make predictions. In the world of rapid change brought about by the Internet, there are many innovations to call out and new trends to highlight. Some of them seem like a major shift. Did you know that Michael Wolf, founder and CEO of technology consulting firm Activate, Inc., forecasts that soon more people will use message apps than use social media? Or that Nucleus Research contends that big data is already here (although its prevalence is somewhat disguised by the fact that it is being used by companies in modestly sized—and manageable—pieces)?

Yet, while pondering “the next big thing” is always exciting, there is a familiar underlying theme to almost all predictions: the elimination of barriers between technology solutions, and more importantly, between people. Bigger data sets, better flow of information between, formerly standalone, computer programs, and improved collaboration among team members are still on the rise. And, as in years before, these trends will impact the way you do business, so make sure your business strategy is informed by changes in the technology arena.



02

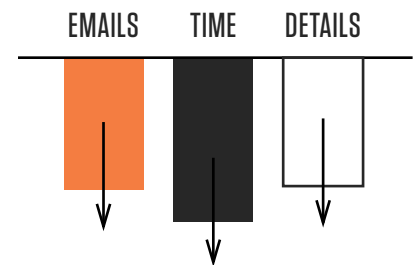
Digital project management

Digital project management is not new. For years, construction teams have been transitioning to computerized solutions. First, architecture/engineering/construction (AEC) companies put desktop computers in offices and in the trailer. They invested in in-house servers. Forms, drawings, and other documents were emailed as file attachments and, with any luck, recipients' computers had programs installed that would open those files.

Desktop computers were a big improvement over pen and paper, but applications designed in the 1990s and programs run on in-house servers provide limited accessibility to project data. User licenses and virtual private networks (VPN) access requirements drastically inhibit communications and collaboration as team members wait to retrieve newly updated information before continuing their work. Project staff are required to suffer through slow VPN connections and remote desktop applications, and are routinely forced to hunt through emails containing outdated attachments. With thousands of emails and multiple revisions going back and forth, the volume of communication can seem endless, and this makes keeping updates to contracts, insurance documents, project plans, RFIs, and change orders impossible. With no streamlined system in place, there will undoubtedly be details (and dollars) lost.

Projects are also slipping their schedules due to a lack of information and communication. Keeping projects on schedule is imperative to profitability, and avoiding delays requires every party to deliver their work on time. Without the ability to monitor deadlines and anticipate delays in permitting, inspections, or obtaining equipment, valuable time and resources are lost.

LOSSES RESULTING FROM NO STREAMLINED SYSTEM





03

The plethora of product options

Recent developments—most notably, cloud computing and mobile devices—have offered a dramatic improvement in efficiency. More data storage and greater accessibility, (which in turn improve project-wide accuracy and turnaround time), are the hallmarks of the latest technologies.

But so much has happened so quickly that you may have ended up buying software that isn't serving your company's needs. Perhaps it didn't fit your requirements from day one or maybe it did, but lately its developers haven't been keeping pace with industry advances.

Predictably, some of the software solutions that were state-of-the-art just a few years ago are now atrophying or being phased out.

In fact, several major construction management software providers have moved their most popular releases to a support or maintenance-only model. All developments of these products have stopped.

This isn't entirely surprising. Every business must be forward looking, building upon their successes and cutting losses. For software providers, especially those that offer a wide range of offerings, this means “sunsetting” some of their products.

When a software is “sunsetting,” it means the provider is diverting time and money away from the solution you—their customer—were using, in order to put their resources toward a new business endeavor. Meanwhile, you are left with an old system fraught with sluggish operations, system freezes, and questions that won’t be easily answered, because technical support from your vendor has been discontinued.

THESE SHIFTS IN PRODUCT AVAILABILITY OR RELIABILITY LEAVE CUSTOMERS WITH THREE CHOICES:

CHOICE ONE:

Upgrade

In some instances, the software companies will provide an upgrade path from their current solution to other solutions, which are normally added via acquisitions. Generally, the transition does not occur seamlessly. However, in addition to fees, customers are faced with the same obstacles they would confront with an entirely new purchase: new implementation, training, roll out, pilot, project go-live, and ultimately company-wide go-live. Furthermore, extensive data conversions are required if the old system is to be shut down and no longer supported. And these “upgrades” to other acquired applications beg the question “When will they be shut down?”



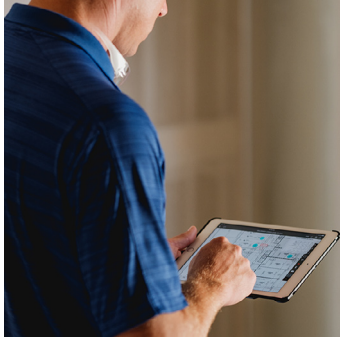
CHOICE TWO:**Stay Behind**

Sometimes, construction firms choose—often by default—to stay behind and not implement any form of new software. After all, the announcement that a product is being sunsetted is easy enough to ignore, because in the near-term, the program you're using will function pretty much as usual. But technology platforms—new operating systems and new versions of Java and browsers—continue to evolve at a swift rate. Soon your legacy software, with its outdated system requirements, will be slowing down your organization's ability to work effectively. And in the long run, if you stick with an outdated software for too long, the valuable data it houses may be lost. As you'll know if you still have any floppy disks hanging around your office, it is all too possible for entire data sets representing your company's work to become unreadable.

CHOICE THREE:**Move to the next generation of construction management software**

Investing in a new software can seem daunting. What's worse, is that it can seem like another futile move in a game of catch-up that you'll never win. However, if you make your next software purchase based on proven developments within the industry, you can not only get up to speed with the latest technologies right away, but you can ensure that your investment will keep you solidly up to date well into the future, even as the tech landscape continues to evolve.

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Choose a software that's built on proven technological developments

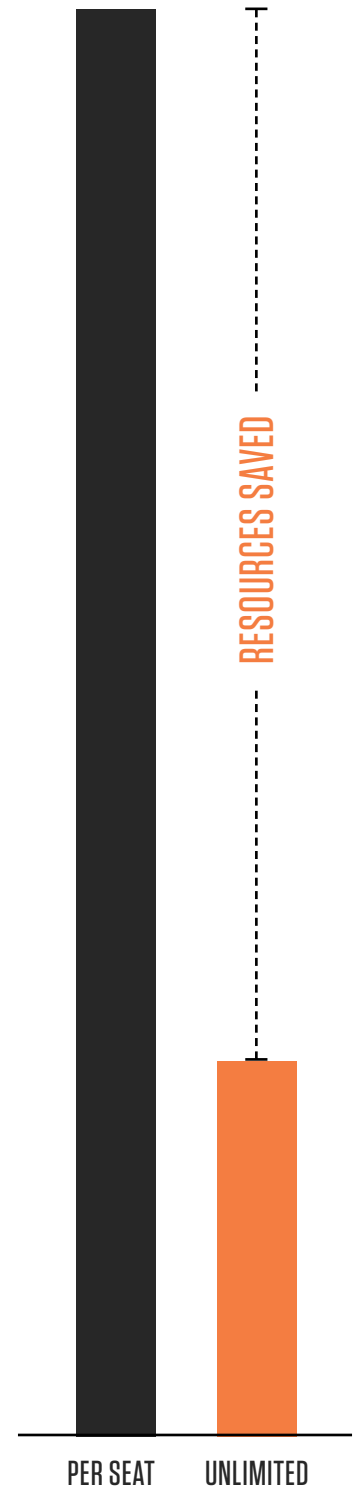
It doesn't take a tech expert to know that cloud and mobile technologies are here to stay. Nevertheless, it doesn't hurt to note that many experts, including market research firm IDC, expect them to gain momentum. It's only logical, therefore, to look for a construction management solution that is cloud and mobile-based.

As it happens, the most progressive software solutions were built to leverage the power of cloud and mobile technologies, since construction work entails a large amount of data storage and requires so much work to be done in the field. These next-generation solutions are accessible via apps on your iOS or Android devices, and offer several advantages:

- + Information is stored immediately in the cloud, which means all team members (including subcontractors and third-party consultants) can get real-time updates, no matter where they are. This enables close monitoring of project schedules and alleviates bottlenecks. For times when you are working in a remote location, it also allows for offline access to project data and will save any changes locally on your device. The changes will automatically sync once an internet connection is restored.
- + Apps are easier to use than a web page on a tablet, because they are designed to fit the smaller screen and take you directly to your destination, whether that be a calculation tool or a drawing.

- + Cloud-based, software-as-a-service (SaaS) means that no server installation or hardware is required on the part of the customer.
- + The best software vendors provide unlimited storage of electronic documents, rather than charging by the megabyte or gigabyte.
- + These best-of-class companies offer subscriptions that allow for unlimited users, eliminating seat licenses (where price is based on the number of individual users who have access to the software) or named accounts (where the customer company must provide the actual names of users, which are, in turn, linked to software login credentials). Companies purchasing seat or named accounts may need to buy hundreds of user licenses, regardless of the frequency of the software usage by those licensees. Having construction software that offers unlimited users eliminates the expenditure of time, money, and effort that would otherwise be required to manage and adjust the named user licenses as companies grow or employees leave. Additionally, when all users, regardless of their amount of involvement, have the ability to access the software in order to collaborate on a project, the value proposition of the software is enhanced.
- + Having all records stored in one location is more than convenient; it supports archiving and record-keeping. Complete, time-stamped project data can be retrieved long after a project's end and be used either for troubleshooting or to apply lessons learned to new projects in the future.

RESOURCES SPENT MANAGING LICENSES



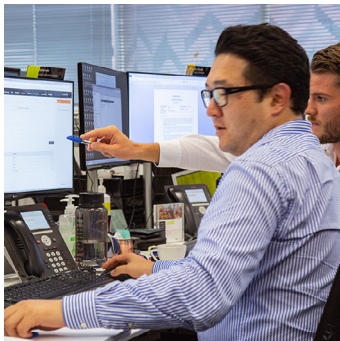


Cloud-based SaaS offers the benefit of high security. Cloud-computing vendors have a unique opportunity to partner with elite data center providers. In all likelihood your company would incur greater costs to achieve less security if your construction management software solution involved an in-house server, because the physical security measures for cloud-based systems are much higher than on-site server rooms. Cloud-based servers are backed up on multiple servers, in various physical locations, all of which have the same high-level security measures in place. Special sources of power and backup generators provide additional disaster security and stability. Sophisticated authenticating access is also provided by these elite data center providers.

Using cloud-based software should not mean giving up ownership of your data—although many software companies do control their clients' data, so it's important to investigate before making a purchasing decision. When making that decision, confirm that you'll be able to obtain a copy of your data at any time and that you'll be provided appropriate assistance in migrating away from the vendor should you ever decide to leave.

05
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Pick a software provider that solves your current (and future) needs



DO YOUR HOMEWORK

There's no getting around the fact that future-proofing your construction management software involves doing your homework. Be prepared to conduct the proper research and enter the process with the right information and questions to assist in selecting the best software for your business.

STEP ONE:

Analyze

The first step, to be taken even before you begin researching potential software purchases, is to analyze the current processes you have in place in order to pinpoint areas that can be improved. Make a list of your current pain points and needs and prioritize them in order of importance. For example, if your RFIs are constantly falling behind schedule, you know you need software with a dedicated RFI tool that includes responsibility assignment capability and automatic reminder notifications. Also, be sure to consider what the future may hold for your business so that you don't end up with underpowered software that only solves half of your problems by year two or three.

**STEP TWO:****Identify**

Once you have your list in hand, you can begin to identify what type of software you need. Beware of applications that are so generalized they can apply to a wide range of businesses. Those solutions seldom allow your team to perform with optimal speed and efficiency. An industry-specific software will promote smoother operations.

STEP THREE:**Solution Demonstrations**

While reviewing demonstrations of various software options, make sure that as many of your end users as possible are able to experiment with your potential solution. Getting your team involved early on will also make them more likely to use the product you select. Make sure the vendor is offering solution demonstrations, not just product demonstrations. Product demonstrations show flashy features and functions of the software, but may have little to no relevance to your needs. You want a solution demonstration that clearly illustrates how the software in question is going to solve your unique business needs.

UNDERSTAND THE VENDOR LANDSCAPE

Avoid the trap of buying software from a big-name company that happens to offer a product in your area only because they offer a product in every area. Those companies may not focus their efforts on continued development and support of the software that is a cornerstone of your business. At the same time, you want a company with the resources and stability to continue to enhance their product offering. It makes sense to look for a vendor who focuses on a single, or at least small, set of core competencies, because having a team dedicated to details is what drives product improvement and relevancy.

Furthermore, if that provider has established partnerships with other key industry providers, you can have the best of both worlds. Many programs integrate—that is, seamlessly share data—with those from other major vendors in the market, enabling customers to use all of their existing or preferred solutions as a coordinated whole. This represents an enormous time savings, because data transfers automatically between your various programs (accounting, estimating, scheduling, etc.). It also improves overall accuracy, because the dual-entry associated with using various standalone products opens the door for user errors to occur.

A software vendor that is loyal to its customers and committed to its product development will also offer unmatched customer support, offering, for example, support not only for clients but for their collaborators, and being accessible (instantly!) via phone, email or live chat around the clock.

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If you prefer to learn on your own, dedicated construction management software vendors also invest heavily in making support articles and video tutorials available online.

Finally, don't forget to check a company's references. Customer testimonials speak volumes about a SaaS vendor's viability. When you're trying to manage deployment risk, there's nothing more comforting than knowing you're not the first organization to have implemented the specific configuration you're planning. Read software reviews and case studies. Look for answers to the following questions:

**Implementation**

(i.e., how long did it take?)

**Solution performance**

(i.e., how well does the solution work, has it met expectations, and what kind of value have you derived?)

**Functionality**

(i.e., how comprehensive are the features, and how often are new capabilities introduced?)

**Usability**

(i.e., are the features and functions easy to navigate, and were your users able to get up and running quickly, or was extensive training required?)

**Support and responsiveness**

(i.e., how quickly does the vendor respond when you have a problem, and how knowledgeable and helpful is their service team?)



INVEST IN A SCALABLE SOLUTION


Software that is scalable in design simply means that it can easily grow with your business, at minimal cost to you. Factors include customizations, number of users, current database structure, and inputs and outputs like reports and connectivity to your other database systems. Scalability is very important for small businesses, because they are dynamic in growth.

When choosing a software solution, you'll want to strike a balance between ease of use and a multitude of features.

More features are not necessarily better if you're never going to use them. However, you'll want to weigh each offered feature carefully; just because you don't currently need a given feature doesn't mean you won't utilize it or require it in the near future.

Intuitive interfaces...finally

One factor that will help you transition to a new software provider is the fact that, overall, recently released computer devices and services—especially those created by companies who devote themselves full time to the development of a core product—are easy to understand. While early waves of technology required humans to operate using computer logic, newer offerings have been designed to fit a more human frame of reference.



In fact, by selecting a software that is tailored to your industry, you may find that it is actually easier to use than your existing solution.

This is very good news for any company that finds itself having to upgrade from a sunseting solution earlier than they wanted to. It can reduce the amount of time and training required, resulting in fast time to value. Top-of-the-line construction management software solutions offer one-on-one time with an account manager and can be implemented in weeks, not months; training for your entire team can take as little as three to six hours via live sessions.

How do you identify a comprehensive, yet user-friendly, product? Make sure that the software vendor is using customer feedback to inform their product development.



Truly agile software platforms remain ahead of their competitors with respect to product advancements due to a focus on culling customer feedback and incorporating it into the development roadmap. If a company has multiple avenues of communication with their customers—direct feedback, focus groups, online forums, etc.—it's a sign they are tailoring their innovations to actual on-the-ground needs and are creating solutions that are in step with the industry's overall evolution.

Software that relies on customer feedback for development has the unique advantage of responding to your business more quickly, resolving universal system issues from a single code base, and soliciting feedback on platform enhancements. Contributing to its ease of use, cloud-based SaaS will update automatically during nighttime, non-peak hours, which means you are always working with the latest features available. This method of updating is not only convenient, but free, with no hidden maintenance fees.

07

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Details Count

When your team can share information in real time, it expedites the entire construction process. Therefore, the more detailed the functionalities—and the more specific they are to real-world construction management tasks—the more efficiencies will be realized. This can quickly add up to improved productivity.

When using your construction management software, you should be able to:

- + Monitor project health from one comprehensive dashboard
- + Distribute, track, and approve contracts and change orders
- + Review punch list items with their up-to-the-minute open or closed status
- + Mark up drawings, link RFIs, drop punch items, and track revisions
- + Take jobsite photos, attach them to files and send them where needed
- + Look up building codes, specifications, and manufacturers' instructions
- + Fill out and track electronic time cards
- + Easily create and manage meeting minutes and create action items



08

Future-proofing isn't magic

Finding a solution that will work for your business now and in the future takes careful purchasing. Stability and consistency are just as important in the new business landscape as they were in the old one, and those qualities are best achieved with solutions built by construction experts, for construction experts.

Following tech fads, or adopting solutions that are provided by companies that deliver construction management software as an afterthought, can cost your company time, money, and possibly jobs. You don't have the bandwidth to keep solution-hopping. So make this the year you select a platform that is going to meet your needs today and evolve with your business to meet the needs of tomorrow.

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