

SCHEDULING SOFTWARE MISCONCEPTIONS

By Jennifer Vogel

For years, the construction industry has struggled to find a viable solution to the drag on productivity. This productivity drag is due to schedules that constantly change, capital assets that are difficult to locate and track, the ongoing need to dispatch resources to the right job at the right time, and the ability to communicate essential information to key people.

What those in the industry should know is that there are solutions available to help. These solutions, in the form of software programs, solve issues like scheduling and resource planning. This new technology replaces the whiteboards, erase boards, and multiple spreadsheets—the industry status quos—with electronic whiteboards and computer or Web-based programs. The software allows users to run their companies efficiently, effectively, and easily, all via server networks or the Web. Information is shared instantly throughout the company, organized in a centralized location, and easily accessible to all needing the information.

So if this scheduling software makes things so much easier, not to mention improves overall productivity, why isn't everyone in the industry using it?

There seem to be misconceptions about scheduling software that can be categorized into one of the following areas:

- Solutions do not exist
- Resistance to change
- Thought patterns
- Time and effort

SOLUTIONS DO NOT EXIST

Many in the industry simply do not know scheduling solutions exist. Scheduling software is a newer solution (compared to estimating and project management solutions that have been around for awhile and are heavily marketed) that is just starting

to have a major impact on the construction industry. Those in the industry will start to hear and see more of software scheduling solutions as word of mouth and marketing start to elevate to a much higher level in the next few years. For now, entering keywords and phrases like “construction scheduling software” or “construction resource scheduling” into search

engines will provide a wide array of possible solutions from which to choose. Help is out there, and it does exist.

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

This is yet another reason why many people do not know scheduling solutions exist: an overall resistance to change. Users are not out there actively looking for a new way to schedule. Change is not easy. The majority of people do not go out seeking change. Rather, they are reactive to it. Many companies have had systems in place for years, and employees and owners have become accustomed to these systems. Scheduling may take place via whiteboards, erase boards, corkboards, spreadsheets, sticky notes, human memory, or any combination of those. The scheduling methods in place have worked thus far, albeit not efficiently or effectively, and these methods have evolved into a daily routine that is predictable, understood, and never questioned. A routine is tough to break. Yet just because a company is used to scheduling its resources a certain way does not necessarily mean it is the best way.

With new technologies out there, the old ways need to give way to the new. Have an open mind about new ways of scheduling, if not for the sake of increased productivity, then for the sake of competition.

THOUGHT PATTERNS

One of the greatest misconceptions in the construction industry



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is the idea that “the company is too small for scheduling software.” This may be true. The company may, at the moment, be very small and not in immediate need of any software to help schedule the few resources it has. However, if contractors want to expand and increase revenues (which are essential to staying productive in the industry), then they will most likely be adding resources (such as employees and equipment). These added resources will need to be scheduled, and the methods that worked for scheduling a few resources may not work so well when that number starts to double and triple. A contractor may start to “forget” things, such as the location of a certain excavator. He may be reminded of its whereabouts by a call from Mrs. Johnson stating that she still has a bulldozer sitting on her front lawn.

No matter how small the company, it is important to be proactive. Start to implement a scheduling system prior to the company’s growth and expansion. Get comfortable with it, and allow it to help the company grow with efficiency. Contractors have enough to deal with as their companies start to grow. Learning how to use a new scheduling system in the midst of transitioning growth does not have to be one of them.

TIME AND EFFORT

Many owners and employees think it just takes too much time and effort to implement and learn a new way to schedule their resources. While there is always a learning curve involved in learning a new technique, in most instances, software simply takes the necessary information and displays it in a different format. The setup may be different, but the important information is still there, right at the user’s fingertips. Just work through that initial learning curve and get used to seeing things in a slightly different way. Scheduling software has been proven to increase overall productivity. It is worth a little time and effort.

USING THE NEW SYSTEM EFFECTIVELY

There is something else worth mentioning. It is up to the owner, supervisor, or project manager to ensure that the right software system is matched with the right person. In many instances, software is introduced, but the person using it just does not put in the effort or think it was needed in the first place. Make sure the person being trained to use the software has a vested interest in it and that the company has his or her buy-in prior to its implementation. This will save a great deal of headaches down the road.

In conclusion, it is time for construction companies to stop wasting precious profits on lost productivity. Despite the industry’s low margins, over half of companies’ productivity losses are due to relatively simple reasons, including the following issues:

- Waiting for equipment and crews to arrive
- Spending too much on high-cost capital equipment rentals
- Being unable to match the right crew and resources with the right job
- Not getting the right information to the right people
- Misplaced information

Look to solve these productivity losses by finding the right technology that fits with your company’s needs. The software on the market today makes each workday run more smoothly and profitably. ♦

MIGHTY PERFORMANCE



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