Interview with a Construction Manager

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Are you wasting time with technology?

 We were recently onsite with a project team from a US Top 10 Healthcare Construction Management Firm.

This project team has a multi-project contract with an owner that will run for the next 5 years. This project team is responsible for pre-construction and operations for each project. Our goal was to get a complete understanding of how their cloud-based technology infrastructure was benefitting their job site team for pre-construction and project management collaboration.

We sat down with two members of the team that had built a document management folder structure on a cloud based program called Box. This solution included an extensive folder structure with access to information such as RFIs, Submittals, Progress Sets, and even bid documents for each project. They were accessing the information via their iPads and bringing up on dual big screen TVs in their job site trailer.

Read the interview below to see how suprised we were to see that this system has actually created bottlenecks in their workflow and actually decreased their efficiency.

NP: First, let's talk Pre-construction. One of our most frequently heard pains is that it simply takes too much time to contact the subs to find out whether they intend to bid a project. How do you solicit subs?

A: We add the subs email addresses manually to Box and send them a link to the project files.

NP: How many subs per trade do you invite?

A: We try to invite 5 to 8 subs per trade but have to make sure we can find that many. Often times because we are relatively new to the market we have to use other resources to find those subs.

NP: How do you know if a sub intends to bid a project?

A: We can see if they previewed the documents or downloaded them through the reporting in Box.

NP: If they've previewed the project, does that confirm that they are going to bid?
A: No, We have to call all the subs in the critical trades and most of the other trades depending on how our coverage looks already.

NP: How do you document bidding intentions in Box?

A: We track responses in Excel. We input the information manually.

NP: That sounds like a headache. How much time do you spend making these phone calls and tracking these responses?

A: On the last project we spent two weeks on the phone with subs.

Does this sound familiar? If so, check out our Bid Reminder Services at NextPlans. One easy set up allows you to send automatic reminders to your subs on any schedule you choose. Our tests have show that this service drastically reduces time spent on phone calls and increases response rates by as much as 500%.

We continued our discussion, moving on to their method (using Box) for project document management and collaboration.

NP: Your folder structure is very organized and detailed for storing documentation during the construction process. How do you use it to exchange information between project team members?
A: We actually just share information with team members through our site.

NP: Can those team members share information back to you through the site (Designers, consultants, subs, owners)?

A: No. Mostly information is sent to us via email from project team members and then we log it in Box.

NP: Is Box, then, more of an internal mechanism for you to store information?

A: Storing and sending out information at this point. We have been unable to fully collaborate through the system.

NP: Speaking of collaboration, can all participants annotate and comment within Box on project information?

A: No, we actually use Bluebeam to annotate. I am sure that others annotate within their own mark-up tools or mark-up hard copies.

NP: So, without a fully integrated file exchange system and a check-in/check-out annotation process because all project team members are using different annotation tools, you are not really collaborating in Box?

A: No, I think the benefit is more for us internally at this time.

NP: We noticed that you have standard sheet names on the drawings, do you have to keep a drawing log for the project?
A: Yes, we keep a drawing log and track the information in our Construction Management software.

NP: Who is responsible for the file naming of drawings and specifications?

A: We do that before we upload the information to Box.

NP: How much time does that take?
A: It depends on the amount of information that has to be named. The more documents, the more time it takes to name them.

NP: On a multi project contract, how do you anticipate managing all of this in addition to you other responsibilities once you have more than one active job.

A: We anticipate bringing in an Office Engineer or two if it becomes too much to handle.

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