Sage Construction and Real Estate

Cloud Computing and the Construction Industry

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What is cloud computing?

"Cloud" is a technology word with varying definitions. According to some, it refers to the use of virtual servers where users access stored data through an Internet connection. Providing access in this manner is frequently referred to as using cloud-based or web-based services. Others refer to the cloud as including any application that is used outside of a company's firewall. "Moving to the cloud" can mean anything from increasing data capacity without having to invest in additional IT infrastructure to licensing a new generation of subscription-based and web-viewable software. The cloud definition often is further expanded to include the use of mobile devices such as smart phones or tablets.

Cloud computing and the construction industry

Using the cloud in the construction industry has strong appeal because of the constant change of workers and frequent setup of new jobsite locations. Many workers need better access to company data to aid in timely, well-supported decision making and reporting while working in the field.

Conversely, the main office balances the need to bill, pay invoices, produce financial reports, process payroll, and plan logistics with the need to have offsite workers access and update information to support these functions—no matter their location. Traditional client/server software solutions provide users access to this information from designated locations. But cloud technology has opened up new possibilities that allow instant connections to be made beyond these traditional preconfigured office sites. It is now possible with the cloud to tap into back-office information and reporting functionality from any location in a very secure way—wherever one can access the Internet.

Construction companies are uniquely positioned to benefit from the cloud's ability to provide greater freedom and ease to access information anytime, anywhere—from satellite offices, job sites or customer locations that span across the globe.

One example is True Value Homes (TVH), a large construction company with many locations. TVH has seen immediate benefits after transitioning to the cloud and giving employees with the proper credentials access to applications through a secure, web-based environment. Before TVH moved to the cloud, TVH was running operations for 17 sites, and employees could only update project information and perform system-dependent tasks at TVH's corporate office. As a result, TVH saw a heavy influx of paperwork that was hand-carried into the corporate office for processing and approval. Today, TVH uses the cloud to provide information and system access for its 500 users through new web-based applications. "We want to make sure that our employees get the best out of their workplace," Arun Nehru, TVH's director, said. "What we are telling employees is that [wherever you need to work], the applications are available—from office, home, or outside. They need not come to [the] office to work."

Collaboration among contractors and owners

Leveraging cloud-based services also extends beyond the workings of a single construction company. Today's construction professionals work within a team, but "team" has taken on a whole new meaning. General contractors, subcontractors, and suppliers are expected to have a high level of transparency and accountability to the property owner. Team members also need to be highly collaborative in order to satisfy the customer and create an edge in a highly competitive industry. An edge that will set the team up for receiving future business and opportunities for growth. Cloud-based technologies are best suited to connect all critical team members, increase opportunities for team collaboration, and increase management and owner visibility. Having access to the right information at the right time creates opportunity for enhanced collaboration and minimizes mistakes and rework costly to project profitability.

To be the additive needed to produce these results, cloud solutions should ensure that team members can easily find and see the information they need at the time they need it most. And management needs to be absolutely certain that they ultimately control who sees the information provided and can limit or restrict access as needed to protect sensitive data. As general contractors, subcontractors, and owners each look to the web to leverage its capabilities, top areas of concern will continue to be ease-of-use, security, and timely access to the right functionality and information. Addressing these concerns with the right technology will free up project teams to focus on their work, producing quality work on time and within budget.

Mobility

As in all industries, it's become very common to see construction workers use their own mobile devices while working on the job. According to Constructech's 2011 IT survey, the type of devices used by construction workers vary as much as the job sites do. "The smart phone is still the most commonly used device at the jobsite (81% of survey respondents). Laptops (69%) and tablets (26%) also receive a significant response." Tablets are increasing rising in use on the job site.

This survey confirms the value mobile devices are offering construction companies by allowing workers to not only report from the field but "carry out project management, scheduling, punchlists, and time tracking tasks in the field today." Given the wide adoption and use of mobile devices by construction workers for personal use, today's construction software solutions need to leverage this employee interest and work to serve up the project information and capabilities in this format to propel construction productivity into the future.

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Transitioning to cloud solutions

Should your construction company scrap current investments or practices to leverage cloud technologies? It makes more sense to extend and leverage the applications you use already and invest in the cloud where there are obvious advantages to doing so, furthering your technology footprint across your field operations. Sage, the market leader in construction-specific business management software solutions, offers its customers a means to leverage their existing investments in Sage financial and operations solutions and extend their reach into the field through Sage Construction Anywhere, a cloud-based project collaboration platform. Working in conjunction with Sage 300 Construction and Real Estate (formerly Sage Timberline Office), Sage Construction Anywhere provides Sage customers and their project teams with increased mobility and access to timely, current financial and operations data housed within Sage 300 Construction and Real Estate. The solution connects people, documents, and data securely in one virtual project hub to improve collaboration and extend project visibility. In early 2013, Sage Construction Anywhere will also help Sage customers streamline the collection, reporting, and approval of employee time worked on projects in the field—providing an easy way for companies to more quickly and accurately reflect labor costs within their job costing and payroll processes.

To learn more about Sage Construction Anywhere, visit **NA.Sage.com/Sage-Construction-Anywhere** or call **1-800-628-6583**.

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15195 NW Greenbrier Pkwy

Beaverton, OR 97006-5701

800-628-6583

www.SageCRE.com