

Paperless Takeoff Technology Helps Estimating Go Green

Although construction historically has been a paper-driven industry, newly developed technologies are helping contractors move toward electronic workflow. Construction estimating is no exception. Digital takeoff technology recently arrived on the scene, allowing estimators to eliminate paper blueprints and go “green.”

With the use of digital prints, takeoffs can be performed on screen using a mouse rather than a digitizer, which delivers unparalleled accuracy. With a few clicks, a variety of color choices, line styles, fill patterns and count symbols can be accessed. When calculations are complete, quantities are transferred seamlessly to the estimate for costing purposes.

SAVINGS ACROSS THE BOARD

In construction, executing project-related tasks better, faster and cheaper means higher profits and happier clients. Making the switch to paperless takeoffs offers many advantages. In addition to saving trees, this eco-friendly technology delivers measurable savings across the board.

Cost savings. The cost to print hard copies of standard E-size drawings can run nearly \$5 per page for blueprint sets with hundreds of pages. With digital takeoff technology, there's no need to print plans, which equates to hundreds of dollars in savings per project. Paperless blueprints also eliminate the need to purchase digitizer hardware, which can save thousands of dollars.

Time savings. Performing takeoffs on screen is faster and easier than wrestling with oversized drawings and a digitizer—or worse, manually performing takeoff calculations. Depending on a contractor's current estimating process, this technology could save as much as 50 percent of an estimator's takeoff time, essentially doubling productivity.



Additional time savings occurs because there's no need to drive across town to pick up printed plans. This puts one less vehicle on the road, which is another green advantage.

Space savings. Paper plans are cumbersome because they don't fit neatly into standard file boxes. Keeping them safe, secure and organized is no simple task. Storing blueprint sets in the office provides ready access, but commercial space priced by the square foot is an expensive archiving option. A less costly alternative is offsite storage, although retrieving plans takes time—and more driving. Storing electronic blueprints on a server, however, eliminates these paper storage and retrieval issues.

As demonstrated, these elements combined have the potential to significantly lower an estimating department's overhead burden.

MORE CONVENIENT ESTIMATING

In the need-it-now world of construction, receiving digital blueprints by email or via an online plan room allows the estimating team to respond instantly to bid requests or changes.

For the construction executive charged with acquiring new work, this responsiveness provides a competitive advantage and a potentially higher bid to win ratio.

Integration of the digital takeoff technology with spreadsheets or estimating programs means takeoff quantities automatically appear in the estimate without duplicating data entry.

Having everything necessary to perform takeoffs onscreen also gives estimators greater flexibility to get the job done. Without blueprints and digitizing hardware, takeoffs can be completed from a corporate office, the jobsite or a home office.

EVALUATING SOLUTIONS

To save time, space and money while providing a more convenient tool for takeoffs, look for features that support these initiatives. Examples include:

- magnifying a single point for measurement rather than continuously zooming in and out of a blueprint;
- viewing two plan sets simultaneously in order to toggle between job specifications and the takeoff;

- integrating with popular online plan rooms and other business tools;
- supporting a variety of digital file types, including PDF files, TIF files, CAL files and many different AutoCAD formats; and
- intuitive navigation.

A GREENER BOTTOM LINE

Implementing tools that boost estimating efficiency is a smart business strategy, especially for contractors that want to increase production without adding more staff. In this regard, digital takeoff technology delivers a relatively quick return on investment.

In today's construction marketplace, companies must continually seek ways to streamline processes and control costs to remain competitive. Adopting digital takeoff technology supports the less-is-more approach to managing paper and gives contractors a greener bottom line.

Jeffrey Gerardi is president of Construction Management Software. For more information, call (800) 255-7407, ext. 104, email jeffg@proest.com or visit www.proest.com.