

Identifying the Best Project Management Software for Your Business

The final section of our three-part series looking at how residential builders are embracing technology.

Today's homes have come a long way from four-walled, dirt-floored log cabins. And the skilled labor required to build them has been strained in recent years, and even more so during the Covid-19 pandemic. Builders are finding they must do more work – and more *complicated* work – with smaller crews.

Thankfully, today's construction management technology has also come a long way. Project management software allows builders to schedule crews efficiently and maximize their time. With the right project management tools in place, builders can run lean without dropping the ball.

Producing More with Less

Project management software has been around for decades, but older programs may not be robust enough to manage the state of residential construction today. Fletcher Groves III, vice president of engineering firm SAI Consulting, says older systems based on the “critical path method” (CPM) aren't designed to manage a portfolio of projects or maximize production cycle time, and they rarely take resource availability in account. This is a major challenge when the skilled labor shortage makes available resources (read: crew members) hard to come by.

Additionally, in an article for *Builder* magazine, Groves says CPM usually only offers a buffer of additional time to protect the completion date of each task, but not necessarily of the whole project. Of course, portfolios of projects, resource availability, and efficient turnover are key to homebuilding and remodeling success. With this in mind, Groves recommends that builders look for project management software using Critical Chain Project Management (CCPM). In addition to managing multiple projects, he says CCPM is much more aware of system constraints in a way that allows the program to reduce the length of construction schedules.

“It also specifies a set of rules preventing behaviors that consume (and waste) the safety that CPM builds into task durations,” Groves says, “It installs a release mechanism that ‘pulls’ starts into the system and keeps work-in-process at the levels required to produce faster cycle times.” Essentially, CCPM programs are smart enough to calculate the best production timelines based on the resources (i.e., staff) you have on hand, and to keep that staff busy by continually rolling new work into the production cycle.

More than Just Scheduling

While resource scheduling and on-time delivery are key to finding an effective project management solution, the experts at Software Connect note that finance-related features are of the utmost importance to construction firms looking for project management software. According to a survey they conducted in 2018, at least two-thirds of construction software buyers want to see job-costing (72%), project tracking (72%), and project estimating features (67%). Other similar features include job costing, bid management, and construction estimating.

“A fully integrated construction management software lets you manage all task management solutions within one system, rather than having several disjointed software products that may or may not communicate well with each other,” the organization explains in its construction software buyers’ guide.

Selecting the Right Tool

As with every category of building products, builders have a multitude of project management software providers to choose from. So many in fact, that companies like Software Connect have built their business by helping other companies sift through available options and choose the right software for their needs. Capterra and PAT Research also offer these services.

Based on reviews from these firms, Software offerings from Procore, PlanGrid, CoConstruct, and BuilderTrend are among the most popular brands for residential construction companies. Several of these brands also offer project management for commercial builders whose needs may differ from the residential side of the industry. Available buyers’ guides will help builders compare features, pricing, training, and tech support for the brands they’re considering.

In an industry where “on-time and on-budget” delivery is essential, and everyone needs to do more with less, finding a software with the right combination of bidding, accounting, estimating, and project tracking features will allow construction pros to keep projects on track financially, as well as on the production timeline.

Embracing Digital

Overall, in researching and sharing this three-part series with you, it’s easy to see that opportunities to incorporate digital solutions exist at all levels of the residential construction business.

At GP, we encourage our customers to ask questions and make informed business decisions. We hope this series has inspired you to investigate digital options for your company.

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