How Subcontractors Can Use Construction Management Software

Let's say your crew arrives onsite and it turns out that you were blocked from doing a critical part of your job: for example, someone forgot to shut off the utilities or the areas you were supposed to be working on are locked up tight. When the superintendent finds out that the work wasn't done that day you try to explain why, but you can't find your daily report or photos that prove your case. After a dozen phone calls and emails, the dispute reaches a stalemate, and the potentially lucrative professional relationship with you and the GC grows uneasy.

If anything like that sounds familiar, you might want to look for a better way to manage your crews and make the handoff of information to the office a little faster and easier. That's where construction management software for subcontractors comes in.

However, such software can be expensive and ineffective, so we talked to actual subcontractors and the GCs they work for to find out what system was best for them.

Construction Management Software for Subcontractors can be "A Useless Ferrari"

That's what John Albert, the founder of Unified Building Group, called construction management software that is too complicated for superintendents and subcontractors in the field to figure out, and it's arguably the biggest problem with construction management software today. "Whenever you adopt a new technology you have reservations because you spend a lot of money and then the problem is no one can use it," Albert says, "It could be the Ferrari of software but it's useless if no one can drive it."

That's why the first thing that construction management software for subcontractors should be is simple and straightforward. It's the only way to make sure that your foremen in the field are going to use it, and that the PMs in the office are going to get the information they need without having to chase it down.

Why Subcontractors Should Switch From Pen and Paper

If you're still submitting pen and paper time cards and daily reports to your supers, you're probably spending a solid chunk of time per week scribbling notes, deciphering your own handwriting, and filling out report templates. Or, maybe you try to avoid submitting your dailies altogether, or just occasionally forget to do them - it's not like you joined the construction industry so you could write reports every day. But then, your super chases you down and gets frustrated with the lack of communication. It's not exactly the smoothest system, and all it does is give you headaches, and strains the business relationship between you and the GC.

Or, you might say that you've already got a construction management software system in place, and that you've been using it with no issues for 25 years: excel spreadsheets. While you may think that this is the most efficient method for field management, ask yourself these questions:

- Does it take you over 30 minutes to an hour and a half some nights? Noah Anderson-Davies of Elkins Construction says "when I didn't avoid doing it, dailies would take anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour and a half, especially if you collaborate with subcontractors." And that's just too long.
- Can you add and manage your photos easily? Usually, subcontractors take photos on their phone throughout the day, then download them to a computer at the end of the day, name them, and put them into folders for safekeeping. If you've ever needed a photo in a daily report or to show what work was done, then you know what we're talking about.

- Are you entering reports into your excel sheet or pen-and-paper log and then having to copy the same information again in another system? Double entry is a huge waste of time. That's time that could be better spent doing literally anything else other than the same work twice.

We understand that some subcontractors out there might be a little hesitant to ditch their old process for something new. For years companies have promised subcontractors and GCs alike a "silver bullet" as Albert puts it, a technology that would sweep in and solve all their problems communicating with each other. The reality turns out to be expensive, confusing, and always leaves either the subcontractor or the GC frustrated.

However, the newest innovations in construction management software are easy to use and allow you to produce professional reports that help you avoid the problems of a pen and paper or spreadsheet method. Plus, the reports you turn in will be clean, impressive, and something you can be proud of.

Construction Management Software for Subcontractors Settles Disputes

But what about the other side of the coin? It's easy enough to see how construction management software for subcontractors benefits the GC: they get a clean log of all the work that the subcontractor has done. But a good subcontractor management solution has to work the other way as well, and that means protecting the subcontractor and their interests when a dispute arises. In those cases, you are going to need a lot more than a spreadsheet and photos hidden on someone's phone somewhere.

Take Sam Bacon, the manager of Green Circle Demolition. Much of what they do relies on other crews having turned off utilities and other tasks before they can do their job. This relationship naturally leads to some disputes about who turned off what when, and that's why Bacon needs good evidence to back him up. "In this business, he who has the best information always wins," says Bacon. Using construction management software for subcontractors with photos built in, Green Circle has proof of the work they do and can bring that proof up in seconds in case of a disagreement. "If there's a dispute all I have to do is forward them the report with the photo proving it," Bacon states, "There are no ten phone calls going back and forth, it's all right there in the report. It provides you with the ability to prove you're in the right and come to the conversation with the back up you need."

The ability to quickly and easily settle disputes between contractors and subcontractors is a huge benefit to construction management software for subcontractors because it helps save the relationship between the two: and any subcontractor can tell you that the majority of their business comes from working with the same GCs for years. If you can prove your position to the GC in case of a dispute then you can save not only time and stress in emails and phone calls but a potentially long-lasting, worthwhile working relationship.

Gone are the days of dealing with handwritten daily reports, missing jobsite photos, and unsolved disputes between you and GCs. Save yourself the time and headaches, and give construction management software a shot. Implementing software with your company doesn't have to be overcomplicated or stressful. Effective construction management software for subcontractors is easy to use, organized and can help avoid disputes, while also allowing you to work more quickly and efficiently. And those are benefits you and your GC can certainly both agree on.

This article was prepared by Raken, specialists in construction daily reports and field management.