Sage Construction and Real Estate

Cloud Computing and the Construction Industry
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What is cloud computing? What can it do for me?

Being “in the cloud” is the latest catchphrase in technology discussions, but the term has many definitions. According to some, it refers to virtual servers that allow users to access stored data via an internet connection. Providing access in this manner is frequently referred to as using cloud-based or web-based services.

Others expand the cloud to include any application used outside of a company’s firewall. As InfoWorld has noted, moving to the cloud can mean anything from increasing data capacity without having to invest in additional infrastructure to licensing new cloud-based software. This can further be expanded to include the use of mobile devices such as smart phones (e.g. Blackberry, iPhone) or tablets (e.g. iPad).

Cloud computing and the construction industry

But how does this relate to the construction industry?

The construction industry balances back office functions—billing, paying invoices, running financial reports, payroll, planning logistics—with the physical presence needed on the job site or in a client’s office. Today’s technological solutions must be able to serve users in both work settings.

As a result, making mission critical business applications available remotely is a hot topic these days. Remote access allows staff to work from any location without being tied to a specific physical location. With the amount of consolidation, decentralization of offices, travel-based positions, and project work being done in different regions of the country or even internationally, being able to offer solid remote access technology to employees is critical for a construction company’s success.

For many companies, solving this challenge means moving some of its applications to the cloud.

One construction company, True Value Homes (TVH), is able to give any employee with proper credentials access to these applications through a secure, web-based environment. Before the move, TVH was running operations on 17 sites, and employees could only work in the office so all papers needed to be brought into the central office for processing and approval. Whereas TVH once had 100 personal computers for 100 employees, now 500 users can access its 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 between contractors, owners/clients

Leveraging cloud-based services also extends beyond the workings of a single construction company. As Constructech’s 2011 IT survey notes, “today’s construction professional also needs to be highly collaborative. The word ‘team’ has taken on a whole new meaning in the construction industry. Every team needs to obtain a high level of transparency and accountability for the property owner. Overall, construction companies will be more collaborative, using technology to connect all project team members— from subs to general contractors to owners—in one central location.”

Yet, it is highly unlikely that each of the project team members utilizes the same back office business management applications. So, as general contractors, subcontractors and owners individually look to the web to leverage its capabilities, it will be critical to look at ways that technology can ensure the secure and timely exchange of project information between them.

Mobility

As noted by Constructech’s 2011 IT survey, contractors will then take project information “out to the jobsite with mobile devices as well as applying a host of applications on these mobile devices.” As the survey reports, construction companies are reporting from the field as well as “carrying out project management, scheduling, punchlists, and time tracking tasks in the field today.”

This is evidenced by the growing momentum in the use of mobile technologies in the construction industry. Yet, the type of device varies as much as the job sites do. According to the survey, “the smartphone is still one of the most commonly used devices at the jobsite (81% of survey respondents). Laptops (69%) and tablets (26%) also receive a significant response.” Given the advances in and adoption of tablets such as Apple’s iPad over the past few years, growth is anticipated in the use of the tablet in the construction industry as well.

Given the fast moving area of mobility, today’s business management solutions need to support the highly mobile workforce of the construction industry today and into the future.

Leveraging today’s technology for the future

Does that mean that your construction company needs to scrap everything it’s using today for new cloud-based applications? In today’s economy, many companies are looking more towards extending the applications that they are using today into the cloud where it makes the most sense.

Sage, the market leader in construction-specific business management software solutions, provides field reporting, time tracking, and other web-based or mobile services through extensions to its Sage Timberline Office, Sage Master Builder and Sage Timberline Enterprise products. In the coming year, Sage will further extend its cloud-based offering with web-based tools to help construction companies better manage their projects, communicate between team members and vendors, and deliver information whenever and wherever it’s needed—in the office, on the jobsite, at a client’s office.
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Sage Development Partners

More than 1000 Sage construction and real estate customers use mobile or web-based solutions from the following authorized Sage development partners:

- AboutTime Technologies
- Austin Lane Technologies
- BuilderMT
- Concord Technologies
- Data-Maxx Technologies
- Digital Business Integration (hh2 Web Services)
- eTenantCare
- Econz Wireless
- FieldConnect
- HomeFront Software
- Jumpstart Wireless
- mJobTime Corporation
- Partners Technology Group
- Property Solutions

For more information, visit www.sagecre.com/Products-and-Solutions/Additional-Solutions