

## Wireless Technology Helps Construction Industry Improve Bottom Line

*By Todd E. Julien, General Manager for Nextel*

It's a \$3.9 trillion-per-year industry, but construction ranks 87th globally among industries in the adoption of technology.

That could easily change with new wireless data technology poised for rapid adoption in the industry. Why now? It's about bottom line improvements. Productivity enhancements offered by newly developed services can reduce and sometimes eliminate unnecessary mistakes, time, energy and costs, all while keeping projects on track.

Research firm Daratech estimates that anywhere from 5 to 10 percent of a construction project's cost can be saved by using Web-based technologies. Worldwide, such tools could save as much as \$400 billion annually by 2004.

Early adopters of wireless technology will no doubt have a competitive advantage, overcoming the inefficiencies inherent in processes that have traditionally been highly manual. Already new applications include online project management, extranet Web sites that bring contractors and suppliers together in a digital marketplace, and real-time collaboration over the Internet.

But someone is still tied to a desktop, or lugging around a laptop, to access and apply this information and these applications. No doubt, fully utilizing the technology has been a challenge for the construction industry where the majority of professionals work out in the field, not behind a desk.

That's about to change. At a recent Construction Industry Institute conference on project management, wireless data was touted as the biggest breakthrough of e-business in the construction industry. In fact, the need to solve problems instantly and communicate efficiently anywhere, anytime is fueling a \$2.3 billion industry in designing, building and providing Web-based tools for the construction industry.

And these high-tech companies are taking modern mobile wireless data to the field. Some of the newest technology available includes: Multifunctional phones that combine cellular, two-way (SMR) radio, text and numeric messaging and always-connected Internet/data access.

Java-enabled mobile phones that house industry-specific applications that operate with or without a network signal, allowing users to collect and calculate information where it happens in the field. Mobile office access to behind-the-firewall corporate e-mail, calendar and datebook information. Built-in business networks that allow for instant contact with clients, suppliers and other contractors related to the construction industry. Real-time, two-way, work force management and the ability to remotely track time-critical data, such as labor hours and project costs. Wireless Internet that allows construction professionals to access project extranets, intranets and Web-based productivity tools including time sheets, fleet management solutions and dispatch tools. And just around the corner are faster connections, multimedia experiences with text, sounds, images and video, and the expansion of mobile commerce.

The technology advancements couldn't be at a timelier juncture. A report from the Construction Industry Institute cites many challenges facing the industry in upcoming years. Owners will increasingly partner with engineering firms, construction companies and major equipment suppliers to build facilities. With projects built in virtual reality, lines are blurring between planning, engineering, construction, operations, maintenance and decommissioning, the Institute reports. These trends are expected to increase project complexity and require more comprehensive project management skills.

Gone are the days when delivering buildings on time and within budget were enough. Gone are the days of number crunching and traditional supply chains.

We live in an age where technology can change business by managing information in new, dynamic ways and creating collaborative, interconnected paths among crews, contractors, consultants and customers. Improve your bottom line, go wireless.

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