

Mann's Construction



Mann's Construction is a family-owned general construction business founded by Stephen Mann in 1999. His daughter, Katrina Owens, joined the company at its inception right

out of college and she and her father handle most of the estimating and project management for the small firm's large construction projects.

Based in Monroe, La., Mann's Construction serves the state of Louisiana, as well as portions of Arkansas, Mississippi, and Texas, with an office in Dallas. Mann's Construction is a \$20-25 million company with approximately 30 employees that perform all types of commercial construction projects from churches and schools, to banks, doctor's offices, and office buildings, and self-performs finished carpentry work, too.

For years, Owens and her father performed takeoffs and estimates with pencil and paper. The most technology they used was a calculator and a digitizer pen they purchased at a local home improvement store.

"The biggest disadvantage of the manual method was that our quantities were not as accurate as they needed to be," explained Owens. "Depending on the size of the job, the takeoff could take up to two weeks. It took us much more time to get a more accurate number because we had to go back and double check the regular architectural scale to see how far off we were."

The Need for Automation

Owens explained how the firm had always been fairly competitive in the estimating and bid market, but also knew that their overhead was increasing and that they could leverage technology to help better manage their time.

In her college years, Owens gained experience with different methods of estimating from paper and pencil to estimating software. Sharing her insights with her father, the two decided it was necessary to find a cost-effective solution to handle takeoff and estimating more efficiently. When the two attended the World of Concrete tradeshow on a mission to find a solution that met their needs, they saw several demos of various software options. Ultimately, they selected Viewpoint Estimating for seamless takeoff and estimating.

Estimating with Ease

Mann's Construction is using Viewpoint Estimating for digital takeoff of electronic plans and digitized takeoff for handling traditional blueprints. "We have reduced our takeoff time from two weeks to just four or five days now depending on the size of the job," said Owens. "And, the takeoffs are much more accurate. The software gives me a way to track every item that I takeoff, so, if I'm taking off concrete, I know every square inch of concrete I took off. There is no question of whether I picked it up in the estimate."

CUSTOMER OVERVIEW

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She further explained that if someone has a question about whether an item was picked up, she can easily go directly to the line item to find it. It is also very easy for anyone in the field to go into Viewpoint Estimating and see what has been done. Owens also uses Viewpoint Earthwork to measure cut and fill quantities quickly and accurately. "This is great software," she stated.

Verifying accuracy is critical to the type of work Mann's performs. Owens explains an advantage they have with Viewpoint Estimating: "At the time we purchased Viewpoint Estimating, we really like the Visual Assembly feature. It is so user-friendly and a lot easier to use than other products out there. It was easy for me to jump right in and use and because so much was automated, my father did not have to go behind me and check up on everything I did to make sure I didn't miss anything."

The Visual Assemblies and verification features in Viewpoint Estimating help provide a comprehensive graphical checklist of individual cost items that are stored within the firm's database and help develop an estimate from one takeoff measurement. Prior to Viewpoint Estimating, Owens explained that they lacked the confidence that they would pick up all the rebar or footings because they were looking at numbers on paper versus a 3-D visual diagram of the object being estimated.

Managing Projects Efficiently

As projects are won, the handoff to the project manager has become much more streamlined. Previously, piles of paper would be handed over to the project manager who would have to dig through the paper files to figure out where to go from there. "We knew what was going on, but there was a lot of paperwork being circulated and we always ran the risk of losing documents even if we made multiple copies," said Owens. "Now, being able to go into Viewpoint Estimating and easily find information is a definite plus."

As a small company managing large-scale jobs, effective project management is essential for Mann's Construction to build quality projects, on time, and make a reasonable profit. The contractor has added to its processes ProContractor™ by Viewpoint's web-based Construction Project Management (CPM) solution, which provides seamless capabilities for bidding, budgeting, scheduling, field reporting, documents, resources, cost control, and more. Owens and her dad can view up-to-the-minute schedules and information to help keep their jobs on track.

"CPM is a great solution to manage any project," said Owens. "We run everything from the bidding side where we send out and track bid invitations to all of our subcontractors to processing daily field reports, purchase orders, submittals, change orders, and much more. It has improved managing projects tremendously because there is never a question of whether something was sent or not or has been approved."

When the firm first started out, they would create a bid invitation and had to sit at a fax machine and hand fax every bid invitation for a project, which were about 500 at the time. Now, with the larger scale projects, they can have up to 1,200 bids for any given project. "Most of the time, I was just waiting until the day of bid to know if the faxes actually went through or that I was going to get something back. ProContractor™ by Viewpoint CPM allows us to have a bid response on the computer rather than have bids faxed in."

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She added: "The submittal tracking in ProContractor™ by Viewpoint is a dream. Before, we handled the transmittals and submittals through our accounting software, but it didn't track dates, so we didn't know when things came in or went out. A lot of things would fall through the cracks. Now, we have so much information that it is hard for anything to get lost. I know when items come into the office, when they were sent to the architect, and when they were returned. It has truly simplified our lives and has helped us to manage the amount of work we have much more profitably."

ProContractor™ by Viewpoint also helps the general contractor efficiently handle the workflow associated with change orders — preventing costly mistakes and capturing potential opportunities for profit. In the past, Owens would email out change order requests to all those who were directly affected by the change and would have to wait until all the numbers were received before putting it back in the accounting system. Now, she can simply go into the cost issue in ProContractor™ by Viewpoint and send it to all appropriate parties. "All I have to do is click a button and it automatically creates a request for quotes. I can send it from there and the subcontractors can use the attached form to reply back. It helps prevent change orders from slipping through the cracks and ensures we bill for every change."

Empowering Success

Part of the firm's success with Viewpoint Estimating and ProContractor can be attributed back to the training they have received. "Viewpoint's training is top notch," said Owens. "I have done both group sessions and one-on-one training and would definitely recommend both. The trainers are excellent. They are very nice and helpful and are able to get on your level and answer any questions you might have."

She also felt that the customer service team at Viewpoint is extremely helpful. If she's had a question, the team has quickly responded and provided her with a solution.

"Viewpoint Estimating has helped us become a lot more competitive in the bid market," Owens concluded. "My bid record now compared to before using the software is much more successful. Right now, with the economy the way that it is, you have to make sure you pick up everything because you are bidding at much lower profit margins. Viewpoint Estimating has also allowed us to retain one estimator instead of two or three and one project manager versus three or four if we were using the manual processes for the same level of work. The software has empowered us to bid more accurately, keep our overhead down, and be more competitive on larger scale projects."

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