

Adkim Builders Inc.

To improve the reliability of scheduling subcontractors, Adkim Builders created an integrated schedule management and notification system based on Microsoft Project. Customer satisfaction soared and productivity increased by nearly 600% as a result.

Vital Statistics: Adkim Builders, Inc. Baltimore, MD Norm Seff, President

Industry: Residential and Commercial Remodeling

Employees: 4

Software Programs: Microsoft Project Microsoft Schedule+ Microsoft Word Microsoft Excel Microsoft Publisher Microsoft PowerPoint®

Hardware: Pentium 90 laptop Timex Data Link Watch

Results of Using Project: "Microsoft Project has created a sense of 'team' and drives our business."

Adkim Builders Inc. is a professional residential and commercial design/build and remodeling company based in Baltimore, MD. The firm specializes in remodeling projects in upscale neighborhoods in the Baltimore - Washington, D.C., metropolitan area.

Enhanced Productivity

Microsoft® Project greatly improved the company's ability to manage more construction projects with fewer staff members. Adkim used between eight and nine employees to manage three projects in 1995. Increased use of Microsoft Project has enabled the company to manage nine projects in 1996 with only four employees, a productivity increase of nearly 600%.

Adkim President Norm Seff initially began to use Microsoft Project to help subcontractors improve their reliability in committing to scheduling dates. Before using Microsoft Project, Norm spent countless hours on the telephone contacting subcontractors and suppliers about any changes in schedule. This time-consuming method of communication was not always successful and often resulted in costly delays.

The number of follow-up telephone calls made to subcontractors and suppliers dropped from more than 60 per day to zero after Adkim linked Microsoft Project to an automatic fax notification system. Any changes in scheduling, such as delays due to weather or in receiving permits, can be instantly updated using Microsoft Project. All suppliers and subcontractors receive a detailed summary of changes to their schedules via a fax modem, which eliminates the need for telephone calls and subsequent questions.

Increased Customer Satisfaction

Adkim uses Microsoft Project in a number of different ways to boost customer satisfaction for both new and existing customers. During initial sales calls, Norm makes a presentation using a Microsoft Project schedule which never fails to impress customers. The ability to instantly display tangible deliverables conveys a sense of professionalism.

Microsoft Project can also maximize the potential of all customer inquiries. Norm created a routine that maps more than 200 steps that help market the company's services, from the point of initial customer contact, to final completion of construction.

The process starts with the initial customer contact which automatically generates a follow-up letter enclosed with marketing literature and customer references.

Microsoft Project has proved to be extremely versatile for a small company like Adkim that must maximize its resources. Adkim uses it as an important presentation tool, a cost-estimator, and a marketing tool in addition to its primary function as a project management tool.

The ability to track baseline data is another feature that provides a number of useful applications.

Adkim conducts a "post-mortem" review of every completed project and uses baseline data to identify changes that may have caused problems that can be eliminated. This analysis of past performance removes obstacles to increased customer satisfaction.

Norm uses Microsoft Project to give customers a visual picture of any changes made against a baseline time schedule. Customers often decide to have changes made to a remodeling project after it has started and want to know how the changes will impact the schedule. Contractors can protect themselves with added accountability by using Microsoft Project to track all changes requested by customers and show variances from the original schedules.

Norm reports that Microsoft Project is easy to learn thanks to tutorials, help files, and wizards that assist users in creating schedules. The familiar features it shares with other Microsoft products, like Word and Microsoft Excel, help to speed the learning process. Norm notes that Microsoft Project is not a program he will outgrow and he has yet to tap the full potential of its powerful features.

Norm has used Microsoft Project with other Microsoft products to take important data with him while in the field making site inspections. He exports milestones from Microsoft Project to Microsoft Schedule+ and transfers data into his Timex Data Link Watch. This allows him to show progress payments or other critical parts of a construction project while he is away from his office. In the future, Norm plans to integrate CAD/estimating programs that link data elements to Microsoft Project, which will provide Adkim with even greater control over project management.

Teambuilding Benefits

Norm Seff explains that one of the greatest benefits provided by Microsoft Project is that it has helped to build a sense of "team" between his company and subcontractors. With only four full-time employees simultaneously managing a number of projects, his company depends heavily on the reliability of its subcontractors.

Adkim has reversed the traditional scheduling paradigm in which employees submit time sheets at the end of a week regardless of whether certain milestones have been reached.

Microsoft Project allows the company to present each individual with a customized schedule detailing what is expected of them in advance. Subcontractors and employees are invited to discuss their schedules with management and work together to make any changes.

Adkim's teambuilding process resulted in greatly improved accountability of subcontractors adhering to their scheduling commitments. Advance participation in the decision-making process motivated them to buy into the process, reinforcing a sense of teamwork. Seff explains that subcontractors are thrilled to work with a contractor who can give them more than 24-hour advance notice of any changes.

Seff uses filters to send updated individual Microsoft Project schedules to all relevant subcontractors and suppliers through a fax modem. The complete control that Microsoft Project provides sends a message to architects and interior designers that Adkim is a professional and efficient company to work with.

The improved accountability and reliability of scheduling also enhances the company's reputation with customers. Microsoft Project allows Norm to give customers definite answers instead of guesses when they ask him how long their jobs will take from start to finish.

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