

The Christman Company

Amid rapid growth, The Christman Company needed to decentralize its enterprise estimating solution to better leverage its people and processes at a local level.

A Decentralized Decision

The Christman Company (Christman) is a 120-year old construction and development firm. Earlier this year, the firm acquired Knoxville, TN-based Rentenbach Constructors Incorporated (Rentenbach), a merger that will significantly expand Christman's services and geographic reach.

Together, Christman and Rentenbach provide commercial construction services to a variety of markets, including higher education, healthcare, government, corporate office and industrial. The combination of the two firms' resources results in an organization with over \$500 million annual revenue and 270 professional employees as well as 150 skilled tradesmen and women.

With the acquisition, Christman's geographic service area expands from five offices to eight full-service regional offices located in Knoxville and Chattanooga, TN; Greensboro, NC; Augusta, GA; D.C.-area Reston, VA; and Livonia (Detroit), Grand Rapids, and Lansing, MI.

Christman's 24-person Project Planning Group acts as a pre-construction/estimating/value-planning team working with the owner, architect and stakeholders to optimize a client's capital investment. The Project Planning Group includes a Virtual Design and Construction Group that is integrated with cost estimators and value engineers, along with sustainability expertise.

Anthony Bango, Director of the Project Planning Group, says, "We're growing in geography, revenue and services. It's a lot of ground to cover. From a planning and estimating perspective, we believe that it's best to have local people on the ground with the ability to leverage national resources."

It's this belief that set the stage for Christman's shift to a decentralized, enterprise estimating solution that better integrates its people and processes for more responsive, flexible capabilities.

"A decentralized enterprise approach to planning and estimating is a big change for us. Until recently, we relied on a centralized approach. With the additional offices and expanding services, we want the ability to level resources around the country with uniform systems so that all published reports and studies have the same look, detail, and quality."

The first step in achieving the Project Planning Group's goals would be to find an enterprise technology that could facilitate its needs.

Evolution of Estimating

While there's been a significant technology revolution in the industry related to building information modeling (BIM) and virtual design and construction, estimating software has realized considerably less development in the opinion of Christman's estimators.

Chad Nelson, Senior Conceptual Estimator with Christman, explains,

“We found that we can build a model in one-tenth the time it took us using our conventional methods. Instead of 1.5 days, we're cutting the time it takes to 1.5 hours.”

Chad Nelson
Senior Conceptual Estimator

"Most of the estimating solutions were born of DOS, and quite frankly, they're very cumbersome. We were looking for more intuitive tools that allow us access to information anywhere, anytime in an easy familiar way so that we can produce accurate estimates in a timely manner for our clients. Our business model is to go where our customers need us—and we also need to draw from our significant historical database to develop the best possible pricing scenarios."

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After a comprehensive RFP assessment of leading enterprise estimating tools, Christman chose Trimble's WinEst estimating solution with Modelogix cost modeling capabilities.

With WinEst, estimators will be able to create, manage and integrate detailed project estimates using cost-knowledge management modeling tools from Modelogix to increase productivity and customize essential documents.

Chad Nelson, Senior Conceptual Estimator with Christman, says, "WinEst has a look and feel of an Excel spreadsheet, which we found appealing because it's very familiar. The WinEst platform with Modelogix will allow us to visualize historical cost with certainty in a fleet-footed manner. We really like the cloud-based capabilities of WinEst that will allow us to work from a server. The other advantage is the ability for teams from multiple offices to work on the same estimate at the same time, yet keep everyone on the same page."

The historical perspective offered by Modelogix is also significant.

Nelson adds, "The ultimate benefit of past experience is the ability to

re-purpose actual cost and schedule data to benchmark new estimates, time and production rates. Modelogix's historical perspective will enable more predictable capital and project planning and feasibility studies."

Nelson believes that the modeling tools will help estimators model in considerably less time.

He adds, "In testing the WinEst with Modelogix, we found that we can build a model in one-tenth the time it took us using our conventional methods. Instead of 1.5 days, we're cutting the time it takes to 1.5 hours—and with remote access we can have several estimators working on the same estimate at the same time."

Technology Transition

Christman is in the midst of the WinEst with Modelogix implementation now with plans to go live in fall 2014.

Key in the implementation will be customization of the technology to fit Christman's processes and people.

Bango says, "The ability to customize WinEst is a key reason it was unanimously selected by the Christman and Rentenbach

estimators. The Trimble team continuously improves the technology based on feedback from their customers. Trimble is helping us configure the system to produce what we need to best serve our customers."

The ease of training was another important point in WinEst's favor, according to Christman.

"Some systems require many mouse clicks and pull down menus in order to perform simple functions. In our view, WinEst is the most intuitive of the platforms we tested and will make training and use a lot easier," says Bango.

Once fully implemented, Christman's Project Planning Group will use WinEst with Modelogix to facilitate all new projects.

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Anthony Bango

Director of Project Planning Group

Learn more about Trimble's building construction solutions:

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