



Building Increased Productivity Using the Cloud

By Sam Liu

In construction, time is money. And, when it comes to saving time and increasing productivity, the cloud is a catalyst for change. Arguably one of the most game-changing technologies of the century, the cloud to the computer industry is like utility grids for the power industry – a central fabric that powers the most complex computing tasks. However, it may be the simple things that result in the greatest business impact. Take, as an example, the access and sharing of important business documents and files.

One of the most effective ways engineering firms can leverage the value of the cloud is to use it to share files. While it may sound like a simple task, sharing files can be one of the most tedious, time consuming drains on productivity in the construction industry. With the demand for mobility, the challenge of sending large files, the need to collaborate with external parties and the risk of version confusion and data loss, structural engineering firms have unique needs when it comes to file sharing.

The Demands of Being Mobile

Because building and engineering firms must work in a range of locations, from high-rises to remote areas, construction professionals are rarely in the office. Yet, regardless of where work is being done, access to files is paramount. Project documents such as design calculations, CAD drawings, reports, permits, and more need to be easily accessible both in the office and on the road. The easier and more ubiquitous the access, the more productivity can be achieved.

Using the cloud to share files can give both productivity and power to the mobile worker. But, file sharing doesn't only have to be used for files. Consider that there is a job change on site that demands quick action. By snapping a picture, or taking a video with a smartphone, workers can quickly convey a situation and its solution using the cloud. Using a sophisticated online file sharing solution, that photo can be easily shared with everyone involved for faster resolution. And, the photo and video files can be automatically archived and tracked for compliance and accountability.

To best enable mobile collaboration, select a cloud file sharing solution that doesn't restrict the device type which can be used. The best file sharing options support any mobile device and enable integrated document editing on tablets and mobile phones. This eliminates the need for additional and potentially cumbersome third-party mobile apps.

Sharing Large Files

Large files present their own challenges. They are hard to email, time consuming to upload and challenging to manage. In the structural engineering field, this is particularly prevalent. The risk that part of an email attachment won't be received can cause significant productivity impact, especially when sharing with vendors, partners or clients.

With a secure online file sharing solution, site managers and subcontractors can easily and securely share vital files – no matter how large they are – without resorting to email or other unreliable systems. What's more, new versions of files can automatically be tracked, updated and made available to all recipients.

Working with Extended Teams

Compounding the need for simplified collaboration for professionals in the construction industry is the need to share content with multiple subcontractors, vendors, municipalities and clients that are outside the company firewall. Projects move fast; any miscommunication, lost document or a delay in response time can

lead to unnecessary project slowdowns and cost overruns. By using a secure online file sharing solution, communication is streamlined and the turnaround time for project document modifications, reviews, and notifications can be shortened from hours and days down to minutes.

When selecting a cloud file sharing solution that will empower your extended teams, be sure to select one that allows sharing with anyone, even if they are not a "member" of the file sharing service you use. The best solutions don't require you to force your recipients to register or adopt a specific file sharing platform. They will offer access to shared files regardless of whether recipients are a registered user of that service or not, while still allowing the sender to remain in control of the document through access rights such as passwords and expirations.

Protecting Your Work

When working on fast moving projects, data loss and breach are the last things a company wants to risk. In fact, data loss can not only be expensive, it can be devastating. According to market research firm Gartner Group, 43 percent of small businesses were immediately forced to close their business after experiencing a "major loss" of computer records.

To be sure that your organization doesn't become part of that 43 percent, look to a cloud file sharing solution that offers robust security features, including security audited geo-redundant data centers, data encryption, authentication technology, reliable data loss protection (DLP) and continuous monitoring against security risks. It is also wise to select a service that has received an independent SSAE 16 certification. Together, these multiple layers of security can safeguard your company data without the high costs and complexities of doing it yourself. ■

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