



A case study: NorCan Electric

One company that has benefited from putting the field first when it comes to IT is Canadian firm, NorCan Electric, an electrical contractor heavily involved in the oil sector. With much of its work coming from capital projects in excess of \$20 million, NorCan faced a critical challenge managing such substantial projects.

Prior to looking at a technology solution, NorCan's time-and-billing process was a complex exercise. Company foremen would collect timesheets from field personnel, go back to the office and hand the timesheets to payroll staff, who would enter the information into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, summarise it, then enter it again into NorCan's payroll software.

With different NorCan customers having different information-reporting requirements, this process was a lot of work, particularly for large projects. The level of complexity meant that the management team had to work 12 to 14 hours a day to keep on top of things. Job costing was made difficult due to delays while payroll data was updated and analysed, and the process was highly susceptible to human error as data was being written down, entered and re-entered.

NorCan used spreadsheets heavily but found them to be lacking in their ability to support the task at hand. "We squeezed as much as we could out of Excel," said Cameron Cassels, NorCan president. "We would touch data so many times, it was absolutely killing us."

As a result, significant pressure was placed on NorCan staff, creating workplace stress that impacted performance and morale. Something had to change.

Enter Singletouch

Given the challenges it was facing, NorCan was all too ready to listen when approached by data-management software vendor Singletouch Corporation, provider of a comprehensive data-capture platform for electrical contractors that enables real-time input of information in the field, allowing data to be entered just once across an entire organisation. NorCan rolled out the Singletouch solution in July 2008 and before the end of August, the company was already seeing business benefits.

With Singletouch in place, NorCan foremen now use a barcode scanner to clock employees in and out. At the end of the shift, the foremen simply synchronise the device with the server, and all data is accurately transmitted to the back office. In January, a separate Singletouch implementation was rolled out, allowing foremen to create purchase orders. This brings together all the information needed for invoices, which saves more time for office staff, and also improves job costing and forecasting, since purchase-order information as well as timesheet data are now both available as soon as a shift is over. As a result of rolling out Singletouch, one NorCan field supervisor was able to reduce his daily paper burden from a couple of hours to 10 to 15 minutes.

Back-office benefits

Back at the NorCan head office, administration staff can now print daily and weekly timesheets and bundle them with the invoices. The timesheets can also be exported to the company's accounting system. The most immediate benefit of adopting Singletouch was making life easier for office staff,

singletouch.com

Canada T 403 648 3930 F 403 237 9601 Suite 300, 110 8th Avenue SW Calgary, Alberta T2P 1B3

USA T 623 536 7833 F 623 536 5517 300, 14553 W. Indian School Rd Goodyear, Arizona 85395

Europe T +44 01670 812716 F +44 01670 528440 Wansbeck Enterprise Ctre, Lintonville Pkwy, Ashington, Northumberland NE63 9JZ, UK



Enter Data Once

since having all the timesheet data in the same place made it much easier for NorCan to meet customers' reporting requirements.

NorCan is now able to keep its clients informed on project data by generating up-to-date budget-status reports in just one day, an exercise that previously took up to 10 business days. Also, with these changes, NorCan no longer needs to make heavy use of spreadsheets, allowing management to focus on building business and engaging with prospective clients, rather than crunching numbers.

"It took away a tremendous amount of frustration," Cassels said. "We can now react far more quickly when our clients request a current view of the cost of a project. Our general and administrative costs have been slashed and fewer office staff are required to support our workers in the field."

And now that the oil sands is facing a construction slump, NorCan is confident that adopting these kinds of business-process improvements has left the company in an excellent position to weather a downturn, thanks to the leanness of its operations and its sterling reputation for premium services.

"I won't have to lay off as I otherwise would, and we can take on a lot more work before people start to sweat in the office," Cassels said. "In a downturn, I don't have to layoff Singletouch."

singletouch.com

Canada T 403 648 3930 F 403 237 9601 Suite 300, 110 8th Avenue SW Calgary, Alberta T2P 1B3

USA T 623 536 7833 F 623 536 5517 300, 14553 W. Indian School Rd Goodyear, Arizona 85395

Europe T +44 01670 812716 F +44 01670 528440 Wansbeck Enterprise Ctre, Lintonville Pkwy, Ashington, Northumberland NE63 9JZ, UK