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GradeBeam
Chicago, Ill.

www.gradebeam.com

GRADEBEAM: TECHNOLOGY MADE EASY

Make a technology tool easy-to-use, demonstrate its ability to reduce numerous mundane tasks, and promise to be there for any assistance needed, and you will have even the most technology-adverse companies hopping on board.

It is a model that has proven successful for GradeBeam, www.gradebeam.com, Chicago, Ill., which specializes in subcontractor database management, instant project messaging, online document sharing, and information tracking. In a nutshell, GradeBeam takes the time and complexities out of managing preconstruction services. Its bid invitation tools give clients the ability to replace internal phone, fax, and mail-based communication processes with a fast and efficient alternative via the Web.

Aside from project invitation tools, general contractors use GradeBeam's services to instantly post project information and blueprints online, search for subcontractors and suppliers, distribute project documents through local printing firms, and issue project change information.

Subcontractors and suppliers find equal value in the technology, using the Internet-based service to identify opportunities, control and update their company contact data, and promote their services to a broader range of general contractors. One roofing contractor notes that the short time it has been a member with GradeBeam, it has paid off ten-fold in terms of new opportunities and revenue.

While an Internet-based alternative to preconstruction activities is music to the ears of most general contractors, the benefits of such a system will only go as far as their

collective pool of subcontractors and suppliers will allow. One factor that stood out to *Constructech* editors during the voting process was GradeBeam's continual commitment to training. While other vendors provide bid management tools within their suite of offerings, GradeBeam adds that all-important layer of helping users embrace the process. The company goes to great lengths to ensure both general contractors and subcontractors/suppliers are comfortable using the technology.

Tom Degan is the preconstruction director for the Chicago office of Duke Construction, the construction arm of Duke Realty, www.dukerealty.com, Indianapolis, Ind., which is believed to be the largest publicly traded, vertically integrated office/industrial real estate company in the United States with properties encompassing approximately 113 million rentable-sq.ft. leased by more than 3,400 tenants. He has been impressed with GradeBeam's ability to get even the smallest of Duke's subcontractors on board. Small mom-and-pop shops, which had not even used email in the past, were not only comfortable using the system, but enthusiastic about its capabilities.

"The most important factor in making (the use of GradeBeam) a success was ensuring our subs would buy into it. If they were not going to buy into the way we would be issuing these bid packages, and we started losing some of them as a result, that would be detrimental to what we do," Degan says. "But we have had nothing but positive feedback from our subs. They tell us that it is easy to use, expressing satisfaction in making the bidding process easier on their end."

After an in-depth analysis of the major bid management tools in the market, Duke opted for GradeBeam and began a pilot program in its corporate office and its national department office in the summer of 2006. By March 2007, the company made the commitment to roll out the solution to 10 offices with the end goal of having all 12 national locations using the tool by the end of the year.

“We had a training session with one rep from each office being able to go through the whole system in one afternoon,” Degan adds. “Those reps went back to their respective offices and trained the rest of the employees, using online training sessions from GradeBeam. GradeBeam also traveled to each office for live training with all of the employees, and even held subcontractor training.”

Part of what makes a technology provider “hot” is its ability to continually help its clients grow and expand their business. Beyond simply getting a general contractor’s existing base of subcontractors and suppliers comfortable and excited about using the technology, GradeBeam also exposes general contractors to its national database of companies.

“Having that national exposure like we do, part of the challenge with going into a new market is simply finding the names of subcontractors in

those areas,” Degan adds. “GradeBeam’s national database was very valuable. It helped us get the names of subcontractors and from there we have a prequalification form on our Website that subs fill out and return to us.”

GradeBeam prides itself on not simply providing technology to clients, but rather developing long-term services. Bryan Jurewicz, president and CEO, GradeBeam, says the company is proud of the work it is doing with Duke and is impressed with their commitment as a real estate developer to taking control of their construction processes.

Duke is just one of the many success stories for GradeBeam, which continues to expand, now providing services in Canada and 37 states in the United

States. Since the company’s inception in 2001, it has provided services to more than 200,000 construction firms and in 2006 sent out more than 4 million invitations to bid.

Among the biggest customer wins for GradeBeam in the past year includes the selection by Phoenix Constructors—a joint venture consisting of four leading general contracting firms—to coordinate all outreach with subcontractors and suppliers in relation to the World Trade Center (WTC) Transportation Hub Project.

Valued at more than \$1 billion, the project entails constructing a permanent replacement for the World Trade Center PATH station, which served as a pedestrian transportation hub to Lower Manhattan until the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001. It will feature approximately 3,000-ft. of pedestrian tunnels, providing connections to existing and future transportation services, such as ferries at the World Financial Center and Metropolitan Transportation Authority subway lines.

The GradeBeam technology allows for four companies that are normally competitors to share a collaborative

solution that organizes subcontractors and suppliers. This enables the companies to communicate with subs while not exposing access to their own internal proprietary systems.

For Jurewicz, the WTC Transportation Hub Project repre-

sents more than just a new customer for the company. In his eyes, it is an opportunity for his company to play a valuable role in completing a project that carries a profound meaning to our nation.

“We are proud to be bringing technology to Manhattan (construction market), knowing that it is not easy to walk into that market and really earn respect from contractors,” says Jurwicz. “We have been proud that people have been willing to meet with us and talk about coordinating technology for the good of the industry and we feel this is a good project to get started on.”

Providing simple services to real-world challenges is what made GradeBeam so appealing to *Constructech* editors. In the end, this is what good technology is all about.

