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Broadening Horizons 2

In making the case for customised workflows, Andy Beckerson concurs with the
argument that 'If you can't get the best possible result, get the best result possible'

Towards a single source of truth. Customised workflows aid collaborative working. Photo: Syda Productions / Shutterstock

In my last column 'Broadening Horizons' it seemed fitting to start 2017 with something as fresh and new as the year itself: a look at how a GNSS (GPS and Galileo) receiver built out of software is poised to make GNSS data collection a mass market reality. Continuing with the theme of broadening horizons, I'd like to use this month's column to take a closer look at how customised workflows can bring new business.

Working together

Sensible workflows enable you to manage a process better, specifically by involving all those concerned in a project. If we asked a number of people how they currently work and collaborate on a project, many would be utilising email for making comments and suggestions to improve delivery or resolve a problem and, of course, for sending large files in different formats via some file sharing application. Indeed, email and file sharing systems are very useful, but when working on a project that has several stakeholders, all working in various file formats, are they the best solutions available?

If we think about the construction industry where a typical project might involve engineers, architects, structural engineers and contractors all working with different files formats and different software programs, all with the aim of delivering the best possible result for the client, email and file sharing don't work – they don't help collaboration.

When collaborating, a perfect workflow could eliminate rework or site revisits; it will probably eliminate paper; it will save time in

both the field and office, and it makes for a more motivated workforce and a more engaged group of stakeholders. But how do we develop a perfect workflow?

Single source of truth

One description of a workflow might be "a single system that breaks down industry, application and professional 'silos' to produce a 'single source of truth'".

This 'single source of truth' should come about by the various stake holders on a project being able to collaborate, publish, view, comment and communicate, using a bi-directional approach where everybody's input is visible to everybody else. The involvement of all the parties on a project is the critical collaboration required to reach the end goal, or the best possible result for the client.

But what do we need to build this 'system of collaboration' and what are the requirements?
• It must be agnostic because data can come from many sources
• It must be secure because nobody will trust a workflow that allows others to compromise 'the single source of truth'
• It must be simple otherwise it won't get used
• The technology that accesses the workflow must be current and recognise that not everybody involved is a technology expert

• It must be accessible by all stakeholders, wherever they are, therefore it has to be in the cloud.

A useful example would be something like Trimble Connect, an easy to use tool designed to improve construction project collaboration. It can be accessed with desktop, mobile or web to view, share and access project information. It provides clarity to the work at hand and can be used anywhere, anytime.

Business builder

So how does a perfect workflow bring you more business? Well, simply, it serves your clients better. You demonstrate technology leadership by using technology that allows you to bring projects in on time and to budget reinforcing client confidence. You can share budgets, schedules and contingencies and it allows you to identify potential risks and take corrective action if required before the risks become problems. Access to the workflow enables you to make better business decisions and to 'work' a problem not guess at it.

In addition, a workflow allows team members to focus on effectively delivering the project with the most current information - 'the source of truth'. With more time focused on the project, managers can more effectively manage the project rather than manage the data and better project management should improve customer delivery and heighten customer expectation.

Improved delivery will add value to your customers and heightened expectation will distinguish you from your competitors. Within your own organisation, by standardising on workflows, you reduce costs and training requirements which, in turn, further speeds delivery to your customer, saves you time, makes you more competitive, allows you to win more work, and improves your ROI.

So that's a perfect workflow in a perfect world, but whoever said "If you can't get the best possible result, get the best result possible" had a wise head indeed!