

Three Benefits of Automated Project Management

The right project management tool can save deployers time, offer better information and provide cost savings.

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Many business owners will say that their two most precious commodities are time and information. Project management tools can help a company have more of both; in a survey conducted by CIO and the Project Management Institute, half of the respondents who used project management tools experienced a higher success rate for projects, improving ROI and increasing efficiency. A company can choose to hire staff to lead project management efforts, or simply purchase software that will track a project. Both options require an investment in time and resources.

Many service providers offer project management capabilities, allowing deployments and ongoing maintenance to run more smoothly. But when choosing a service provider, it's important to find one with the capacity for automation.

"Any service where a technician is dispatched onsite, a piece of equipment is shipped or inventory is tracked can use automated project management," said Tim O'Connor, professional services sales manager for Greenville, S.C.-based National Service Center, a service and installation company.

This white paper, sponsored by National Service Center, discusses three benefits of automation capabilities, including saving time, access to better information and cost savings.

Saving time

One of the biggest challenges for any project is time management. Many companies have to dedicate at least one person, if not more, to full-time project management. That employee then has to spend the bulk of her time keeping track of where different projects are, updating spreadsheets and following up with contractors, subcontractors, vendors and team members.

A service provider with automated project management capabilities can streamline the process, ensuring the project runs

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more smoothly and freeing employees to focus on other core business processes. Instead of spending time tracking the status of all the parts of a project, each person who works on a task can update the project management software; the internal project manager then can see the status of projects at a glance, and can troubleshoot more effectively.

Automation also means that information is available all the time. Instead of having to ask someone a question about a task, the user can go into the program and see the status. That way, if someone is on vacation, ill or tied up in meetings, the project still can continue to run.

The program should send notifications when things run behind schedule, as well. Should a task not be completed on time, an email can be sent to all designated parties. Surprises are kept to a minimum, and problems can be resolved more quickly.

Empowering employees can streamline the project management process, but make sure to choose a program that has permissions enabled. A high-quality automated project management program should have different levels of permissions, ranging from extremely low level/read-only to an administrator who can edit every step of the process. That way, different users have appropriate access to the program, and only trusted individuals can make significant changes.

Better information

Information is key to the success of any project. Knowing exactly what tasks need to be accomplished, when and by whom is crucial to ensure a smooth implementation. Reporting is one way to keep everyone informed, but it can be overwhelming to sort through all the information. Automation programs should offer the ability to generate customized reports. Users can

Rollout Summary

Total Stores Completed:	723
Total Stores installed this week:	0
Total Stores scheduled for today:	0
Total Stores scheduled for this week:	0
Total Stores Remaining:	8059
Total Stores with Exceptions:	209
Total Stores Not Booked:	7073

Search Options

Store Information
Note: Store & District numbers contain numbers only.

Store Number: Install Date:

District Number: Store Status:

Equipment Information
Note: Serial & Asset Tag numbers contain alphanumeric & - only. Store numbers contain numbers only.

Serial Number: Ship Date:

Store Number: Equipment Status:

Asset Tag: Equipment Type:

Serial Number:

Automated software allows each team member to provide status updates, helping projects run more efficiently.

Types of reportable information

Typical information in a report includes:

- Equipment installed
- Serial numbers
- Repair/install status
- Inventory tracking
- Problem/resolution codes

generate as many reports as needed, with the different types of information required displayed. The CFO, for example, might only need to see a report about hours spent on specific tasks so as to calculate the labor costs involved, while the project manager needs a close look at what equipment is installed and what still needs to be shipped. Choose a program that generates reports easily and quickly, in whatever configuration that is needed.

Of course, the best reports in the world aren't valuable unless they display real-time data. Some project management programs have a delay in uploading data. Choose a provider whose project management program updates as soon as new information is entered. That way, anyone accessing the program has the most accurate information possible and can make better decisions.

Cost savings

Completing a project efficiently and on time is one important way companies can save money. Knowing that an installation

will require specific equipment and take a certain number of days to deploy allows a business to plan more effectively and budget more accurately. Project management tools can ensure that projects stay on track and adhere to the budget.

Expenses can be tracked more accurately with project management software — invoices can be uploaded and man hours can be calculated. Any time a service call is requested, the software can track how long it took to fix the issue, and, if appropriate, how much the downtime cost the company. At the same time, if a part goes down repeatedly, the project manager can identify the issue that with the software and decide whether to install a new part, change the system or resolve the problem in some other way. The ability to troubleshoot ultimately saves a company money, as it decreases downtime and helps keep processes running smoothly.

Automation is key to cost-savings, however; because of the automation capabilities, less employee time is spent on project management, requiring either less staff or allowing staff to focus on other, more profitable tasks.

Choosing a program

Many service providers will claim to have project management tools. When partnering with a service provider, make sure to ask questions and see a demonstration of the program to make sure it meets the company's needs.

The automated project management software should be:

- Updated in real time
- 100 percent customizable
- Easy to use
- Brandable
- Accessible to different levels of users
- Included in the cost of the service

Most importantly, the project management software should be useful to a business. It should offer real, tangible benefits, either by increasing efficiency, providing better data or decreasing costs. Choose a service provider with the experience and ability to offer a high-quality project management automation program.

***About the sponsor:** National Service Center, based in Greenville, S.C., is a service and installation company that specializes in cabling, digital signage, point-of-sale systems, kiosks, computers, wireless (Wi-Fi) and other IT equipment-related deployments. NSC provides investigative needs analysis in regard to implementing or upgrading a business, corporate or institutional IT environment. NSC also offers full-service staging and configuration of the client's selected equipment upgrade into its work environment.*