Customer Case Study

The Weitz Company

The Weitz Company Integrates Prolog® Software with e-PCS to Achieve Electronic Document Management and Archiving throughout the Project Lifecycle

Founded in 1855, The Weitz Company is the oldest construction firm west of the Mississippi. A general contractor, design-builder and construction manager, Weitz is based in Des Moines, Iowa and has additional operations throughout the U.S. as well as in Guam and the Dominican Republic. The company, which is recognized as the leader in senior living community construction, builds a broad range of projects, from high-end commercial office space and military facilities to residential communities located in mountainous regions. With annual revenues in the $1.5B range, Weitz consistently ranks among the world's leading contractors. The company is #40 on ENR's 2008 Top 400 Contractors list and #104 on its 2007 Top 225 Global Contractors list.

The Weitz Company has always prided itself on being an effective implementer of proven technology. As far back as 1996, the company recognized that, to optimize productivity, project coordination and communication, it needed to manage construction documents electronically. Acting on this need, Weitz implemented Prolog Manager from Meridian Systems in 1997 and gained an electronic tracking system and data repository for project-related information like contracts, requests-for-information (RFIs), submittals, transmittals, daily field reports and so forth.

Prolog was later integrated with the company's JD Edwards enterprise resource planning (ERP) system so that information could move seamlessly between operations and accounting without exchanging paper. And when Weitz added Prolog WebSite to its electronic workflow setup, the extended project teams were able to access Prolog functionality from any Internet connection across the globe.

Solving the Paper Problem

Yet, even with these systems in place, managing paper was still a problem – and there was a noticeable lack of industry-specific document management options. So Weitz turned to Data Builder, Inc., a Meridian Independent Software Vendor (ISV), for a solution.

Founded in 2003, Data Builder originally specialized in capturing documents at the end of the construction process. Its initial product, called ECC (Electronic Construction Closeout), gathers project documents electronically at a specific point-in-time and creates a fully-searchable document database.

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Weitz implemented ECC and quickly benefited from the elimination of paper project archives. But the field staff were still struggling with paper. "If we had seven people running a job from three different locations," explains Weitz President and CEO, Craig Damos, "paper documents had to be copied and manually routed from place to place. It might take two weeks for something to reach the seventh person."

Weitz went back to Data Builder and the two companies focused on how to increase productivity at the job site. "We concluded that paper documents actually create lack of productivity by slowing down communication," recalls Damos, "and decided that the best solution would be an electronic, real-time file cabinet that would be designed for the field – and more importantly by the field – where documentation actually starts, and dedicated to supporting the standardized construction workflow we had established with Prolog."

As a result of its work with Weitz, in 2004, Data Builder launched e-PCS (Electronic Project Control System), which allows documentation to be captured, stored and managed electronically throughout the project lifecycle. A hosted solution with rigorous security, backup and disaster

recovery features, e-PCS provided the real-time document management that Weitz needed to take its field productivity to a higher level. "Today," says Damos, "we have several hundred jobs and billions of dollars of construction captured electronically with e-PCS and stored in a safe and secure manner."

Integration Automates Document Archiving

A factor that extends the value of e-PCS for Weitz is the product's integration with Prolog. Data Builder has created an integration engine that connects e-PCS to Prolog. Each night, similar to daily backups, e-PCS electronically pulls vital project documents like daily reports and meeting minutes from Prolog and adds those documents to the permanent project file.

"With e-PCS, there is an ongoing process that automatically archives each Prolog document using a sophisticated optical character recognition – or OCR – process that makes retrieval fast and easy," explains Data Builder CEO, Drew Grant. Because of this, adds Damos, "e-PCS has essentially become our centralized document depository for Prolog."

The e-PCS system is also integrated with Weitz's e-mail server. Users can manually select e-mail that is critical to the project or set up an automated system at the server level to capture relevant e-mail using specified criteria. "Throughout the job," says Damos, "every piece of project information is being carefully tucked away. At the end of the job, if there is a document request from an owner, a warranty issue or a potential litigation situation, we have all of our documents in one secure, searchable location."

It's interesting to note that when a job's statute of repose has expired, documents can easily be purged – or electronically "shredded" – from the archive.

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Meridian Partner Profile

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Saving Time – and Money

Although mitigating risk is a significant benefit of having e-PCS in place, Damos is equally impressed by the time and cost savings that Weitz has realized by using the system with Prolog, as well as its ease-of-use. "e-PCS is not a complex system to use," he says. "Our typical field employee can learn the system in two to four hours."

In fact, productivity gains at Weitz have been far reaching. Damos uses a typical Weitz job to illustrate one example. "A $60M job might have 85,000 documents that we used to box up and store in an off-site warehouse. If we needed to retrieve documents, we couldn't send clerical people because they wouldn't know what to look for. Instead, we would send a high-priced project manager or engineer to find what was needed. With e-PCS, the boxes and warehouse have been replaced with a sophisticated search engine where electronic retrieval is done in minutes with your fingertips. The time and cost savings are so significant that investing in e-PCS was a no-brainer for Weitz."

Streamlining the bid process is another way that e-PCS saves Weitz time – and money. Instead of sending out hundreds of paper bid packages by mail or courier, Weitz now e-mails an external Web link that provides access to bid packages online. Subcontractors can then respond electronically, or print the documents and respond by paper.

Project closeout is also handled more efficiently because document files and folders stored in e-PCS can be seamlessly migrated to ECC. "We used to have a project engineer spend days – or even weeks – putting together closeout information for the project owner," states Damos. "Now, that's done in minutes. At the end of the job, we select the documents that are needed, submit our request electronically to Data Builder and they provide us with an ECC archive for the owner." ECC publishing options include CD-Rom, DVD or any other external storage media. ECC can also publish closeout documents to a secure, Web-based archive for access by any authorized user.

Prolog and e-PCS: An Exciting Duo

Since the launch of ECC, Data Builder has spent three years entrenched in construction field operations and is now recognized as an expert in document management workflow. As a professional services firm, it works with construction companies of all sizes to establish and execute best practices that optimize document control. Data Builder even offers litigation services to help its clients with the timely creation of documents in accordance with e-Discovery Laws and the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

"We like to think of ourselves as providing solutions rather than products," explains Grant. "Although we bring products to market, we also help our clients design, plan and roll out their document management solutions."

Damos would agree. "Meridian Systems and Data Builder provide key solutions for moving into the 21st Century. When you marry e-PCS with Prolog, which is the premier player in construction project management, you have a pretty exciting duo."

Getting Out of the Paper Business

While embarking down the road to electronic document management requires change, and leadership from the top down, the technology isn't as complex to deploy as people might think. With e-PCS, a construction company can start with a few pilot projects and continue rollout at a comfortable pace.

"The way the construction industry manages paper today is beyond bad business," concludes Damos, "it's insane! By using e-PCS with Prolog and our e-mail system, we've taken ourselves out of the paper business so we can do what we do best: build buildings."