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Plans and Permits

CONSTRUCTECH

Reducing the costs and complexities associated with plan review and logistics can vastly improve the profitability on projects. Technology is playing a primary role in helping government agencies and contractors reduce the cost of dealing with paper.

Local governments are combating the rising costs of plan permits with the use of Web-based technology. For example, under a new e-government program Maricopa County Arizona is looking to reduce the amount of paper and travel associated with obtaining a construction permit. Maricopa County is on an explosive growth pattern, receiving more than 16,000 requests for building permits in 2006 and more than 7,000 thus far this year.

In order to accommodate the aggressive growth, the Maricopa County Planning and Development, [www.maricopa.gov/planning](http://www.maricopa.gov/planning), Phoenix, Ariz., will use ProjectDox from Avolve Software, [www.avolvesoftware.com](http://www.avolvesoftware.com), Scottsdale, Ariz., for electronic plan checking. Officials anticipate this will streamline the slow and inefficient manual processes that are typically involved with this process.

"As one of America's largest and fastest growing counties, we have witnessed a huge increase in demand not only for faster and better permitting services, but for streamlined IT (information technology) infrastructure between departments," says Gordon Jennings, director of IT, Maricopa County Planning and Development. "Moving to electronic review and approval gives us a number of near and long-term advantages over paper-based manual processes and fits well with our vision of system interoperability."

When a permit request is submitted to the county, the technology creates a permit project and the submitting party is sent an email invitation, which prompts them to upload permit drawings via a Web browser. At that point, the county supervisor invites the plan review team to begin the plan check process. The technology also allows for both parties to communicate on change requests.

Upon completion, the ProjectDox technology publishes a PDF (portable document format) version of the plan that can be downloaded and printed.

Reducing the costs and complexities associated with the paper trail on a project is a top initiative of many general contractors, many whom are using electronic plan room technology to streamline plan printing and shipping with partners.

For the general contractor, DeWayne Adamson, founder and CEO, Plan Express, [www.planexpress.net](http://www.planexpress.net), Memphis, Tenn., says such solutions are doing wonders in moving the total expense of reprography and distribution away from these parties and on their partners. Plan Express offers centralized print ordering, document management, and distribution services on a regional basis.

"On a local level, if you are a large contractor and have a sub base that is soliciting you for work, what we offer is the ability for a sub to come in and pay for his plans," says Adamson. "One of the first objections we hear is that subs will not pay for plans because the sub is currently getting it for free or on a CD or electronically."

"At that point, when we show them the logistics piece and how it is fully automated, we can get the message to the sub that in five clicks—at a price less than you are paying to get drawings—we can get you the plans the next day, comparing that price to driving across town to get free drawings, it is almost always cheaper. Subs, once they understand this, are fine with it."