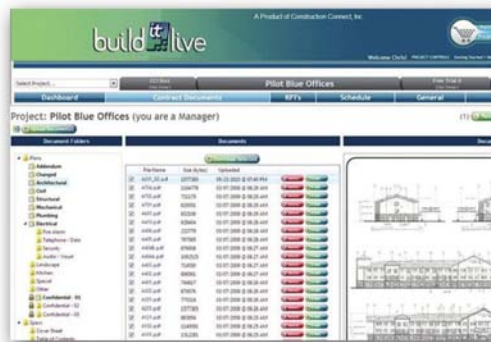


## HOW SMART IS YOUR SMARTPHONE? HOW MOBILE TECHNOLOGY IS CHANGING OUR INDUSTRY



Whether you describe yourself as tech savvy or gadget illiterate, there is no question we are at the beginning of a new wireless era where smartphones will become the standard way to connect with anyone in your life. A Nielsen report from the third quarter of 2010 stated more people are opting for smartphones these days, with 28 percent of the U.S. mobile market flocking to these devices. The report attributed the growth to the popularity of Apple's iPhone, RIM's BlackBerry phones and Android-based devices.



**Build It Live is a web-based project management tool for the Construction Industry**

A smartphone essentially combines three (or more) products into one—a mobile phone, an mp3 player and an Internet communications device—all with useful desktop e-mail, web browsing, searching and map applications. Much of the market penetration credit goes to Apple and their widespread marketing campaign, user-friendly interfaces and accessible apps. It was not until Apple introduced the first iPhone in June 2007 that consumers really sat up and took notice of the real world uses a smartphone could have. Apple's iPad was released less than a year ago and is following a similar pattern. It is already rapidly becoming a must-have tool for streamlining business practices, with particular handiness for the construction industry and its related industries like electrical distribution.

The possibilities for using smartphones in construction are relatively obvious; it's a job where physically being on-site is a requirement and being able to access important plans, schedules and other documents is extremely necessary. What smartphones are changing about the construction industry is the office/job site dynamic. What we saw with the advent of laptops has been taken a step further—smartphones and iPads simply allow for greater interaction while out of the office.

Chris Ross, the founder and CEO of Build It Live, an online construction project management software system that provides straightforward and efficient tools for project communication within the construction industry, says the use of smartphones and iPads in construction is part of a technological progression.

"I've seen this industry go from pagers, to faxes, to cell phones, to file transfer sites. For a seemingly old fashioned industry, construction professionals will use technology where it makes sense," said Ross, who has 15 years of experience in the electrical industry. Starting as an apprentice, Ross worked his way up to vice president of a mid-sized electrical contracting firm before starting Build It Live in 2008.



**Mobile Plan Room is an iPad app component for Build It Live**

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Build It Live is a centralized tool designed specifically for the construction industry. Ross and his team took the concept a step further with the introduction of the iPad. "When the iPad was coming out, the team thought this was such a great opportunity. It has a more workable screen for this industry. The size of an iPhone screen is better than nothing, but we wanted to utilize the functionality of the tablet touch screen. So with Mobile Plan Room, we put out something that construction managers can use daily," explains Ross.

Launched in June 2010, Mobile Plan Room is the iPad component to Build It Live and is available for download at Apple's App Store. Version 2.0 is due out this month. "We updated the program with features users wanted such as faster file upload and a faster previewer," says Ross. "Customer feedback is important. We have nearly 1,500 users over 12 different countries."

Like other apps on the market, Ross' product is appealing for its time-saving features and accessibility using a completely web-based "invite" process, similar to social media communities. It is a pay as you go set up and the subscriber can host and invite as many people as they want for free. Users can upload submittals, RFIs, schedules and more, while allowing collaborators to access the information without a string of emails, though it does have an email notification tool similar to social media websites.

"We've designed what we call a construction document communication tool. You don't have to track down the individual responsible for certain pieces of the job. Everyone can look for themselves. You have more time to utilize and less money spent on overhead," adds Ross.

Less than a year ago, UDA Technologies came to the realization that mobile apps were going to be important in this industry. "We began development of multiple apps, which we call OnSite Mobile Apps, which give construction professionals access to important estimates, specs, schedules, and other files, while on-the-go.

They're incredibly popular and we have over 20,000 people using the apps with the iPhone, iPad, BlackBerry, Droid, and Samsung Galaxy every day," said Ali Rauch, project manager for OnSite Mobile Apps at UDA Technologies.

UDA Technologies began selling construction software in 1999, and has evolved with the needs of the industry to provide ConstructionSuite, ConstructionOnline, and now OnSite Mobile Apps.



NAED and ecosight Inc.'s Energy Audit software solutions app for the iPad

"ConstructionSuite is a project management software program users have on their desktop computers. ConstructionOnline is a web service that allows users the chance to upload, view, and share important files, specs, plans, etc. from anywhere on the web. Now, OnSite Mobile Apps lets those users view any of those ConstructionOnline files from anywhere with their mobile device," said Rauch, adding that their client base includes residential contractors and larger specialty contractors who specialize in everything from flooring and foundation repair to solar energy solutions.

"OnSite Mobile Apps helps construction professionals run their business from virtually anywhere," she says.

"They can use ConstructionOnline and the mobile apps for free as an online plan room to connect with their team members, or as a presales tool to attract customers and stay connected with homeowners or owners of the project."

Across the board, these applications and the numerous others available at the App Store work well to increase efficiency and eliminate errors. Hours upon hours are saved on data entry. E-mail or text message reminders help to keep tasks on schedule. The sheer fact of allowing for a central location to store documents—often bulky file sizes for a computer or in print—is a game changer in an industry adapting to many other types of digital advances such as Building Information Modeling (BIM) and cloud computing.

Rauch goes so far as to say the apps save time and really help construction professionals improve what they do. "Since both the owner and the builder can use the mobile apps for free, it's an instant way to keep the communication channel open. It's a fantastic tool where the builder can upload progress photos, and the owner can open an app and view those photos. It's impressive," she says, "it also helps the builder stay organized, because they can open up a schedule, specs, or anything else on site. It's incredibly valuable to make sure you're doing things the right way, without having to travel back to the office to check."

Both Ross and Rauch agree that users know these apps pay for themselves almost immediately due to increased efficiencies. "If you have a browser, you can use our product. Users can log on in the morning, and find everything's tabbed and their documents are all in one place, no matter where they are," adds Ross.

His company's app is seen as a departure from software that needs significant training, installation or license fees. "We are leveraging cloud computing to help the masses conduct business," he says, adding that their core customer base is contractors with fewer than 100 employees—an audience not likely to purchase expensive technology.

When NAED recently teamed with ecoInsight, Inc. to develop their Energy Audit software solution, an iPad application seemed a natural part of the equation. "We developed an iPad application for our energy audit solution to streamline the process of collecting building data," said Dave Kart, vice president of marketing for ecoInsight. "By collecting audit data through the iPad, the professional auditing the building will now have that data available for analysis without having to decipher their hand written notes and input it into a spreadsheet."

Kart anticipates the mobile collection of data, combined with the analysis, will cut audit time by 35-40 percent, based on what he's heard from several distributors.

New mobile applications are rolled out every day. According to Ross, Apple expects new versions to be introduced in the App Store on a regular basis. What makes an app stand out is the ability to fulfill a need and be user-friendly enough for everyday use. It is important for electrical distributors to stay informed on new technology their customers are using, which may include everything from the iRuler app for measurements, to an app called ReceiptsOnDisk, an expense tracking system.

According to Kart, demand is increasing at the electrical distributor level and more are looking for ways to utilize mobile devices. "We expect that the industry will continue to embrace these technologies as a way to collaborate with customers and streamline business processes," says Kart.

#### To download apps, go to:

**Apps for iPhone or iPad –**  
[www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)

**Blackberry App World –**  
<http://us.blackberry.com/apps-software/appworld/>

**Droid Apps –**  
[www.droidapps.org](http://www.droidapps.org)

#### Some other useful construction industry apps:

##### **Documents To Go by DataViz**

**Allows users to view, edit, and create Microsoft Word documents; view Excel, PowerPoint, PDF and iWork, and send and receive Microsoft Exchange E-mail.**

##### **Pronto, powered by TrueContext**

**Use forms on your iPhone or Blackberry to capture, report and manage information. Share the data with others by exporting to Excel, XML, HTML, PDF or CSV. Can be used for estimating, inspecting and reporting time.**

##### **iPhone TSheets Touch**

**Track standard hours, overtime, paid time off, job time and project time. Reporting features let you customize the content of reports, specify a spreadsheet and then format and export to CSV, PDF, QuickBooks or online in HTML.**