Powerproject®

Case study: Interserve

Interserve improves site progress discipline across seven schools

Summary

Interserve is one of the world's foremost support services and construction companies, headquartered in the UK. Powerproject is one of a suite of tools it uses for project planning. On a recent project to deliver seven schools simultaneously across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Berkshire, it explored what the companion app, Site Progress Mobile, could do to improve the collection, management and integration of progress updates, and discovered significant benefits in terms of time.

In 2015 Interserve signed a joint venture deal to build seven new schools for students in Hertfordshire, Luton and Reading. The £135m project now delivers 8,900 student places, of which 900 were newly-created through the new build Priority Schools Building Programme.

Managing a multi-site build is always a significant challenge, requiring the tightest of project management both individually, and in terms of oversight and co-ordination between projects. Interserve uses Powerproject planning software for that purpose on many of its projects. Peter Farmer is one of the Senior Planning Engineers at Interserve Construction's Strategic Projects division, and an experienced Powerproject user, who was tasked with overseeing the project progress.

Multi-site activities multiply at fitout stage

As the project approached the fitout stage, it was clear that the number of activities would increase exponentially, and that tracking project progress in the critical final phase would become challenging. With seven schools, of broadly similar configuration, size and shape, with fitout sometimes happening on multiple storeys or in separate classroom blocks, it was evident that tracking progress accurately through each location was imperative.

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With a vast number of activities to manage across seven geographically separate sites, Peter decided to use the Site Progress Mobile app, a companion tool for Powerproject programmes that is specifically designed to help track progress on the move and out on site.

Originally, Peter and his colleague would visit each site and walk around with a notepad – but this was a time-consuming exercise, not only because each school had to be tracked individually but because of the time traveling between sites spanning Hemel Hempstead, Luton, Watford, Reading, Bishop's Hatfield, Cheshunt, and Kings Langley.

Peter explained that: "Before Site progress Mobile, capturing progress updates was time consuming. By the time you had walked the site, gone top to bottom of the building, input the data into the programme, assessed

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progress achieved, and spoken to the construction team, it would take the best part of a day. Following that, we still had to format progress reports to be issued. With Site Progress Mobile, it took us between a third, to a half, of the original time."

Eliminating the task of manually inputting progress updates into the programme, in addition to enabling faster collection of data itself, is the main benefit that Peter identified: "The beauty of Site Progress Mobile is that the data collected with your phone can be downloaded directly into the programme. It removed a laborious task and the potential for errors from having to input data manually."

Creating new perspective on progress

Keeping tabs on progress means tracking all current activities, everywhere, constantly. Peter is clear about the vital role of progress management, saying "Progress management is essential. You must always know where each job is on the timeline. Often you will speak to

a sub-contractor and they are unsure where their element is – so you need to find out for yourself. On this project, we implemented a location-based scheduling system. Each building was sub-divided into a number of locations. We could identify the status of individual tasks in each, helping us to build a very accurate picture of our position. This process requires further refinement, but it definitely helped us in this instance."

The mobile app helped Peter and his colleague to monitor every location. "By walking around with Site Progress Mobile in front of us, we picked everything up and logged it. We downloaded the relevant segments of the programme to our mobile devices beforehand, so everything we needed to check was visible – we could then allocate progress accordingly. We used our judgement to decide percentages, and were able to make comments and take photographs associated with programmed tasks."

Image overload

Taking lots of in-progress site photographs is the norm in construction, but these are often cumbersome to file, keep track of, and distribute – a problem that increases as the number of concurrent activities rises. Peter was emphatic about the benefit in this area, commenting that "Managing photographs used to be an

absolute nightmare. On seven sites, we took a lot of pictures. During the superstructure/envelope stage of each of the schools, you could walk the site, stand on each elevation, take your photo and pick everything up on one photograph. When fitout starts, and services go in, it gets more complicated and we would take many more photos. We'd take photos of things that were incomplete, to help us ask the questions as to why – i.e. as a memory jogger. Originally, we would upload photographs onto our laptops and email them to team members, highlighting concerns in the email text. With Site Progress Mobile, the photographs are attached to the relevant programme tasks during the site inspection and can be viewed in Powerproject when reviewing progress. An instant visual record is available of the status of tasks at a particular point in time."

"Site Progress Mobile has made the data collection and collation associated with progress monitoring much more straightforward. The fact you can attach a photo directly to a relevant task or bar line and add comments to it, is brilliant. It's easy and simple to use, and it makes life easier."

In conclusion, Peter said "You have two choices for progress management on a project like this. You can have either all the activities printed out from the programme or on a spreadsheet, giving you numerous sides of text on A4 sheets for each site that you have to annotate – or, with Site Progress Mobile, you have it all on your mobile device."

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