INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY

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TECHNOLOGY: ADOPTION IS NECESSARY FOR YOUR BUSINESS'S SURVIVAL

There's no doubt that COVID-19 accelerated the construction industry's adoption of technology. Office-based employees shifted to working remotely and everyone regularly encountered public health-related tech, like digital thermometers. Fewer in-person meetings occurred; instead, we spoke to customers over FaceTime and Zoom. We even tried to limit the number of people on the jobsites, making digital communication like texting and email important for staying in touch.

According to one construction analyst, **the pandemic compressed three years of construction technology growth and adoption into nine months.**[1]

All these changes were challenging, but they proved that contractors could adapt quickly to new technologies. As the construction industry continues to evolve at a fast pace, you'll need to work to keep up. Your competitors will likely be adopting more technology, so you don't want to be left behind. Technology can help make your job easier and safer. It can even help make your business more profitable.

Change can be tough, but there are ways to make the process of adopting new technologies easier:

- **Have an open mind.** It can be tempting to keep doing your job the way you've always done it. Don't get stuck in your ways and miss out on opportunities to improve.

- **Be patient.** You won't become proficient in a new technology overnight. It'll take some time to get used to a new device or software program, and it will take your team a little while too. Don't get frustrated.

- **Don't adopt too many new tools at once.** There are already many helpful tech tools out there, and it seems like more solutions debut every day. It can be tempting to want to try everything, but adopting too many new tools at once is setting yourself up for failure. Choose one to become proficient in before adding another new tool, device or software program to your business.

- **See if your suppliers offer technology.** Technology won't replace a relationship with your supplier, but your supplier may be able to offer solutions that make working with them even easier.

Don't be discouraged if you find new technology overwhelming. Stick with it, and you'll likely find it helps make your business more successful — if you've chosen the right technology.

[1] https://connectedremag.com/newsletter/report-construction-tech-adoption-accelerated-due-to-covid-19/

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HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY FOR YOUR BUSINESS

With so many tech options available, it's important that you choose what's right for your business. Follow these four tips to ensure that you're integrating technology that will help make your job easier and your business more profitable.

1. ANALYZE YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS

Take an audit of all the current technology your team uses. Consider both hardware, like computers, phones, printers and cameras, and software, like the programs you use for accounting, ordering materials and tracking timelines. Put all your technology into three categories — good, bad, needs improvement — to assess where you're at. Common areas for improvement include:

- Accounting and financing

- Placing and tracking orders

- Project management

- Communication (both with employees and customers)

- Safety

Evaluate your technology according to your business's needs, not your desires. For example, it might be tempting to purchase a flashy computer system for the office. However, if your employees are often traveling from jobsite to jobsite, mobile technology will likely serve your needs better.

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2. CHOOSE TECHNOLOGY THAT GROWS WITH YOUR BUSINESS

Technology can be an expensive investment, so choose solutions that will work for your business for years to come. Ask similarly sized companies what they're using and whether they've had any difficulties implementing or using a specific technology.

Keep in mind that some tech equipment can be leased. This is most common with office equipment like computers, copiers and phone systems. The benefit to renting equipment is that you won't be stuck with outdated technology if a new version or product becomes available. The downside to renting is that it can become quite expensive in the long run. It's important to weigh your options carefully before deciding to purchase or lease.

ProTip: Technology evolves at a rapid pace, and it can be challenging to keep up. Look to industry publications and associations for information on the newest construction technologies.

3. HAVE A BACKUP PLAN

Technology isn't foolproof. It's important to have a backup plan in place should your technology fail. Think about the technology you depend on, and plan how you can continue to work should it become unavailable. For example, have paper forms for ordering or invoicing handy should your computer system fail or the internet go down. Or, be aware of what other tools and technologies can be used for creating remote estimates should you be prevented from doing a roof inspection.

4. INVEST IN TRAINING AND SUPPORT

Technology won't help your business if no one knows how to use it. Develop an ongoing training process for you and your employees to ensure everyone is comfortable using necessary technologies.

If your company is large enough and you're using a lot of tech, it might even make sense to hire a dedicated IT professional to help maintain your technology, troubleshoot issues and answer any questions you or your team might have.

Choosing the right technology can ensure that you have the correct tools for your business to be successful. Now that you know how to select the right tech, you might be wondering what technology is out there. Luckily, we've got answers for you.

WITH THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY, YOU CAN DO (ALMOST) ANYTHING

Technology can serve many purposes. It has the potential to make nearly every part of your job easier. Here are some different ways you can apply technology in the construction industry.

ESTIMATES

There are several tech tools that can save you time and increase accuracy when creating estimates.

- **Software:** With software like EagleView, RoofScope, HOVER and iRoofing, you can take measurements from an aerial view of a home and generate a quote for roofing jobs based on high- and low-end estimates. Many programs also allow you to create quotes for siding and gutters too. When you can estimate a job without even stepping onto a jobsite, why wouldn't you give this convenient technology a try?

> According to Roofing Contractor's State of the Industry report, **43 percent of roofing contractors currently use aerial measurements** and 16 percent are planning to start using them in 2021.
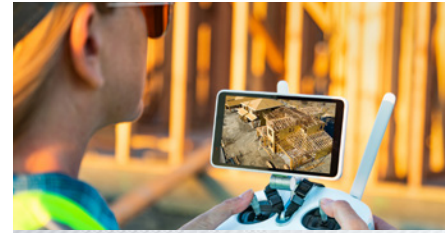
ProTip: With EagleView's integration with **ABC Connect**, you have real-time access to ABC Supply pricing to create material lists, bills of materials and proposals.

- **Augmented Reality:** Augmented reality is a technology that superimposes a computer-generated image on a user's view of the real world. Many augmented reality measurement apps exist that allow you to use your phone's camera to measure and record measurements. These apps make it easy to take measurements without a bunch of tools.

- **Infrared Cameras:** You can use infrared cameras to see the thermal levels of structures. This technology lets you locate faulty or vulnerable areas that you wouldn't otherwise be able to see with a high degree of accuracy. Using this type of tool can save you headaches and your customers money by identifying specific issues like punctures or gaps in roofs.

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- **Drones:** Another popular tool for creating estimates is a drone. Drones with cameras are used to conduct visual inspections of roofs. They can also be used to take aerial photos of the jobsite that can be used in marketing or sales pitches. Drones are quickly becoming popular in the roofing industry.

> **ProTip:** Unsure if an infrared camera or drone is worth your investment? These technologies can often be rented, so you can try before you buy.

While **45 percent** of roofing contractors already use drones, nearly a third plan to start using them this year.[2]

PROJECT VISUALIZATION

Virtual renderings of your project can help customers more confidently make decisions about materials. Use virtual rendering software to create a mock-up of what a home would look like with different styles of roofing, siding, windows or doors. Here are a few examples of software programs you can use to create images:

- **Pictureit:** Through integration with ABC Connect, Pictureit allows ABC Supply customers to upload a home photo or use pre-mapped stock imagery of over 80 popular North American home styles to "try on" their preferred product lines that are readily available through ABC Supply.

- **GAF Virtual Home Remodeler:** This program allows contractors to upload a photo of the home or choose a preselected house and apply GAF's roofing products to see a remodeled home.

- **One Click Contractor:** This virtual sales software integrates with a number of visualization tools, so you can help homeowners see their dream before it becomes a reality.

- **HOVER:** After you've used Hover to create an estimate, you can also use it to test out different materials on a 3D model of the home.

- **iRoofing:** In addition to being a useful estimating tool, iRoofing's roof visualizer gives you the ability to simulate a home with different roofing materials.

Include virtual renderings in your bids to help your customers visualize the finished product. This can help decrease the amount of time they'll need to decide about working with you — so you can get started sooner.

[2]Roofing Contractor's 2021 State of the Industry report

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ORDER MANAGEMENT

You can't afford to have any issues with ordering, because it can derail your entire project. It's crucial that you're able to easily place and track your orders so you can manage timelines and your customers' expectations. Check with your supplier to see what solutions they offer to make ordering materials easier.

ABC Supply customers can use myABCsupply to manage their orders and make doing their jobs easier. You can access this tool through your computer, tablet or smartphone, so it's convenient whether you're working in the office or doing business on the go. Plus, it's available day or night, so you're not limited by business hours. MyABCsupply offers a number of helpful features, including:

DOWNLOAD MYABCSUPPLY

MyABCsupply is available in English, Spanish and Polish. Sign up today on **myABCsupply.com** or download the ABC Supply app on the **App Store** or **Google Play**.

SIGN UP

- **Order materials:** Purchase products online from ABC Supply. You can also view previous orders, review order details and create order templates to make purchasing frequently ordered products easy.

- **Keep track of your deliveries:** Check the status of your upcoming deliveries through a calendar or map view. You can also retrieve delivery photos once a delivery has been made.

- **Simplify your billing:** View your statements and pay invoices through myABCsupply. You can also download account activity directly into your existing accounting software.

- **Manage users:** Share work with your team members by adding additional users to your account. You can even grant team members different levels of access.

Another useful tool is AccuLynx. It has many features that help roofing contractors streamline regular tasks, including importing leads, tracking job costs and forecasting profits. AccuLynx is especially helpful for ordering materials. Due to its integration with ABC Connect, you can access ABC Supply's products and pricing to accurately build estimates and send material orders directly to your nearest ABC Supply location.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

There are many tools available that can make managing projects easier, which can save you time — and money.

- **Team Management:** Many project management software programs exist specifically for the construction industry. Programs like these offer features that allow you to:

  - Keep track of team members' responsibilities and contact information

  - Manage correspondence for a project

  - Keep tabs on the timeline

  - Schedule meetings

  - Collect project documents in one place

- **Weather Tracking Apps:** Since construction jobs often rely on the weather, another technology that can be helpful for managing projects is weather tracking apps. Apps like Weather, Weather Underground and Dark Sky provide detailed weather forecasting. You'll be alerted to incoming storms that might cause delays in your timeline or could lead to surges in business if you perform insurance restoration work, helping you plan ahead.

- **Customer Relationship Management:** Another aspect of project management is managing your customers. Keeping current customers updated and reaching out to potential customers will help your business be successful. That's where customer relationship management (CRM) software comes in. CRM programs allow you to store information, like demographics and project history, about customers. You can even add notes on conversations you have. For example, if a roofing customer mentions that they're saving up to replace their home's siding, you can make a note to contact them in the future to see if they're ready for that siding job.

CRM software can also help nurture leads, allowing your team to track interactions and receive alerts when they should reach out again. Many programs also allow you to send automated emails to your contacts. For example, after a storm you could send an email informing customers about your insurance restoration services.

Nearly a third of roofing contractors already use CRM software,
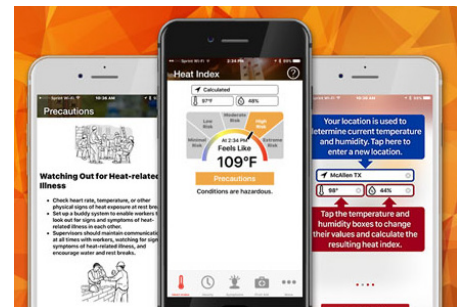and 19 percent are planning to begin using it this year.[3]

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SAFETY

Your team's safety should be your number one priority on a jobsite. Luckily, many technologies exist that can help prevent injuries and mitigate illnesses.

There are many different apps for mobile devices that can help improve safety for your team members, including:

- **NIOSH Ladder Safety:** This app from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health helps to reduce the chance of a fall. It has a range of features, including a measurement tool that can help you adjust ladders to the correct angle and a selection guide that identifies the right size and type of ladder needed for a job.

- **First Aid:** This handy app from the American Red Cross guides you through delivering first aid for conditions ranging from strains to heart attacks. It's available in both English and Spanish and includes quizzes and videos to help team members understand the information.

- **Safety Meeting:** This app helps you document all required Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) safety meetings and provides a list of more than 900 topics to choose from. You can also use the app to record incidents and near misses.

- **OSHA Heat Safety Tool:** This app evaluates the heat index, provides real-time data and shares what you and your team will feel when working in that weather. It helps you make informed decisions about safety when working outdoors in hot weather.

- **StaySafe:** This app helps keep employees who are working on their own safe. It allows them to schedule regular check-ins so you can keep tabs on their safety, and it has a panic button that can alert team members if an emergency occurs.

Besides safety apps, many emerging technologies can help your team stay safe on the jobsite.

- **Virtual Reality (VR):** VR is an immersive experience that puts a user into an entirely digital world. This would be like putting on a pair of goggles and feeling as though you are actually moving and walking in different environments, completely removed from the world around you. Imagine being able to train and test on the jobsite and then reboot and start over — that's possible with VR tools. This could make training a lot more realistic to your team's situations, helping your team learn safety practices without real-life risks.

- **Jobsite Sensors:** Dangerous temperatures, gas leaks and noise levels are constant stressors on the jobsite. The good news is that jobsite sensors can monitor for all of these things and more. The sensors can be set up anywhere on the jobsite and can send alerts to phones or laptops if any site conditions are approaching dangerous levels, helping to keep your team safe.

- **Wearable Sensors:** Similar to jobsite sensors, wearable sensors can help monitor for potential dangers. This technology often comes in the form of badges and sensors attached to hard hats, glasses, shoes and other personal protective equipment. The goal of these wearables is to monitor physical, environmental and biological conditions and provide data that informs you and your team members. For example, a wearable sensor could alert a worker if they are becoming exhausted or performing a hazardous physical movement like reaching too far.

DON'T FORGET THE BASICS

While new safety technologies are helpful, it's important to remember that they can't replace tried and true safety practices. Make sure your team has appropriate safety gear like safety glasses, hard hats and protective footwear. You should also provide regular training, so everyone is familiar with the safety protocols they must follow on the jobsite.

While technology can be a huge help for your business, using it can carry some cybersecurity risks — but these risks are largely preventable with the right precautions.

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HOW TO KEEP YOUR COMPANY'S DATA SAFE FROM CYBERATTACKS

If you're a small business owner, you might think that your business isn't a target for cybercriminals. That's not necessarily true. Cybercriminals often attack small businesses because they are easier to access than large companies. They might even target your business as a way to gain access to another company that you work with.

> **58% of cyberattack victims** are businesses with fewer than 250 employees.[4]

There are many ways that thieves target digital data. One type that's on the rise is ransomware attacks. These attacks occur when hackers prevent companies from accessing their systems until they've paid a large ransom fee. You can counter ransomware attacks by backing up all your information so it's accessible even if hackers shut your system down.

When determining how much to spend on cybersecurity, consider how much you'd stand to lose if your company's data is stolen. A good place to start is with a vulnerability scanner, an automated software that regularly scans your networks for weaknesses. It can help you understand how to best invest in increasing your company's cybersecurity systems.

> **On average, a data breach costs $148 per record.**[5] If 1,000 of your customers' records are stolen, the breach could cost your business $148,000.

There are also some low-cost best practices that you can apply to help prevent data breaches at your company:

- **Use strong passwords:** Don't use the same password for multiple accounts. Once a criminal has stolen the password for one account, it will be easy for them to access another. Instead, use different passwords for different applications. Avoid common keyboard patterns (e.g., "QWERTY") and words (e.g., "password" or your company's name) when choosing a new password. Also, mix upper- and lowercase letters, numbers and symbols to build a strong password.

- **Don't open suspicious emails:** Phishing — posing as a trustworthy entity to trick someone into revealing sensitive info — is a common type of cyberattack. When checking your email, don't open messages from people you don't know and don't click on unsolicited attachments. Also, look for spelling errors or strange email addresses, which could be a sign of a hacker.

[4]https://www.forbes.com/sites/ivywalker/2019/01/31/cybercriminals-have-your-business-their-crosshairs-and-your-employees-are-in-cahoots-with-them
[5]https://modernrestaurantmanagement.com/five-mistakes-restaurant-owners-make-that-put-data-at-risk/

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- **Don't send sensitive information electronically:** Cybercriminals can intercept emails and instant messages to steal data. When handling sensitive information, such as a customer's payment information, password protect documents and encrypt emails.

- **Limit employee access to data:** The more people with access to a piece of data, the more vulnerable it is. Password protect documents, folders or programs containing sensitive information that not all employees need access to. Some programs, such as myABCsupply, may even allow you to select the level of access that specific account users have.

- **Train employees on data safety:** Without training, your employees might not know what to do if they notice suspicious activity on company computers. Train them to recognize threats and encourage them to report suspicious activity. Also, remind them of the dangers of weak passwords.

By keeping your data safe, you'll be able to reap the benefits of technology without so much risk. Consider integrating technology into your business operations for increased safety, efficiency and profitability.

READY TO GET TO WORK?

Visit our blog for more tips on integrating technology into your business, or reach out to your local ABC Supply location for more advice on building your business.

FIND YOUR NEAREST LOCATION

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