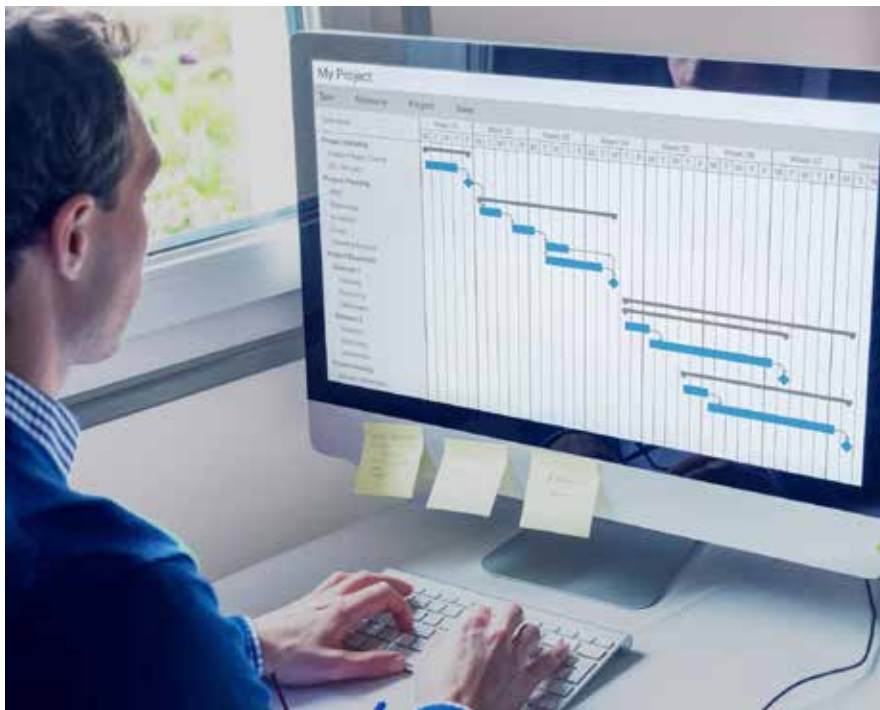


Mastering your business process

How low-code technology is super-charging corporate retail project management software : By Scott Lunt

Technology plays a key role nowadays in the management of multi-project corporate real estate development. Project managers, vendors, employees and subcontractors depend on everything from spreadsheets to fully customized software for collaboration and coordination.



What is low- and no-code development?

Low- and no-code platforms enable people with little or no programming experience to develop applications that meet specific business process needs without involving IT staff or going to outside developers.

There are low-code applications that are easy to build and launch by almost any non-technical person. Even if external help is needed, the cost is a mere fraction of traditional software development.

Using a low-code software platform, a member of the team could create, test and launch the app—often through a drag-and-drop interface—much quicker and more cost-effectively than relying on busy IT staff, outsourced developers or purchasing another one-off solution.

USGN (www.usgn.net) is an early provider of cloud-based collaborative project management systems for corporate building programs. Founder and CEO Doug Sperr points out that benefits

But spreadsheets are just a snapshot of information at a given time and are not dynamic, which makes collaboration difficult and inefficient, and one-off custom software tools are costly to create and maintain. So companies often settle for off-the-shelf software that is said to be designed to industry best practices, but that does not always solve their unique situations.

There is a better solution, and it is a growing trend: Low- and no-code application development.

While the technology has been around for years, industries are just beginning to adopt it. Here is why this technology is on fire today, and how it can give those who adopt these tools a highly competitive edge.

go beyond saving time. “When you buy software that’s based on standard industry best practices, you’re forced to work the way the software works and not the other way around. With low-code, you can dictate how the software works to solve your unique needs.”

These low-code applications are in no way inferior to hard-coded apps. In fact, they are better because they are more targeted to the specific need. They are full-featured integrated solutions used by the world’s largest companies today.

Sperr and his team, led by Scott Wessels, USGN’S Chief Technical Officer, started developing low-code technology more

than 20 years ago. They first saw the need when they realized that their customers, large end-users, like PetSmart and Whole Foods Market, wanted very different tools to match their corporate culture and long-standing methodologies.

“Two different companies; two different ways of doing things” Sperr says. “We realized that customizing our platform each time we got a new customer would become insanely expensive. The only solution was to put the customization into the hands of the end user.”

More companies across industries are seeing the value in that. Research firm Gartner forecasts that by 2024, low-code platforms will account for more than 65% of all app development.

Business involved in commercial real estate construction are lagging in adopting this technology and, according to industry experts, it is time they catch up.

Critical for success

Tom Sparrow, a consultant who oversees large infrastructure projects in Canada, says design-build companies in the US and Canada face the same issues with the evolution of technology.

“Companies developed their own proprietary software but quickly realized they could spend millions doing that or buy off-the-shelf software. We look for off-the-shelf software that can be tweaked to meet the needs of the project but still have a lot in place.”

But it is really important for software developers to understand the processes, structures and issues facing the industry.

Low- and no-code platforms enable people with little or no programming experience to develop applications that meet specific business process needs without involving IT staff or going to outside developers.

“We’re looking for organizations that can fill the no-IT gap,” Sparrow says. “This isn’t the area for executives of (design-build) companies. They need the right people to provide the guidance to lead them through what they need.”

For Sparrow, the bottom line is that companies need to be utilizing low-code technology if they want to stay competitive. “For projects where the software is usually not managed by the owner, we’re demanding more from architects and GC’s to make sure they’re using the technology to stay connected. When I do a Request for Qualifications, I want to know how they are effectively applying these technology tools. It’s something I look at very closely.”

If vendors cannot show how they are reducing costs and timelines, Sparrow says he probably would not consider them.

What does the future hold?

The impact of COVID-19 has forced companies to look for ways to cut costs while continuing to support project collaboration from those working remotely. And they are discovering low-code technology is a better solution.

Sperr says the use of the technology is going to be the deciding factor in what solutions companies choose. “If you can’t get in and turn the knobs yourself, then you’ll be at a disadvantage compared to companies who can.”

Sparrow believes we will see continued refinement of the technology and more integration of artificial intelligence, with less and less human involvement.

The near future is full of opportunities to help companies become better at what they do, and more competitive. And that opportunity is not just driven by the pressures of a pandemic. “What we’re really looking for are specialists to help push us in the right direction,” Sparrow says, in regards to software developers. “We want people who understand the gaps we’re dealing with, the issues we’re dealing with and can meet our needs. It’s like shifting paradigms. If you don’t jump on the wagon, you’ll get left behind.”

Sperr says it is not only time to get rid of spreadsheets, but time for companies to take a serious look at low-code technology. “The real time benefits it brings to the multi-project corporate retail space is critical.” **CCR**

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