CASE STUDY

Successful paperless contracting

Iowa Department of Transportation

CHALLENGE

SOLUTION

Iowa DOT was plagued with the inefficiencies of exchanging, losing and storing paper material certifications, and the long process of auditing and 'finaling' contracts.

The Doc Express® service – a paperless contracting system that includes electronic signatures. It allows construction project owners to create a secure, digital filing cabinet for the documents exchanged during a project.

Project documents are securely stored, document processing is transparent, audits are easier and contracts are 'finaled' faster.

infotech

"Although the Iowa Department of Transportation does not currently have a performance measure to track the ROI for Doc Express, the perception and realization is that projects are getting 'finaled' out quicker, there is less going back and forth with the contractors/ suppliers for lost certification statements, and a general thought from both our inspection staff and the contractors that we are all saving time and money."

GREG MULDER, DIRECTOR, CONSTRUCTION & MATERIALS
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Headquartered in Ames, the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT) is responsible for managing more than 9,400 miles of state-owned highways and ramps and maintaining nearly 4,200 bridges.

The professionals in the Highway Division are always seeking ways to improve efficiency and output across the state. One area that was ripe for change was the paper-heavy construction documentation process.

With all of the automation that has occurred in construction project management, it is hard to believe that, until recently, the predominant way to exchange documents such as material certifications at Iowa DOT was on paper stored in loose-leaf binders. Iowa DOT often needed multiple copies of the same document requiring copies to be made using extra paper. Often, copies were lost or damaged and had to be made again and again.

Iowa DOT reached out to Infotech, a technology partner for the Bid Express® service and other software used by the agency. Based on the needs described by Iowa DOT, Infotech's Doc Express service fit the bill.

The Doc Express service is a paperless contracting system that includes electronic signature technology. It allows construction project owners to create a secure, digital filing cabinet for the documents exchanged during a project. All project stakeholders and business partners can access, exchange, track and, when applicable, electronically sign contract documents (material certs, shop drawing, storm water reports and more) for projects and save those documents in a project archive.

The Doc Express service is accessed online with no VPN or FTP and a low total cost of ownership. The service is priced per contract and does not require any additional hardware or software, which makes it easy to try out.

"We started with only four residencies and one or two contracts in each," said Greg Mulder, Director, Construction & Materials at Iowa DOT. "The contracts were selected partially based on the prime contractor and their buy-in and willingness to use Doc Express."

"The next year we requested that every residency try at least one contract using Doc Express, more if they wanted, and to include the contractor in the discussion concerning using Doc Express."

The agency and contractors were up and running on the Doc Express service quickly. Janet Wasteney, Training Officer for Construction & Materials at Iowa DOT noted that "the Doc Express program is so user friendly and intuitive that we didn't initially have a need for any organized training. Instead, each user was given an instruction guide (one was written for DOT users and a different one written for contractors/ suppliers) and that, along with phone support as needed, worked quite well. Users could almost immediately use the software and have success once they were given access to contracts."

The Doc Express service improved communication among stakeholders since they all have access to the information stored there.

"Anyone with access to a contract can submit, receive, etc. documents from any location at any time as long as they have Internet access," said Mulder. "Transparency and accountability of the submittals has been a huge benefit to Iowa and our contractors through this web-based application. Folks that need to see the status of submittals can see if they have been submitted, when they were submitted and who submitted the document. You can also see who has received a submittal, and if something is rejected, there is space to document why."

Use of the service immediately addressed the main issue. "... [T]he fact that once documents are submitted, they are safe in the program, documents can be easily tracked, and will no longer be lost as happened with paper documents," said Mulder. However, another benefit was how quickly the agency was able to 'final' contracts."

The most noted observation is that there are no longer multiple requests to furnish documents during the 'finaling' process because once the document has been put into Doc Express, it is safe there and not lost like has happened to hard copies in the past."

Mulder noted that auditing is also improved.

"Auditors can remain in their own office and check many documents without having to travel to the residencies. Submitted material certifications can easily be found by searching or filtering on a specific type or title, which is much easier than sorting through a notebook of papers."

"The organization of the certifications required at audit time is more consistent and uniform throughout all offices by using Doc Express, as compared to the old system of loose leaf paperwork. **This in turn makes auditing easier and faster.**"

The service has been quickly adopted by both the contractors and Iowa DOT personnel, and is now a requirement for all Iowa DOT projects. "The use of Doc Express has increased far faster than we had ever expected that it might," Mulder said.

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