



APP OVERLOAD

Mobile apps can improve efficiencies on a day-to-day basis. But wading through the options can be overwhelming, whether looking for professional or personal use. *Luigi Benetton* lists some of the more useful choices.

Professionals who own a smartphone or tablet are getting more work done on the go. Small and large companies alike are developing an app a minute, all designed to make our personal lives easier. There are applications to help in all areas of a professional's work, from the construction site to invoicing, to social networking.

For those looking to do more than just check email with their phone, there are countless possible applications for download. Many of the apps available merely extend the features of systems most users already have on their mobile device. (Note: not all apps are available for all mobile platforms.)

Apps for infrastructure industry professionals

Sheena Sharp, a principal with Coolearth Architecture, is considering *Architactile Inception* to automate the initial architectural programming process. It prepares bubble diagrams to help with this process, she says.

Freeance is a good option to extend the reach of a company's GIS to contractors and employees. The app relays known field conditions and the location of field crews, so they can reduce service response times and eliminate the need to call the office.

The *Construction Punchlist* app lets users annotate plans onsite without lugging reams of paper. Once done, they can electronically send marked-up documents to project owners and team members.

Municipalities are helping citizens report non-emergency infrastructure issues using *SeeClickFix*. The app, in turn, lets municipalities publicly report successful issue resolutions.

Savvy urbanites are learning about and sharing city-enhancing technologies using the *MESH Cities Map* app.

Not to be outdone, Autodesk lets users take many previously PC-bound tasks on the road more easily thanks to its catalogue of mobile apps. AutoCAD files can be viewed, edited, and shared from mobile devices using *AutoCAD WS*. The *ForceEffect* and *ForceEffect Motion* apps lets engineers more easily simulate design concepts in the field. *Bluestreak Mobile* helps project leaders track activities and collaborate right from a mobile device.

Various flavours of *SketchBook* provide drawing tools on screen. Owners of camera-equipped tablets can turn images into 3D models using *123D Catch*.

Not all apps are tailored to a specific industry. But that doesn't mean professionals in the infrastructure industry can't find them useful.

Sharp downloaded a one-off app for the American Institute of Architects conference she recently attended just to find her way around. "That conference is huge! There's so much stuff there, and this app organized it for me," she says.

Navigation

Dave Thompson, director of Sustainable Communities for Sustainable Prosperity, relies on several apps to get around, including *Google Maps* and *Google Latitude*.

He finds the *Wikitude* "augmented reality" app gives him a better sense of what's in the vicinity. "You hold the phone up in front of you and it shows you what's behind [the things you see]," Thompson explains. "If you aim it down a street, it will tell you what restaurants are down that street."

Personal information management

Smartphones and tablets ship with prepackaged PIM apps like calendars, contacts, and task lists. Third-party apps augment, and in some cases supersede, these default apps.

Consider *Cardmunch* and *World Card Mobile*, each of which turns photos of business cards into address book entries.

Default task list apps may be the weakest features on mobile devices. That helps

explain the popularity of task list apps that let users manage projects, delegate tasks, and synchronize with other computers. Popular task list systems that feature mobile apps include Remember the Milk and 2do.

Thompson uses ACC-ALF Mobile Lite to access his Alfresco enterprise content space, which he likens to the project-management program Basecamp. (Basecamp itself doesn't publish an app, but it does maintain a mobile-friendly web interface.)

Mac-driven businesses may want to try Daylite, a Microsoft Outlook/Exchange alternative for small businesses, and its mobile apps.

Online file organization and sharing

Certain systems let users keep and access documents online, share those documents with other people on their project team, send download links for large files, and more. As a bonus, the online files act as backups in case other copies get lost.

This popular category of apps includes DropBox, the more tersely named Box, SugarSync, and Google Drive.

Document creation, editing, and management

Tablets and smartphones aren't just for content consumption any more. Create and edit documents using productivity suites such as Docs To Go and Kingston Office. iPad users will want to check out Apple's Pages and Numbers apps for word processing and spreadsheets.

Sharp swears by Goodreader, which she uses to bring PDFs of documents to meetings. She mentions the small firm's commitment to get everybody in the office an iPad. The iPad replaces a whole stack of product literature," she says. "We're making a conscious effort to not collect pieces of paper at trade shows, only information."

To annotate PDFs, try PDF Expert.

Note-taking

Sharp's iPad has replaced "the notebook that every architect carries around everywhere," she says. She uses the Notes app that comes with the iPad, both to take meeting notes and to put her notes in a proper record of meeting format.

She also uses the Penultimate handwriting app. "I often draw things, the relationships between things, ideas about how something might be configured," she explains.

If you're looking for more advanced note-taking and collection capabilities, consider Microsoft OneNote.

Thompson switched from a BlackBerry



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Web-Based Reporting

The Canadian Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute (CPCI) will be using an online database to help compile a biennial report on sustainable practices at the manufacturing level. The Sustainable Plant Program, launched this May, uses a web-based software tracking program to help measure and implement changes at plants affecting environmental and economic performance. Facilities can submit confidential benchmark reports online, then the CPCI will release a report with the aggregated results every two years. The Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute (PCI) launched its version of the sustainable plant program at the PCI Convention and National Bridge Conference last December.

to an Android phone, which he finds easier to use for online research, so he now collects his findings using Evernote. "I end up with a lot of materials that I can put into Evernote and transfer to my laptop," he says.

Time tracking and invoicing

Thompson uses Harvest to enter time and track expenses. FreshBooks and Billings are Canadian alternatives.

Social networking

"I'm the president of the Ontario Association of Architects, and we recently started a Twitter campaign," Sharp says. "I follow people who I am interested in, from ministers of infrastructure to other construction-related organizations."

Sharp finds articles using what she describes as a "stream of information going under my nose" that she frequently forwards to clients, something she might not do if she had to lug a computer.

LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Google +, Pinterest each have apps. Those handling multiple social network accounts and looking to broadcast the same message across all platforms should try a social media dashboard like HootSuite.

Travel

GPS is built into many of today's smartphones and tablets, and it integrates with the map applications that ship with these devices. Google Maps may be the best known of the bunch. BlackBerry users who commute note the usefulness of BlackBerry Traffic.

When travelling further afield, try apps from carriers like Air Canada or platform-specific apps like BlackBerry Travel.

Security

Thompson uses the password management application LastPass. Other choices include Keeper and 1Password.

Entertainment

Everybody needs some downtime. Sharp spends hers watching enlightening presentations on the TED Talks app and reading magazines using the Zinio app. Thompson reads news from periodicals around the world using their phone apps. ❖

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