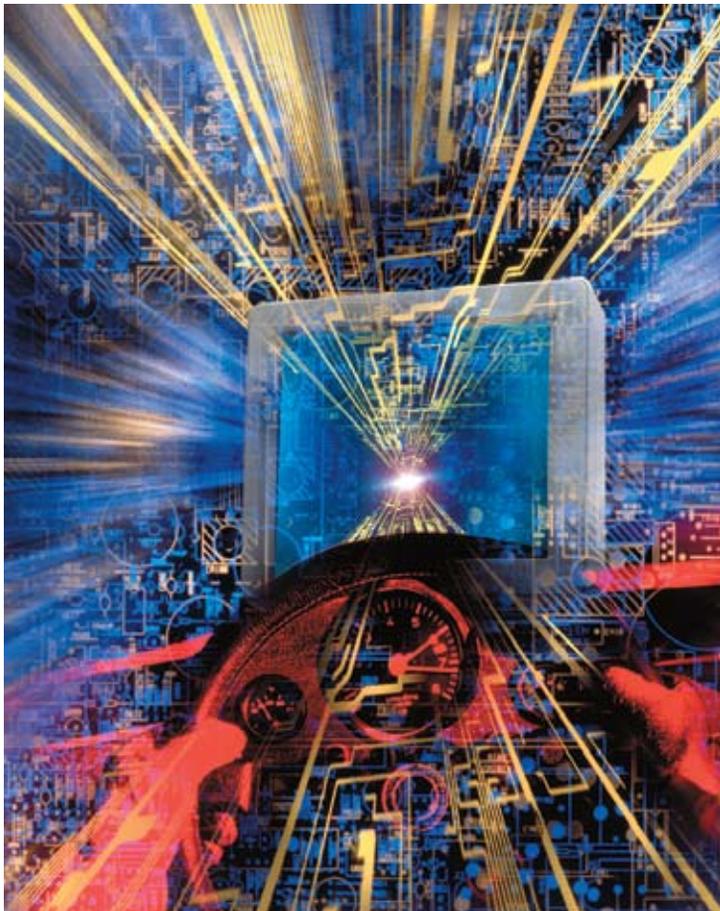# A Portal to Critical Information

Just as some automobile dashboards now provide GPS information to enable drivers to make better navigation decisions on the road, new developments in computer software dashboards offer a portal to web-based information to enable construction executives and project managers to run their businesses more efficiently.

A dashboard is an interactive user interface that gathers, organizes and presents selected information at a single location on the user's computer desktop. It not only launches system applications, but it also "publishes" selected data from the user's system applications based on selected parameters.

A construction business owner, for example, might set parameters to configure the dashboard with key indicators from the financial system applications—standard ratios, cash balance and summary financial statements. A project manager might have tabs for outstanding submittals, pending RFIs, change orders and labor costs.

A dashboard can be customized to fit individual needs, such as configuring templates and quadrants according to a construction company's unique standards and graphics. In addition, data in the various quadrants of the dashboard are updated based on user input. For example, updating figures on a particular job will result in updates to all of the user's designated quadrants.

However, a limitation of standard dashboards is they only integrate with the financial system applications offered by a particular vendor.

PORTAL ADVANTAGES

The most advanced dashboard available today uses web-based technology that enables it to function as a portal (i.e., an Internet site with access to other Internet sites). In addition to launching the user's system applications, a portal offers access to Internet sites and any third-party applications that can be launched via a URL, such as Microsoft Outlook.

Moreover, users gain immediate access to data from any website, such as the company's latest stock price from the New York Stock Exchange. And, project managers can access outstanding submittals, pending RFIs, change orders and labor costs, as well as a third-party project management system or streaming video from the company's jobsite webcams.

CRITICAL ALERTS

A user can configure a portal to post alerts via the desktop portal, email message or telephone text message based on specific criteria. For example, a CFO might set up the portal to issue an alert if active projects are in danger of exceeding the labor budget. A project manager might set up an alert if a scheduled activity, such as completion of a foundation pour, is off schedule. The user can specify how frequently the data are refreshed: hourly, daily, weekly or monthly.

The portal issues the alert based on information extracted from the appropriate database, such as the user's system applications, a website or third-party software.

The portal also can issue multiple alerts based on various criteria. A project manager of four different active jobs may set up alert criteria for each job depending on the project phase, or set up a project "hot list" that presents due (and past-due) dates.

The latest computer dashboard bolsters construction executives' and project managers' decision-making by putting critical information at their fingertips.

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