

centered on
LANDSCAPING

TAKEOFF AND ESTIMATING SOFTWARE FOR LANDSCAPING

Architects and building owners go to great pains to design landscaping treatments that achieve a desired function and look. It takes a skilled professional and artisan to turn these visions into reality.

CHANGE IS CONSTANT

As in many other industries, innovations that improve efficiencies have made their way into the landscaping trade. The trade is constantly changing with breakthroughs in approaches to sustainable landscaping and digital tools that provide instant views of customer landscape design renderings.

When it comes to landscaping, attention to detail and accuracy are critical to the appearance of a property. Accuracy must begin with the takeoff interpretation of design drawings to assure that all required components and treatments are addressed up front. Failure to do so can be costly.

Successful contractors understand the fundamental importance of the takeoff and estimating (TOE) processes. These tasks are the cornerstone of every construction related bid and have always been challenging. In today's "low bid gets the job" marketplace, a landscaping contractor can lose money before the first irrigation ditch is dug without accurate TOEs.

MANUAL PROCESSES ARE A DRAG ON PRODUCTIVITY

Prior to digital technologies, the rolling linear scale, colored pencils, highlighters, legal pads and calculators were the tools of the estimator. As the use of personal computers grew in business, estimators replaced their calculators with electronic spreadsheets and complex formulas. Many estimators still use

"...UNDERSTAND THE FUNDAMENTAL **IMPORTANCE** OF THE TOE PROCESSES."

these tools to manually perform material takeoffs and generate educated cost "guesstimates" for their formal bids.

Manual processes are time and labor intensive. Knowledgeable

landscape estimators carefully comb through printed plans to define material requirements such as irrigation piping and fixtures, trees, shrubs, sod and top soil. Further complicating the process are irregular shapes. Because most flower beds, ponds, and rock gardens are curved, accurately determining their areas manually can become quite a chore.

"MANUAL PROCESSES ARE **LABOR INTENSIVE**."

Many businesses invest considerable time and money in their TOE processes in the hope of winning work. While manual TOE processes are still used, there is a better, more accurate way for landscape companies to effectively double their estimating productivity. Digital TOE applications allow companies to submit more accurate bids in less time. And of course, more and better bids mean more lucrative work.

DIGITAL TAKEOFF & ESTIMATING IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY

Digital takeoff applications allow knowledgeable landscape estimators to measure areas, lengths and volumes, count quantities, and select

plants from digital plans on a computer screen. As counts and measurements are taken with the click of a computer mouse, the on-screen plan is highlighted to show what has been processed. The estimator applies conditions such as irrigation, lighting, erosion control, flower beds, sod and seeding, etc. Rather

“...SUBMIT **MORE ACCURATE BIDS** IN **LESS TIME**...**BETTER BIDS** MEAN MORE LUCRATIVE WORK.”

than tabulating the takeoffs on a spreadsheet, the estimator lets the application track and tally all the material needs.

Digital estimating applications are used to apply current material, labor, mark-up and other costs to the takeoff data to estimate project costs. An important element of creating an accurate estimate is being able to break a project down into smaller pieces and roll them up into an overall bid. An example would be creating a property estimate by irrigation, ponds, flower beds, trees and shrubs.

From start to finish, an experienced landscape estimator

who is proficient with these automated tools develops a more precise, detailed bid in much less time compared to doing it manually.

Today's digital TOE solutions are usually separate applications. Fortunately many of these products—especially those from a single vendor's portfolio—have a high degree of integration. This integration allows takeoff data to flow directly into cost estimates. What's more, the products' capabilities and features can vary widely; the best value is found in full-featured TOE solutions that do more to simplify and accelerate the bid development process.

AUTOMATION INCREASES EFFICIENCIES

Digital TOE applications quickly pay for themselves in several ways—first by increasing the number of jobs bid to win more work; second by eliminating the need to print, handle and store bulky paper-based plans and other documents; and third by easing the estimator's analysis of the building and grouping objects into assemblies for streamlined installation.

“...LANDSCAPE ESTIMATOR... DEVELOPS A **MORE PRECISE**, DETAILED BID IN MUCH LESS TIME...”

Most importantly, these applications assist in the accurate translation of specified specialty system design requirements into an equally accurate takeoff and estimate.

Digital plans imported directly into the application allow an estimator to takeoff all aspects of the project. This can include professional botanical symbols for trees, shrubs, grasses and other elements. Because the estimator specifies and views individual conditions directly on the computer screen, it's easy to work up precise material counts and types which are critical in developing accurate estimates.

“DIGITAL TOE APPLICATIONS QUICKLY **PAY FOR THEMSELVES...**”

Estimating programs allow landscape contractors to maintain and manage a library of common assemblies and landscaping designs. These assemblies are generally combinations of materials, quantities, costs and labor that together form a unit of landscaping activity. These common assemblies can be recalled instantly and reused among projects to save time.

Cost databases that are specific to landscaping are another time-saver designed to reduce errors and develop a more accurate bid. Moreover, a good estimating software package allows an estimator to import complete and current cost lists from multiple sources including vendors and subcontractors.

“...IT'S **EASY** TO WORK UP **PRECISE** MATERIAL COUNTS AND TYPES... **ACCURATE** ESTIMATES...”

A landscaping estimator uses digital TOE tools to specify assemblies and labor required to perform a specific portion of a project based on the measures identified during the takeoff process. Once the materials and labor are determined, prices and rates are applied, markups are calculated, and the detailed estimate is published for the bid.

MANAGE COSTS BETTER

Cost management is crucial to the profitability of every job. Estimating programs generate reports that help the business owner manage labor and material costs. There are reports to manage material inventories and purchases, and to plan man-hours and costs for a variety of labor

categories and tasks. Depending on the reporting capabilities, labor is broken down into sub-categories for site and installation labor, to name a few. Additionally, reporting can provide job total breakdowns such as by Phase – trenching, plumbing, wiring, sodding, seeding, planting, etc. Furthermore, material requirements are reported by what is needed, and when, in order to facilitate just-in-time purchasing. This is critical when dealing with live plants. These programs also export costing information to accounting systems—yet another way to save time and reduce input errors.

“COST MANAGEMENT IS **CRUCIAL** TO THE **PROFITABILITY** OF EVERY JOB.”

THE BOTTOM LINE: A BETTER WAY TO CONDUCT BUSINESS

Landscape companies that already adopted digital TOE applications can't imagine doing business without these tools. These programs help the owners:

- **Save Time and Money**
Reduce the cost of shipping and printing plans. Spend far less time doing takeoffs and estimating costs for each bid. Submit more bids to win more projects.

- **Reduce Costly Mistakes**

Eliminate manual entry errors and see visually on the screen that everything is accounted for, which decreases the likelihood of having to perform “value engineering” to recoup lost revenue and cost from an error filled bid.

- **Improve Collaboration**

Get everyone on the same page for how to bid and work a job.

- **Differentiate From Competition**

Submit bids, respond to change requests and offer alternatives quickly and with confidence.

CONCLUSION

A landscape company's success begins with expertise, attention to detail, and hard work. These attributes are crucial to accurately takeoff, estimate and bid projects in a timely manner. Taking too long to generate a bid or bidding

“LANDSCAPE COMPANIES... **CAN'T IMAGINE** DOING BUSINESS WITHOUT THESE TOOLS.”

too high because of inaccurate input costs will cause companies to lose jobs. Conversely, if a company bids too low due to inaccurate information, it will lose

money on its work. The objective is to get it right the first time, every time. Digital TOE software makes the difference between keeping a company busy and profitable, and just keeping the doors open.



On Center Software, Inc., is a privately held company providing software and training to construction industry professionals for over 24 years. Located in The Woodlands, Texas, the company's mission is to transform the takeoff, estimating, and labor-tracking experience with comprehensive software solutions that turn winning bids into profitable projects. On Center Software solutions include On-Screen Takeoff®, Quick Bid®, and Digital Production Control™. Customers in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, South Africa, and 60 other countries around the world leverage On Center Software's internationally recognized solutions. For more information about On Center Software, call 866.627.6246 or visit www.oncenter.com.