BUILDER TECH

For an assist from technology, built-in software and apps are favorites
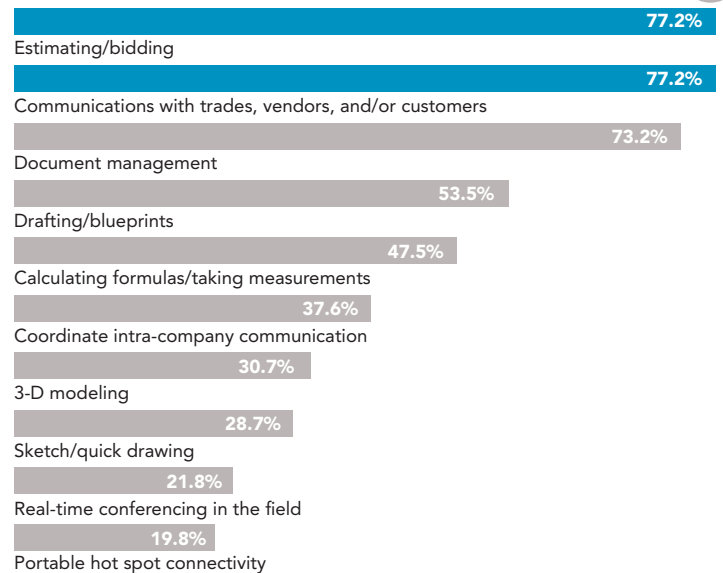
By Mike Beirne, Senior Editor

The standby programs that come already loaded with the purchase of a laptop or a smartphone—Excel, Gmail, Office, FaceTime—and those that can be downloaded for free—Dropbox, Skype, and many more—once again were the most popular tech tools used by participants in *Professional Builder*'s 2017 Builder Technology and Social Media survey. However, innovations like virtual reality (VR) and drones seem to be catching on, particularly with small and mid-sized builders. Approximately one-third of respondents who closed 16 to 50 houses last year are posting VR tours on their company websites and on social media. A quarter of the respondents who sold 26 to 50 homes have posted aerial footage taken by drones, and almost 25 percent of builders who sold five homes or less indicated that they are planning to use drone footage for marketing.

Respondents cited all sorts of apps and software that helped them close the gap between estimates and actual cost. Increased productivity was another top benefit that builders and architects are seeking from their tech tools, whether that gain was realized by meeting construction deadlines or better communication between all the players involved in the project. A list of apps and software that builders and architects are using as well as their favorites is included with the charts that follow.

METHODOLOGY AND RESPONDENT INFORMATION: This survey was distributed between April 12, 2017, and July 19, 2017, to a random sample of *Professional Builder*'s print and digital readers and to members of Builder Partnerships. No incentive was offered. By closing date, a total of 101 eligible readers had returned surveys. Respondent breakdown by discipline: 34.7% custom home builder; 20.2% production builder for move-up/move-down buyer; 11.3% diversified builder/remodeler; 8.1% architect/designer engaged in home building; 6.5% production builder for first-time buyer; 4.0% luxury production builder; 4.0% multifamily builder; 2.4% manufactured, modular, log home, or systems builder; and 8.9% other. Approximately 31.2% sold one to five homes in 2016, and 14.8% sold more than 100 units.
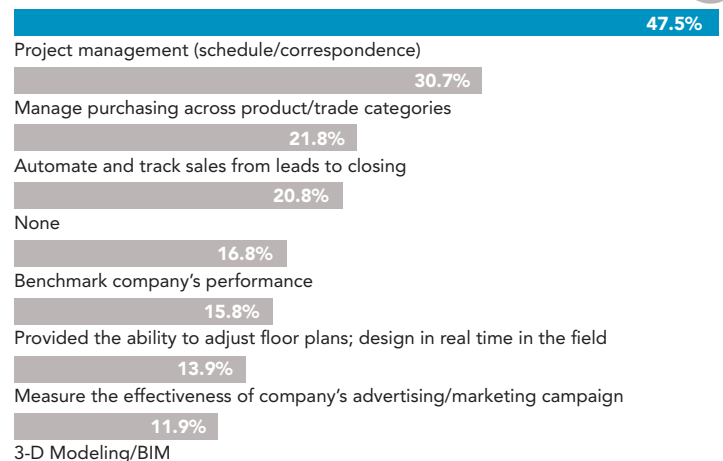
IDENTIFY THE TASKS/FUNCTIONS THAT YOUR COMPANY PERFORMS WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF APPS AND SOFTWARE

Task/Function	Percentage
Estimating/bidding	77.2%
Communications with trades, vendors, and/or customers	77.2%
Document management	73.2%
Drafting/blueprints	53.5%
Calculating formulas/taking measurements	47.5%
Coordinate intra-company communication	37.6%
3-D modeling	30.7%
Sketch/quick drawing	28.7%
Real-time conferencing in the field	21.8%
Portable hot spot connectivity	19.8%

BASE: 101; 2017 PROFESSIONAL BUILDER TECHNOLOGY/SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

Excel, Dropbox, Microsoft Outlook, Google Docs, QuickBooks, and Adobe were among the built-in computer programs mentioned most often in the survey, as were industry-specific programs that users buy separately like Buildertrend, CoConstruct, Revit, AutoCAD, and SoftPlan.

HAS USING SOFTWARE/APPS HELPED YOUR COMPANY ACCOMPLISH ANY OF THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES?

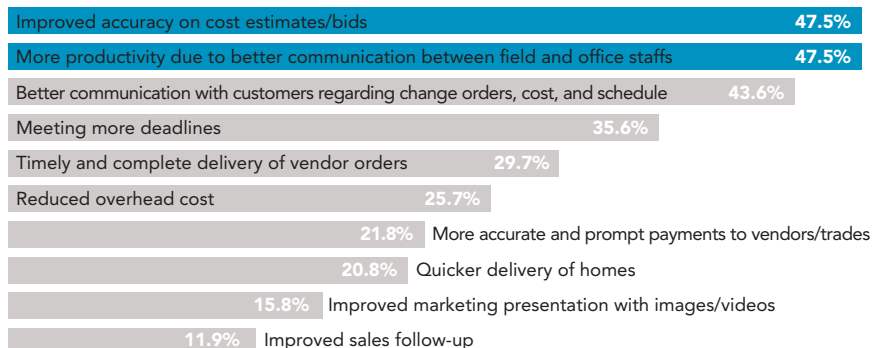| Objective	Percentage
Project management (schedule/correspondence)	47.5%
Manage purchasing across product/trade categories	30.7%
Automate and track sales from leads to closing	21.8%
None	20.8%
Benchmark company's performance	16.8%
Provided the ability to adjust floor plans; design in real time in the field	15.8%
Measure the effectiveness of company's advertising/marketing campaign	13.9%
3-D Modeling/BIM	11.9%

BASE: 101; 2017 PROFESSIONAL BUILDER TECHNOLOGY/SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

Among the other tasks that software/apps helped survey respondents stay on top of were providing real-time updates for jobsite managers and finding real estate values in neighborhoods of interest.

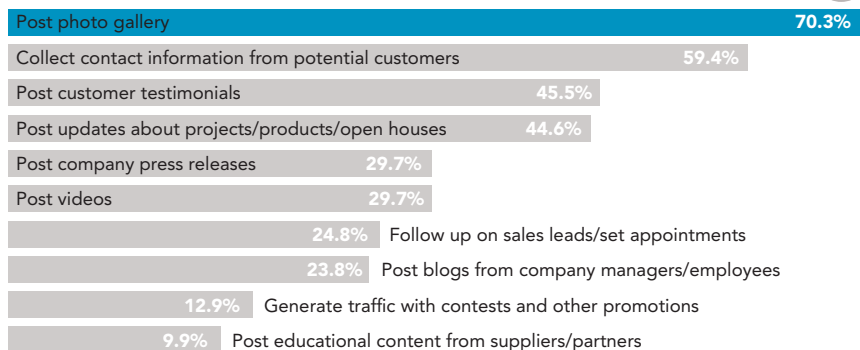## WHICH BENEFITS HAS YOUR COMPANY REALIZED AS A RESULT OF USING APPS OR SOFTWARE?

Improved accuracy on cost estimates/bids	47.5%
More productivity due to better communication between field and office staffs	47.5%
Better communication with customers regarding change orders, cost, and schedule	43.6%
Meeting more deadlines	35.6%
Timely and complete delivery of vendor orders	29.7%
Reduced overhead cost	25.7%
More accurate and prompt payments to vendors/trades	21.8%
Quicker delivery of homes	20.8%
Improved marketing presentation with images/videos	15.8%
Improved sales follow-up	11.9%

BASE: 101; 2017 PROFESSIONAL BUILDER TECHNOLOGY/SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

Technology is improving communication with all parties involved in a project. An Illinois architect who uses e-Builder, CostWorks, Autodesk SketchBook, and Revit noted that software has led to "faster resolution of issues that arise in the field."

HOW DOES YOUR COMPANY USE ITS WEBSITE?

Post photo gallery	70.3%
Collect contact information from potential customers	59.4%
Post customer testimonials	45.5%
Post updates about projects/products/open houses	44.6%
Post company press releases	29.7%
Post videos	29.7%
Follow up on sales leads/set appointments	24.8%
Post blogs from company managers/employees	23.8%
Generate traffic with contests and other promotions	12.9%
Post educational content from suppliers/partners	9.9%

BASE: 101; 2017 PROFESSIONAL BUILDER TECHNOLOGY/SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

Approximately 9 percent of respondents have a person available for live online chats with website visitors, and 10 percent stated their company did not have a website.

HAS YOUR COMPANY USED A DRONE TO TAKE AERIAL PHOTOS/VIDEO OF LAND, JOBSITES, OR COMPLETED HOMES?

52.6% No
25.3% Yes
22.1% No, but planning to do so soon
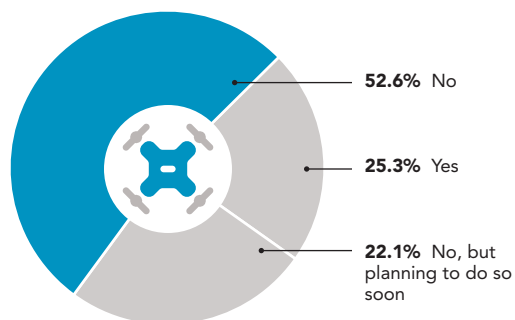
BASE: 101; 2017 PROFESSIONAL BUILDER TECHNOLOGY/SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

One-quarter of respondents who used drones posted the images on their company website and on social media for marketing. Other purposes included surveying land, to document the view from a condo tower, and to give to clients as a thank-you-for-your-business package.
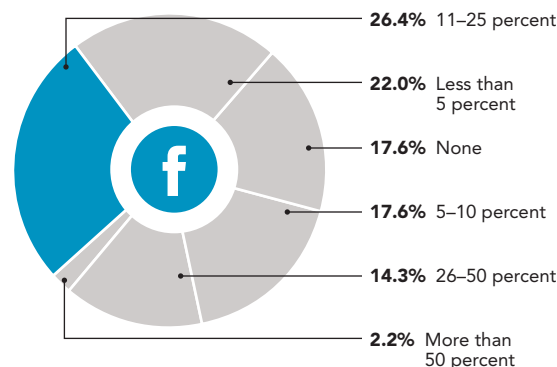
HAS YOUR COMPANY USED VIRTUAL REALITY TECHNOLOGY TO SHOW ANIMATION OR VIRTUAL REALITY TOURS OF EXISTING PRODUCT OR OF HOUSES/COMMUNITIES YET TO BE BUILT?

74.0% No
21.9% Yes
4.2% No, but we are considering doing so soon
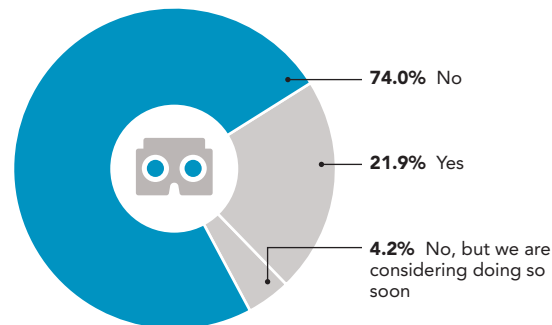
BASE: 101; 2017 PROFESSIONAL BUILDER TECHNOLOGY/SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

A Colorado production home builder is using virtual reality (VR) tours in lieu of building model homes. Another Colorado builder wrote he is posting VR tours of existing homes on the company website and social media page and soon will display virtual tours of houses yet to be built. Several builders and architects mentioned that they are using VR walk-throughs of homes before building begins so clients can get a feel for their house and make changes.
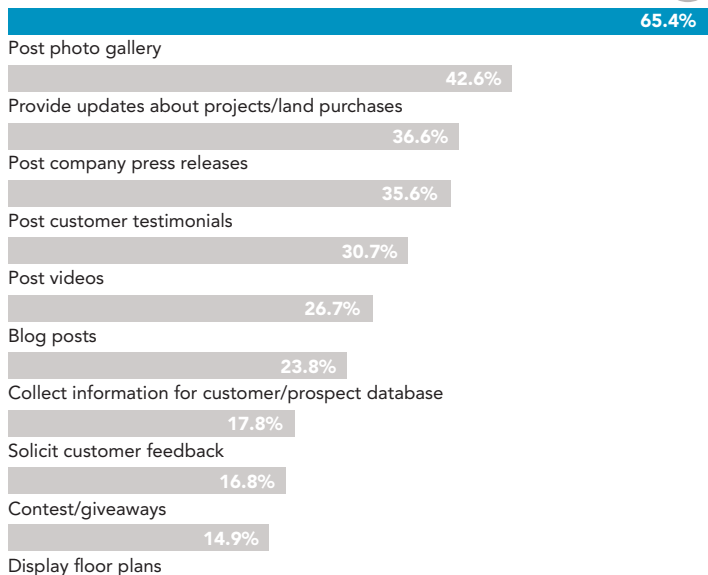
HOW MUCH OF YOUR BUSINESS DO YOU ESTIMATE IS COMING FROM BUYERS YOU'VE REACHED THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA EFFORTS?

26.4% 11–25 percent
22.0% Less than 5 percent
17.6% None
17.6% 5–10 percent
14.3% 26–50 percent
2.2% More than 50 percent

BASE: 101; 2017 PROFESSIONAL BUILDER TECHNOLOGY/SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

Almost one-third of survey respondents who sold 16 to 25 homes last year attributed 11 to 25 percent of their business to engagement through social media.

WHICH ACTIVITIES HAS YOUR COMPANY USED IN SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH?

f

- **65.4%** — Post photo gallery
- **42.6%** — Provide updates about projects/land purchases
- **36.6%** — Post company press releases
- **35.6%** — Post customer testimonials
- **30.7%** — Post videos
- **26.7%** — Blog posts
- **23.8%** — Collect information for customer/prospect database
- **17.8%** — Solicit customer feedback
- **16.8%** — Contest/giveaways
- **14.9%** — Display floor plans

BASE: 101; 2017 PROFESSIONAL BUILDER TECHNOLOGY/SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

More than three-quarters of survey respondents use Facebook for their social media outreach, followed by LinkedIn (42 percent), Houzz (38 percent), YouTube (27 percent), and Pinterest (24 percent).

MY FAVORITE APP IS ... BECAUSE ...

"Trello tracks our invoicing, billing, to-do lists, etc. Easy to use and friendly to anyone."

"Design 3D Group of Apps; simple to use and allows me to quickly give customers a detailed visual to explain a detail."

"Buildertrend allows us to communicate through messages and comments with internal users, vendors, and buyers; upload docs, photos, and videos; [and] track schedules, warranties, selections, POs, invoices, etc."

"Box—we store all of our job files for field access, plans, selections, engineering, all of it."

"Note Taker HD as we can draw concepts with clients, letting them see our ideas and giving them confidence when they hire us for landscape plans."

"Dropbox for sharing docs in the field and Constant Contact for lead management."

"Autodesk SketchBook. When the contractor needs help figuring out how to build something, I can easily sketch out a detail, transmit it to him, and have a permanent record."

"SugarSync [provides] access to files on the go and coordination of project data. Guild quality for reviews."

"Sweets, info for product updates."

"iHandy Carpenter to measure angles and slopes; Paperless: Lists + Checklists to keep track of projects, to-dos, etc.; iCalendar for making appointments, reminders; maps to find jobsites."

"Houzz, share current houses for sale."

"Google apps so reports can be worked on real time live."

"Evernote for quality control, punch list, and sharing with group. Can insert pictures and check off items completed."

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS NAMED THESE MOBILE APPS AND SOFTWARE PROGRAMS AS THEIR FAVORITES OR MOST OFTEN USED

PROJECT MGMT/SCHEDULING
Brix
BuildTools
BuilderMT
Buildertrend
BuildTopia
CoConstruct
Mark Systems Integrated
   Homebuilder Management Software
Procore
Sage 100 Contractor
   (formerly Sage Master Builder)
Sage 300
   (formerly Sage Timberline Office)
Trello

MEASURING/FORMULAS
BIM Pipeline
Construction Master Pro
DeWalt Mobile Pro App
Excel
PlanSwift
QuickBooks
Revit

ESTIMATING/BIDDING
Adobe
BuildTopia
Contractor Tools
Excel
Google Docs
iHandy Carpenter
QuickBooks
Microsoft Office
PlanSwift
SoftPlan

DRAFTING/DRAWING
AutoCAD
Autodesk SketchBook
Chief Architect
Note Taker HD
Revit
SoftPlan

3-D MODELING/BIM
BIM Pipeline
Chief Architect
Design 3D
Envisioneer
Revit
SoftPlan

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT
Adobe
Box
BuildTopia
Dropbox
Evernote
Google Docs
Microsoft Office 365
Microsoft OneDrive/OneNote
Microsoft Word
Note Taker HD
SugarSync

CONNECTIVITY
FaceTime
iPhone hotspot
Skype
Verizon Wireless

INTRA-COMPANY COMMUNICATION
Adobe
FaceTime
Microsoft Outlook
Skype for Business
Zoom

OUTSIDE COMMUNICATION
8x8 Virtual Contact Center
Buildtopia
Facebook
Hyphen

SALES
Lasso
New Star Sales

OTHER FAVORITES
Houzz
Realtor.com app
Zillow