

CLIENT CASE STUDY

Featuring Seth Cheever of Stiles Construction



How one of Florida's leading commercial development companies is employing the latest in construction technology on building projects.

Tell us about yourself.

I have been working in the building industry for 14 years. I started working in Preconstruction at Stiles Construction in August 2002 after receiving my bachelor's degree in construction engineering technology from Florida A&M University.

Tell us about your company – what do you build and where?

Stiles Construction was established in 1951 as a small residential general contracting firm. We have since grown into a full-service real estate firm adding divisions for services such as acquisitions, architecture, financing, leasing and brokerage, and property management. Stiles Construction builds for our own Development division as well as third-party clients. Our product types include all facets of construction including office, retail, automotive, sporting facilities, governmental, industrial, healthcare, parking, educational, hospitality, and residential. We build primarily in South Florida, but travel outside of the region for our various clients and partnerships.

Describe the preconstruction process at Stiles – from Prequal to Bid Day, including the number of employees, subs, plan files, etc. involved.

The majority of our work comes from negotiated contracts. Those projects are usually assigned to a Senior Preconstruction Manager (Sr.PCM) who leads a team of 3-5 PCMs working on specific trades. On a competitive bid we may bring in additional PCMs and sometimes Project Managers from the field to help manage the additional incoming bids.

We are more selective in our bid invitations for our negotiated work, inviting between 200-250 subcontractors. On competitive bid projects we might invite upwards of 450 subcontractors.

We prepare bid documents then post them to SmartBidNet and then notify the potential bidders of their availability. We repeat this process for addenda and RFI responses as they arrive.

How did you handle invitation to bid before SmartBidNet?

Initially we utilized manual database and fax solicitations. We started using other bid solicitation/preconstruction management web-based software in 2006.

How long has your company been using SmartBidNet?

We have been using SmartBidNet since the beginning of 2011.

What features of the software influenced your purchase decision during the buying phase?

We were first attracted to the ease of use of the system! The simplicity of the system enabled a fast roll-out that was logical to our users. We were also attracted to the reporting abilities and the ability to simply manage our subcontractor database while within a project without interrupting overall workflow. We kept finding more beneficial features and abilities in the system after spending a short time exploring the capabilities of the system.

Which employee roles use SmartBidNet within your company and how often?

Senior Preconstruction Managers, Preconstruction Managers, and the Preconstruction Assistant use SmartBidNet daily. Depending upon their project involvement, departmental Directors may use the system every few days.

If any of your users have downloaded the SmartBidNet mobile app, how do they assist in mobile preconstruction?

The SmartBidNet mobile app allows us to access our subcontractor database while out of the office, and enables us to keep project documents on hand in the event we need to access them at a presentation or at an off-site meeting. It also saves time and uncertainty by keeping associated documents handy as well. As an example, we can ensure better coordination with a site contractor on a site visit by being able to check a corresponding fire or plumbing drawing, which they may or may not have considered or checked... plus, it's easier to manage a mobile phone or a tablet than a set of plans on the trunk of a car.

Describe the most recent project in which SmartBidNet was essential for preconstruction.

SmartBidNet is the key conduit for ALL of our preconstruction projects. It is the vehicle that we use to deliver our project documents and to communicate with our subcontractor network.

What other technology did you or are you using for this project? How does SmartBidNet fit into the mix?

For preconstruction, we are mostly preparing documents in PDF format as a combination of drawings with annotations and other word processing software. The other key technology that we are utilizing in preconstruction is the preparation of Building Information Models into a format that is available for our subcontractors to review and evaluate. SmartBidNet fills the key role of the efficient and reliable mass communication and distributor of these essential project documents.

How has your company's use of technology evolved since you first started working there?

In the last 12 years, we have gone from manual takeoffs with rulers and a digitizer to using computer based on-screen takeoffs that are able to be collaborated on by the entire department. We have also changed our bid solicitation system from isolated components (i.e. fax machines, a complicated subcontractor database directory, and untraceable paper plan deliveries) to SmartBidNet, which simplifies all of those individual processes and components into a unified platform. Of course BIM has moved to the front of the line of construction technology evolution. We've gone from blueprints, to plotted drawings, to on-screen 2D images to 3D models. We're now getting into 4D simulations and 5D model-based cost estimating.

Over the next decade, in what ways do you hope to see construction technology evolve, particularly at your company?

I expect that BIM will take an ever-increasing role in construction in general, being the primary aspect to evolve the most significantly. We are currently positioning ourselves to prepare for this with the addition of the Virtual Design & Construction division at Stiles. I expect that the level of expertise in this realm will change the way that our Preconstruction and Operations departments function. The other aspect of construction that I expect to evolve most meaningfully is mobile computing, perhaps more so out in the field than in Preconstruction. That said, I expect to see benefits of mobile computing trickle into the office in ways that we haven't yet thought of, that might change some of the day to day functions.