LEVERAGING MOBILITY
FOR THE RIGHT OF WAY PROFESSIONAL

Yes, there's an app for that!

BY YOGESH KHANDELWAL

Keeping up with changing technology can pose a significant challenge to any organization. Managing budgets, project schedules and reporting processes can become burdensome without the right tools.

Over the years, I have seen varying degrees of technology acceptance by companies involved in right of way. At one extreme, there are those who still prefer using the good old-fashioned spreadsheet. At the other extreme are those who have not only adopted the latest technology, they have built their own systems. Then there are those companies that fall somewhere in the middle. They have accepted the fact that their core competency is right of way - not technology – and have chosen to maximize their internal resources, while outsourcing technological tools to the experts.

For companies who recognize the value that comes from using third-party vendors, there are a variety of new tools available that offer unparalleled speed and increased efficiency.

CONNECTIVITY CHALLENGES

Anyone who has experienced unreliable or unavailable online connectivity knows about the frustrations that come along with it. In response, geoAMPS, LLC developed a cutting-edge tool that uses a detached and mobile component that does not rely on connectivity. That's because the technology was created to work both with and without a connection.

Originally, our company developed a new suite of products for an insurance company who needed a fast and efficient way for their field agents to enter information into a database from different locations. The faster they could get their next assignment, the more money they could make. For these agents, time was literally money.

When we started working with right of way agents in 2010, we discovered that they were facing many of the challenges and needs as agents in the insurance industry. We learned that, regardless of whether it was a title agent working in the office or a field agent performing on-site job functions, having access to a collaborative environment where information can be shared quickly is a high priority.

The rowAMPS suite of products was designed as a cost-effective way to offer cross-platform collaboration across a diverse set of users. The products work with a variety of platforms, including desktops, laptops, phone and tablets. But the real difference is the detached component, which offers unparalleled access regardless of the user's location. Because there is no need to log into a web application, users from anywhere can input project updates and changes, all while having complete access to any new information that's been input by another user. The detached component gives the added convenience of always having the most up-to-date information on hand.

Since the rowAMPS modules work seamlessly across all the platforms, any information entered through one interface is readily available on other platforms. So if an agent working in the office logs on to the web and takes a tract offline, an agent in the field using the detached component can be updated on any changes that were made. If another agent is using a mobile device while pulling title at the courthouse, they will have instant access to the same changes. Similarly, an acquisition agent that has just secured survey permission can input updates that will trigger a notification to the

survey crew via their smart phones. This approach brings significant efficiencies within right of way processes and helps eliminate errors.

MOBILE APPS

In June 2011, we launched our first mobile app, giving users quick access to the same kinds of updates they were getting with their phones or tablets. Important notifications are pushed to these devices so that agents will never have to miss a beat. From getting real-time updates, requesting documents to getting reports, there is little that a user cannot do via mobile technology.
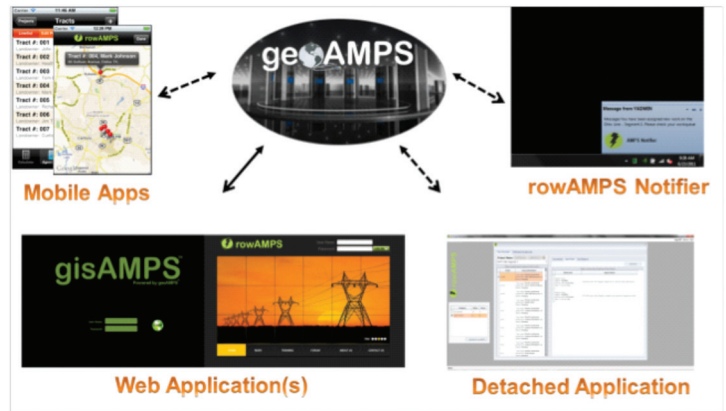
Our GIS solution enables geospatial visualization of all the information related to projects and assets on a GIS map. This unique interface provides users with visual updates of the project's progress in various disciplines, such as survey, title and acquisition, and critical alerts can be set up specifically for expiring options or leases. In addition, this interface provides the ability to run several 'what-if' scenarios surrounding route planning, re-routes and engineering of the end product.

Our technology is independent of operating systems like Windows and MacOS and browsers like Internet Explorer, Firefox and Chrome. The combination creates a powerful solution that allows organizations to leverage existing infrastructure and deployment options that are speedy and cost effective. In most instances, organizations can start using the tools within two weeks of picking which modules to include. To date, the right of way field agents have responded well to the speed and reliability of this interface and the flexibility that it provides to those who work in remote locations.

BENEFITS OF OUTSOURCING

Partnering up with a company that offers a comprehensive suite of technological solutions can provide significant benefits to any organization, regardless of their size. Some of these benefits are:

- Products have a proven track record with several successful implementations

- Easy to adapt and convert a company's existing data

- Products are customized to needs of the end-user; easily adapted to changing business processes

- Platform offers independent deployment that can reduce implementation costs

- Fixed cost structure simplifies the budget process and eliminates surprises

- Collective knowledge from industry experts is already integrated into each product

- Access to a seasoned team that's adept in technology and has a complete understanding of industry business processes

- End-user training and support

The unique suite of products enables organizations to take advantage of new technology and adapt quickly to changing business practices.

LOOKING FORWARD

Fortunately, the web component of today's project management tools provides exceptional efficiency and has greatly simplified the deployment process. With Microsoft, Google and Firefox all vying for the same search engine users, innovation within the browser space has accelerated. As a result, the browsers of today are far more capable than they were even a year ago. The availability of Wi-Fi connections and mobile hotspots have given us the added flexibility to work from remote locations and if necessary, from a computer other than our own. This means that an agent on vacation could log into the web application from a shared computer at the hotel. While this may be the last thing an agent wants to do, the options exist if they get in a bind and need to access or update information quickly.

As right of way agents strive to keep pace with project demands, taking advantage of highly efficient tools will be the best way for companies to ensure they remain competitive in today's marketplace. To truly maximize a company's time and resources, software solutions will need to continually progress to meet evolving expectations and accelerated client demands.

Yogesh Khandelwal

As Chief Executive Officer of geoAMPS, LLC, Yogesh is an engineer with a diverse background in technology across various industries. With more than 15 years experience in database customization and implementation, his organization helps energy companies implement standardized processes, bringing efficiency and optimization within project and asset management.