

DELIVERING PROJECT CERTAINTY THROUGH REAL-WORLD ANALYTICS



Your company's success hinges on your customers' confidence in your ability to deliver a project safely, on time and on budget. As one of the fastest-growing privately held pipeline, facilities and energy infrastructure solution providers in the U.S., Strike understands that this ability, along with a deep commitment to always doing what's right for clients, is non-negotiable. The Strike team meets this challenge daily, drawing on an extensive portfolio of companies to provide the local terrain, mobilization and specialized expertise required to serve a broad range of capital projects.

With a multi-discipline team of over 4,000 individuals across 24 service locations that leverage more than 5,600 pieces of equipment companywide, Strike's willingness to pivot to meet clients' needs is reflected in everything it does, right down to its choice of construction management software.

Tasked with the management of hundreds of stakeholder expectations along with thousands of pieces of data, Strike needed a comprehensive data management solution. With the help of InEight® Connected Analytics, the Strike team is now bringing data and people together, redefining its commitment to earned value management (EVM), and increasing project certainty across the board.

RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR A CONNECTED SOLUTION

For Dean Schulte, Chief Information Officer for Strike, one missing link in its project management system was being able to load budgets not just by costs, but by quantity in hours and by resource, i.e., equipment, labor, material subs, etc. “Getting that kind of control, not just at a total level but a daily one, and then being able to track progress against resources, is critical,” Schulte says. “So, we knew that if we could get that kind of granularity, we could start producing earned value reports that didn’t just talk about value, but really showed it.”

Another issue was a common one, that of team members relying on outdated tools to track data, including Microsoft Excel®. Though customary, Excel remains a point solution with templates that are not always applicable to the project at hand, and it can take the user longer to locate any mistakes. This is a problem because the sooner issues can be identified — where things are going over budget or where there should be a change order — the greater the impact on the profitability of the business.

According to Todd Taylor, Construction Technology Manager for Strike, this was proving difficult to achieve. “With our traditional reporting tools, it might be six to seven weeks after an event has happened until we see the impact of adverse events on our financials,” he says. Schulte adds a little color to Taylor’s point: “Imagine if your GPS only sent you a report a month after your road trip telling you where you missed all your turns and how much time you could have saved if you’d made those turns, would you still use it? That’s exactly how it is with most data reporting.”

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Therefore, a solution that could give them real-time information was a must for reacting more quickly to problematic situations. “Having a tool that could show, for instance, a certain type of earned value curve on a project — project after project — would give our executives the ability to immediately discern problem areas. This is a big deal,” Taylor says. Why? “Ideally, management wants to manage by exception, to see the outlier, figure out what needs to be adjusted, and then do it quickly. We knew that the right connected analytics solution would show that.”



DASHBOARDS THAT VISUALIZE EARNED VALUE

Once Strike chose InEight's Connected Analytics solution, one of the first priorities was being able to produce accurate and timely EVM reports. Teams needed dashboards that could not only handle data coming in from myriad sources, but also track, sort and analyze data going back out as well. For Taylor, integrated APIs are key to accessing the data they need and marrying it with data from their other systems. "We can take actual costs from our ERP system, time from our InEight-integrated system, plus hours from our legacy ticketing system," Taylor reports. "Then between those three pieces, we can now produce some pretty nice analytical EVM reports."



Using the InEight integration with Primavera P6®, the team can also access data from its scheduling program. "That's what's made the earned value type reporting really exciting because not only do we have cost quantities and hours for each cost item, but now we've got the duration for when it's supposed to start and stop," Taylor says. "With InEight, we can get a true planned earned value curve, and then we can track against it in real time. Now that's pretty awesome."

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Taylor also points out that though the concept of earned value has been around for a while, it's still not one that is universally understood by all stakeholders. He's helped remedy this with a clever dashboard maneuver consisting of two tabs. One is based on true earned value-per-unit cost and the proportion of individual costs to overall costs. That one is used to determine percent complete data. "But then we created another tab that's just based on quantities,"

Taylor explains. "Say someone's got 100 quantities of something and they've installed 80 of them. It's basically telling them, 'Hey, you're at 80%.' So, it operates as a simplified version of progress tracking that's more accessible to more users."

For Schulte, it's also about being able to visualize data. "When you have 20 to 30 phases on a project, it's pretty hard to scan down a traditional Excel grid and see where you're doing well, where you're not, or where you're even trending. A picture's worth a thousand words, and the InEight dashboards give us that picture in real time."

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Taylor agrees and adds another benefit of visualizing data on the dashboards: charting a critical path to construction. “On our linear projects, the critical path isn’t necessarily clearly defined,” Taylor says. “It’s a sequence of events where you might have clearing that starts before ditching, which starts before lighting and welding, which is down. You want to see those real value curves, and how they’re progressing. That’s where the visuals really come in.” Why is this so important to Strike’s success? “If you can just look at a dashboard and see if there’s going to be an intersection or a slow-up at some point that you can’t otherwise extract from just numbers, you’re going to be ahead of the game,” Taylor says.

CONNECTING DATA YIELDS FASTER ADOPTION

Another factor in Strike’s success with its new system is all of InEight’s Microsoft Power BI® integrations. “Our Power BI team has been able to easily connect with InEight’s OData API and pull data down into our data warehouse,” Taylor explains. “From there, we use the standard cost code structure that we have in a few key fields so that we can pull in all the rest of the data. Because of that ability, it’s been a pretty smooth transition process.” While the productivity and earned-value dashboards are primarily targeted at the project management team, i.e., the project manager, superintendent and coordinator in the field, the executive teams have shown new interest in getting on board. One of the reasons is the software’s mapping ability. “Our execs love to look at the maps because they tell a story so quickly,” Taylor says. “And that’s what they need because they’re not just looking at one project. They’re going through our whole portfolio. So, the quicker we can bring data to light and allow them to analyze it, the better for everyone.”



Fairway Houston Facilities

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What about the impact on Strike’s clients? Schulte reports definite improvements there as well. “Their interest is higher than it used to be because now when they say, ‘Hey, how much has been completed?’ we can show them by phase on the map exactly what’s been performed, what hasn’t, which drillings have been completed, and which ones are still to be done, plus all the dates. It’s super transparent.”

As for the learning curve on the dashboards, the Strike team has needed very little guidance from InEight support, and this is a good thing. “It’s very intuitive, so we’ve been able to figure out pretty much everything on our own,” Schulte says. “We know we can always contact the InEight team for help, which is great. But the goal of giving people connected data in the first place is so they can get what they need when they need it — and that’s what we’ve done.”

SHARING INSIGHTS TO STAY COMPETITIVE

Another benefit Schulte sees is the shortened time it now takes Strike to close on a request for information (RFI) and responses on change orders. “If we get clients an answer a month after their initial request and then we have to go back and open the site up and make changes, very rarely do our predictive costs and recovery expense models fit anymore,” he explains. “But now when we get an RFI, we can issue an answer in an hour, have the crew mobilized and they can take care of it, allowing us to stay on track with our costs.”



Data is all about balance and, as Schulte says, giving people data on their own terms. That includes data on time spent. This is because getting customers to pay for time when they make changes to a project is often a difficult proposition. “But now we can actually point to a visual and share what the impact of time spent was, so customers are more lenient on substantial changes once they see we’ve got some skin in the game too,” Schulte says.

For the project controls team, sharing data also means the creation of a project model that’s reusable, so they don’t have to rebuild their own Excel spreadsheets and educate people on the same process for every new project. “Our jobs should not be handled as individual works of art,” Schulte says. “Meaning, we shouldn’t have to create ‘project management artwork’ over and over. With InEight, the models are right there, so we save time, which saves money.”

Taylor points out another feature they’ve been using that has some unexpected internal benefits. “The InEight platform has essentially allowed us to build reconciliation-type reports on top of the daily plans,” he says. “So, we’re able to catch timecard errors before they get pushed to payroll. We can see any missing extra pay, highlight it easily, and flag it before it can become a downstream problem.”

Schulte agrees and adds another aspect. “While it’s true that one-off payroll creations to catch somebody up take a lot of hours on the back end, it’s about more than that,” he says. “On a human level, if we mess up payroll, people can feel like we don’t care about them. It’s a morale issue when people don’t get paid, and nobody needs that.”

A FUTURE BUILT ON CERTAINTY

Strike prides itself on delivering certainty across every facet of a project. Looking back on all it has accomplished since its decision to go with InEight Connected Analytics, the team sees project certainty as the most important benefit moving forward.

“We fully expect our partnership with InEight to help us land more advanced customers wanting data that’s reliable at a higher level,” Schulte says. “Clients are always nervous about projects that are a big capital investment for them because they have to rely on the contractor’s word that they’re going to make their dates. The certainty, the confidence that we’ve now got the data to back up our progress reports is crucial.”

Are you ready to build project certainty with real-world data?

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For Taylor, that confidence comes back again to the visuals provided by the dashboards. “What makes it such a great platform is the breadth of data available to pull reports from, and the higher-end analytical ability with Power BI. Those two items alone make it a very robust and scalable system.”

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At the end of the day, it all goes back to the Strike value of always doing what’s right for its clients. “One of the areas we’re planning on opening up is safety, complete with individual customer data portals to give them real-time insights into their projects, something our smaller competitors can’t easily do,” says Schulte. “InEight Connected Analytics is proving to be a wonderful tool to further differentiate ourselves in the market, helping us be more competitive now — and stay that way in the future.”

About InEight

InEight provides field-tested project management software for the owners, contractors, engineers and architects who are building the world around us. Over 300,000 users and more than 750 customers worldwide rely on InEight for real-time insights that help manage risk and keep projects on schedule and under budget across the entire life cycle. From pre-planning to design, from estimating to scheduling, and from field execution to turnover, InEight has powered more than \$400 billion in projects globally across infrastructure, public sector, energy and power, oil, gas and chemical, mining, and commercial. For more information, visit [InEight.com](https://ineight.com).