

ASSEMBLE SYSTEMS

WORKFLOW GUIDE

Look-Aheads

Keep Projects Running Smoothly and On Schedule

Look-Aheads

If you're a contractor, you know that look-ahead planning is vital to keeping a project running smoothly and on schedule. Typically looking forward three to six weeks, look-aheads can help GCs in countless ways, including:

- 1 Providing a deep assessment of current work in progress as well as upcoming construction work.
- 2 Coordinating the efforts of subcontractors and ensuring they stay on schedule.
- 3 Establishing the rate and progression of work and smoothing variations in construction workflow.
- 4 Offering planning foresight and reducing overall uncertainty in construction operations.
- 5 Increasing production by identifying opportunities to overlap activities, split activities, and reduce the transfer times between activities.

Look-ahead planning is a key link between phase schedules and weekly work plans. Look-aheads carve up the master schedule into many packages and typically provide detail beyond what is in the schedule, such as outlining which crews should be in specific locations and what they should be doing at certain times. A look-ahead may also include Safe Work Plans that outline hazards of activities at hand.

Look-aheads are the first step in controlling production and, in fact, are the only option for producing more reliable production plans based on the stream of supply, design, and installation throughout production units. Reliable construction planning demands that project managers understand and manage the prerequisites for any given activity— such as previous work completed, needed information obtained, materials delivered, equipment and tools available, weather amenable — in order to identify and resolve conflicts as early as possible. The earlier you identify these conflicts, the better the chances of resolving them and staying on schedule — and look-aheads are the tool for the job.

TRADITIONAL LOOK-AHEADS **FALL SHORT**

Although the value of look-aheads could hardly be argued, traditional approaches to look-ahead planning are not on such solid ground. For example, it's common on projects today for "look-aheads" to be nothing more than detailed plans developed in weekly subcontractor meetings and documented in spreadsheets or on a whiteboard. However, these plans are rarely tied to higher-level project plans and schedules, nor do they even use the parameters, such as location and task names, common to the rest of the project. These plans then become the primary means of production control on the job site, with subcontractors typically following them while disregarding higher-level project execution plans.

Using a typical look-ahead plan on its own can lead to blind spots — that is, potential conflicts between subcontractors trying to work in the same space, which can lead to confusion and delays. When look-ahead planning is not used correctly, weekly work plans are not properly linked to long-term plans and Percent Plan Complete (PPC) is not a reliable indicator of project progress. Planners slip into reactionary mode and lose all project foresight.



Software Usage is on the Rise

According to an August 2015 survey by Capterra, a software advisory service, more than half of construction managers rely on such tools. Four out of five who use it said it decreases the amount of time required to complete a project, and two-thirds said it resulted in a 25%-100% increase in sales.

A BETTER WAY: **BIM-BASED LOOK-AHEADS**

Assemble Systems has developed a solution that overcomes traditional challenges of look-ahead planning. Affordable, flexible, and easy to use, the cloud-based software draws on data from the building information model (BIM) to help the field team, project manager, superintendents, and subcontractors develop and access reliable look-ahead reports, facilitating a deeper understanding of work in progress and upcoming work.

Assemble draws data from the published BIM model, such as Activity IDs, WBS codes, installation dates, and look-ahead groups (to start, to finish, behind schedule) to create accurate, up-to-date look-ahead reports. It can associate activity IDs or WBS codes from schedule to model components, export and import data to and from Microsoft Excel, use "if formulas" to compare to the current schedule, and modify look-ahead group values routinely. By having easy access to the quantities associated with each task on the look-ahead report, users can greatly improve resource planning.

Data from the model lends a visual component to the planning process, enabling a better understanding of what is happening and where. For example, Assemble lets users define views that group and filter by specified look-ahead values, and users can color code the BIM model according to activities to be started within the next three weeks, items to be completed within the next three weeks, and items currently behind schedule. This makes it easy for GCs to review job progress with subcontractors as well as the quantities associated with upcoming and in-progress activities.

Look-ahead planning is most effective when those doing the work are involved in the planning. Assemble supports involvement and collaboration among all project team members, who can access information, provide feedback, and collaborate, regardless of location, via any Internet-connected device. Subcontractors can directly access needed quantities and visuals. Workflow conflicts can be resolved quickly and effectively, before they become major obstacles.

LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Not all look-aheads are created equal; in fact, some construction plans dubbed “look-aheads” are little more than short-sighted to do lists. Fortunately, technology is available today that delivers the potential benefits of look-aheads without breaking the bank, drawing data directly from the BIM model to give contractors and subcontractors a deep understanding of job progress that supports efficient resource planning, improved productivity, and on-time performance. Used effectively, the latest technology enables a contractor to move from being reactive to being proactive – and that’s an advantage that can boost current and future business.

