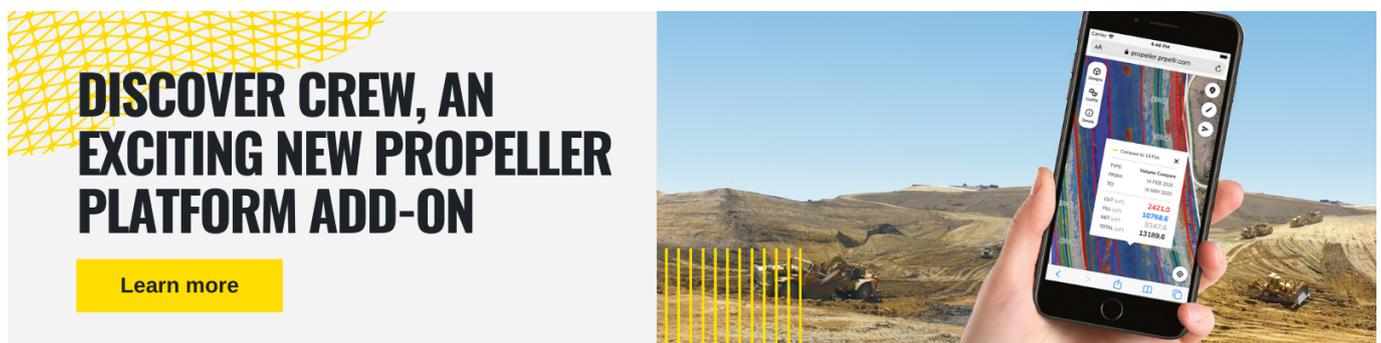


Propeller Asks: What Issues Do You Have Getting Information from the Office to the Field?

No matter the industry you operate in or the nature of your work, consistent communication between team members is key to getting the job done right and on time. This also rings true on the job sites our customers work on: [construction sites](#), [surface mines](#) and [quarries](#), and [landfills](#). Maintaining a solid line of dialogue between the office and the field is challenging no matter the distance, number of workers involved, or nature of the information being communicated.

We recently introduced a few ways to help our customers more easily share site maps and survey data to combat some of the communication difficulties inherent to any worksite. These include:

1. [Crew](#), an add-on to the [Propeller Platform](#) that allows users to create customized aerial maps with special overlays (linework, cut/fill remainders, design specs). Platform users can share them with their colleagues in the field by sending them a custom URL that will take them to a browser-based version of the map.
2. [View-only mode](#), a limited permission level for the Propeller Platform you can grant subcontractors, clients, and other third parties. View-only users can check out your most recent site maps, but are restricted from seeing or exporting things like specific measurements and design files.
3. [PDF file exports](#), an easy way to create and distribute high-resolution, 2D versions of your site maps with whatever information you want to include.



DISCOVER CREW, AN EXCITING NEW PROPELLER PLATFORM ADD-ON

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With improved communication an ongoing project for us, we decided to make that the focus of this month's **Propeller Asks** question:

How do you deliver information from the office to field, and what obstacles do you face with that communication?

Among the 80+ answers we received, four obvious trends emerged. Here, in descending order, are the most frequently mentioned communication issues respondents said their worksites suffer from:

1. We don't have a good way to quickly share the most up-to-date information

Worksites are fast-paced, constantly changing environments, no matter the industry. Every day, stakeholders' priorities change, resources are reallocated, new surveys are completed, and a hundred other things take place that change what needs to happen on the ground.

So it came as no surprise to us that the need to keep everyone on site informed of the most recent plans was the biggest trend in the responses we received. These are just a small sampling of the comments we received:

"Obstacles include constant drawing revisions and mistakes from not having everyone updated."

"The biggest challenge is getting the latest drawings and documents in the hands of the people on site."

"Not all teams are operating off the same info all the time, which creates a headache for me when I have to get everyone on the same page hours later."

Several people said their primary method of sharing site maps and instructions is through printed documents, which, obviously, takes longer to distribute and are more costly than digital means.

Not having a way to update everyone in real time isn't an issue specific to construction sites or other large-scale work environments, but it can be especially detrimental to them. It costs companies a lot of money when their people and machines are in the wrong place doing the wrong jobs.

2. We have too many ways to share information

While many people reported not having an effective way to communicate new information in a timely fashion, some said they actually have *too many* methods.

“Keeping track of the latest info” was the biggest issue on site according to one senior business development manager, who said he frequently finds himself asking the question, “Did you look in all of the places that the information would have been shared?”

There’s certainly no shortage of data-sharing and communication platforms for worksites to utilize. In addition to industry-specific tools like BIM360, our respondents mentioned WeTransfer, OneNote, Google Drive, MS Teams, Skype for Business, and Dropbox. And, usually, they didn’t mention just one.

On top of that, almost all the respondents who mentioned using at least one of those communication platforms said their teams also leverage email, texting, and phone calls to share information—usually with no rhyme or reason for which medium is used for which purpose. One person even mentioned occasionally communicating through “social platforms.”

“How something is sent sometimes depends on who’s sending it and what they prefer to use,” said one project manager.

Without agreed-upon, centralized communication channels, plans and documents can get lost, conflicting orders can cause confusion, and teams can operate off of outdated documents.

3. Data connectivity creates roadblocks on site

Many worksites in the industries we service tend to be off the beaten path, miles from areas with more consistent data accessibility. This is especially true for landfills and surface mines and quarries which by nature are typically in less populated areas. And on-site Wi-Fi, if it exists, is often spotty and limited to a small corner of the jobsite.

While many of the cloud-based work management platforms that we listed above tend to have good mobile useability, they were built with offices and urban areas in mind, not 100+ acre worksites. Because of this, the constant connection necessary to access data is often impossible on some sites.

Here’s how one project surveyor explained their current situation operating in a more remote area:

“Currently we use thumb drives to transfer data from office to machines and field controllers.

The files are installed manually. We have looked into Wi-Fi and cell phone modems. The cost of these services is substantial and we often work in areas without Wi-Fi or cell service. I can see us moving to some form of wireless service as cost and technology improves.”

Many who said they use physical memory cards point out that they can only bring files of a certain size along with them, requiring more trips back to homebase.

4. We can share information—but too much info causes confusion

While the majority of respondents to our survey reported at least one issue sharing information with their field teams, many said they were happy with the consistency of their communication standards.

However, several of those who said they had no issues bridging the gap between office and field still expressed concern that they weren't getting *the right information* to each stakeholder.

“We have built a proven workflow that speaks well to the field supervisors and has mitigated the majority of problems with getting them the information they need at the right time,” said one VDC manager. “We have to be careful though because it is easy to send too much data or make a process too complex.”

When answers are of the essence, having to sift through large documents with loads of immaterial information, or navigate around an overly complicated platform, can be especially irritating for foremen and project managers.

On top of that, inadequate mobile devices can make it difficult to access the right information in the field, as one senior surveyor points out: “The small screen size can hamper viewing.”

Here's a collection of some of the other responses we received:



“We use MS OneDrive to share data via the cloud. Our ISP is sufficient to provide basic data services, but we don't work with imagery in the field as it is just too big.”

GIS manager



“[We use] WeTransfer and screenshots. Neither method is interactive.”

Managing director



“Field staff are often busy and don’t have their hands available to check their phone or laptop due to the specific task they are performing or PPE they are wearing (we are in contaminated waste management). So getting them information typically only happens when they have time for a break to check their phone or laptop, or when transitioning between tasks or sites.”

Sr. business development manager



“Verbal misunderstandings or too many feelings get in the way of technical communications.”

UAV operations manager



“We usually provide hard copies of plans with instructions and electronic copies when appropriate for data collectors. The hard copies are simply handed to field crews in the morning or evening.”

Project manager



“We use Skype for Business but only for the people with phones that can handle it. I have a lot of people with old phones they need to replace, and so usually I just call them.”

Owner

[Let's talk](#) about how Propeller can help you overcome office-to-field communication issues



Related resources:

[Crew, The Propeller Platform's New Add-on, Bridges Your Team's Communication Gaps With Info-rich Mobile Maps](#)

[A Case Study: The Journey From Simple Drone Surveys to Worksite Management \(Part One\)](#)

[How Propeller Works Alongside Survey Managers to Ensure Drone Data Accuracy.](#)