



Patience, Schmatience



My soon-to-be 4-year-old niece is at that “parakeet stage.” Colleen also likes new adventures, so last spring we went to one of Minnesota’s 15,000 lakes for some shore fishing. (The license plates read *10,000 Lakes*, but Gov. Jesse Ventura claims otherwise, and I’m not about to argue.)

Once I got our lines in the water, I tried to explain the point of this activity. “Now you have to be very patient,” I said. Half an hour went by. Nothing. I asked, “Where are the fish, Colleen?” She replied, “*You have to be very patient.*”

Many concrete producers are probably patient when they’re not working, too. But when it comes to awaiting lab test results or submitting mix designs in the ready-mix business or keeping up with design changes in design/build precasting, the producer wants information yesterday.

Take test results, for example. As noted in a previous column, the producer often faces a two-week wait after submitting cylinders to an independent testing lab, since the results traditionally arrive through the mail. An e-solution that would reduce this

cycle—and the billing cycle—makes perfect sense.

Stacey Mastacusa, director of marketing for application service provider (ASP) Digital Site Systems in Pittsburgh, let us know that this scenario already is playing out on the company’s QuadreliService site (www.quadreliservice.com), which introduces visitors to several for-members-only information management tools. The site’s free iCollaboration area has an iReporting function that allows visitors to create reports and alert project partners by e-mail that the reports are posted, or they can e-mail them.

The application allows the producer to import data from a database. Data entry occurs once; people aren’t re-inputting data from a faxed or mailed report, which increases the potential for mistakes. There’s obviously an application here for design/builders who deal with design updates, too.

The customer service improvements are substantial, particularly for the sales representative whose office is a pickup truck. Testing data are avail-

able from anywhere one has Internet access, so the sales rep might beat a competitor with a quote after quality control has reduced the mix design submittal cycle. When time is of the essence, any edge in customer service can make all the difference.

Digital Site Systems reports that nobody is using this service to work with outside testing labs currently, but it probably wouldn’t be too difficult to convince lab personnel to try a new, faster method of reporting results.

One company that is using it to report internal test results is Cemex. Jerry Medina, Cemex’s Houston-based technical services manager for Texas, says the system is handy for his multi-plant operation. Last year he wanted to set up a paperless submittal system, and while the industry’s comfort margin hasn’t enabled him to eliminate the fax machine from the process entirely, he’s made great strides. And the system is bringing in more work.

“Under the old system we gave dispatch a copy of what the administrative assistant in sales entered so they could enter it into the dispatch

▶ Streamlining the submittal process is one application of a new project collaboration service.

system,” he says. “Now I e-mail it at the same time to the guy who enters the data into the system and to the dispatcher.

“It can give you statistical data per plant; I’ve found that to be very, very useful,” he continues. “You can see the performance of each mix design per plant—sometimes engineers ask for that.”

—DON TALEND