

Job Control Software for the Rest of Us

by Joe Stoddard

Computers are supposed to make life easier, but small builders usually face a tough choice: Either try to turn off-the-shelf software into something it isn't, or spend big bucks on a high-end construction package that is really designed for high-volume contractors.

That's the dilemma David Jones was trying to resolve when he set out to create SiteTrak. A tradesman himself, Jones couldn't find any software for his boss

to use, so he teamed up with his brother Brandon, a programmer, and formed Beacon Systems. The software they created is just what the doctor ordered for a lot of small companies trying to computerize their operations, or for contractors totally frustrated with the systems they're using now.

Beacon Systems calls SiteTrak a "job cost" program, but I prefer to think of it as a "job control" program. It isn't

accounting software, but it does keep track of your cash flow and it will manage your checkbook. It's not a contact manager either, but it stores all the information you need about clients, suppliers, and employees in one spot. SiteTrak does, of course, handle job costing, automatically distributing payments and deposits to the appropriate job, but it also provides tools to analyze where your business as a whole stands at any given moment. The best thing about SiteTrak is that the average contractor who loads it on a computer will start to get good information about the financial health of his or her business within five minutes.

Sensible Interface

I've been around computers a long time, so I appreciate the value of SiteTrak's simple and easy-to-use interface — even computer newcomers will be comfortable right away with this layout. The program is organized into four interconnected main sections, or "windows," represented by icons on the left side of the screen. All four windows share the same general layout, plus a common "Bank Account Ledger" called "Nsite" ("insight") at the bottom of the screen.

Bank. The Bank Entry window is where you enter payments and write checks (see Figure 1). Anyone familiar with Quicken will recognize the method of distributing bank deposits and checks across multiple jobs by "splitting" the transaction. For example, a check written to your local lumberyard at the end of the month might actually cover payments for invoices from several jobs; similarly, a single bank deposit might

Figure 1. The Bank window is where all checks, job payments, and other transactions are entered. Entries can be assigned to one category, such as a project or supplier, or spread or "split" across several. Categories are customizable by the user.

Figure 2. The Job Site window takes the place of a filing cabinet, storing all vital job information, including customer name, address, and phone, directions to the site, and other notes. Jobs can be defined in or moved between one of three tabs — Future, Current, or Complete — giving the user the ability to update job status easily.

include payments from several projects. By breaking up these transactions, SiteTrak helps you keep track of where all the money is going.

Job Site. Tabs in the Job Site window enable you to set up or view jobs that are Current, Complete, or Future (Figure 2). This screen also serves as a contact manager for your customers, as

well as a place to record notes about the job or client, directions to the site, and other pertinent job information. You can pick a job type (commercial, remodel, new home, etc.) from a category list, or create custom job types. The category list is nested, so individual clients can be listed under the more general categories.

Supplier. In SiteTrak, the Supplier screen lists not only material vendors, but also labor and subcontractors — anyone who provides materials or services to a job (Figure 3). Detailed information for each is entered on separate screens; for instance, the employee screen has fields for withholding and other payroll information, while the subcontractor screen would have different fields relative to those trades.

Office and Overhead. Many contractors have difficulty grasping the concept of overhead, so SiteTrak has made it easy to distinguish between specific project costs and general expenses. To keep the interface consistent, the Office and Overhead window is treated as a special type of “job,” and a single invoice can be split between a specific project and the “Overhead” job (Figure 4). The category list in this window holds various types of overhead items, such as insurance, car and truck expense, or employee benefits; you can also create custom categories.

Type	Date	Chk No	Payee	CI	Debit	Credit
Chk-Desk	12/19/98	6304	Carolyn Jones		439.98	
Chk-Desk	12/19/98	6305	Jason Haas		287.57	
Chk-Desk	12/19/98	6306	Mike Jones		759.63	
Chk-Desk	12/19/98	6307	Lane Jones		225.69	
Chk-Desk	12/19/98	6308	Williams Insulation		2,333.56	
Deposit	12/21/98		- Deposit -			15,500.00
Deposit	12/21/98		- Deposit -			3,498.32
Chk-Desk	12/22/98	6309	Treco		1,873.27	
Chk-Desk	12/22/98	6310	Sherwin-Williams		435.21	
Chk-Desk	12/22/98	6311	Office Depot		40.62	
Chk-Desk	12/22/98	6312	Bryan Utilities		214.00	

Figure 3. In SiteTrak, “suppliers” include materialmen, subcontractors, and employees — anyone who provides something to a job. Each tab has its own set of fields; for instance, the Employee tab contains payroll information.

Type	Date	Chk No	Payee	CI	Debit	Credit
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Figure 4. To keep records consistent, SiteTrak treats overhead as a separate “job.” Transactions entered here, such as office help or general vehicle expense, have to do with the cost of doing business rather than specific costs for a particular project.

Analysis Tools

Once data has been entered, you can start using SiteTrak’s powerful analysis tools. In the Job Cost and Budget Worksheet, you can instantly see whether a job is over or under budget (Figure 5). As estimated costs for each phase of construction are manually entered in the left-hand column, SiteTrak fills in the actual amounts spent to date in the right-hand column, and calculates any variance.

Flexible sorts. The other powerful tool in SiteTrak is the ability to sort and filter the Nsite ledger every which way to Sunday (Figure 6). For instance, if you want to see only the money spent on framing the Jones job between the 4th and 9th of March, you could do it with a couple of mouse clicks. This feature is invaluable for everything from basic job tracking to isolating a lost payment to a supplier. And it can help you make good decisions or minimize disputes by putting the right information at your fingertips — without having to learn complicated spreadsheet or database programming.

Job Site Categories	Original	Change	Total	Actual	Variance
Permits & Fees	1,190.00	0.00	1,190.00	250.00	940.00
Architectural & Engineering	370.00	0.00	370.00	680.00	-310.00
Utilities	290.00	0.00	290.00	95.54	194.46
Demolition	2,500.00	0.00	2,500.00	2,458.27	41.73
Site Work	3,500.00	0.00	3,500.00	3,431.46	68.54
Foundation	10,500.00	0.00	10,500.00	10,674.94	-174.94
Other Concrete	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Framing	24,000.00	0.00	24,000.00	24,781.28	-781.28
Structural Steel	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Expense Sub Total:	144,710.00	25.00	144,735.00	142,494.13	2,240.87
Overhead:	16,078.89	2.78	16,081.67	14,180.21	1,901.46
Total Expenses (Debit):	160,788.89	27.78	160,816.67	156,674.34	4,142.33
Profit:	17,865.43	3.09	17,868.52	37,775.66	19,907.14
Total Revenue (Credit):	178,654.32	30.87	178,685.19	194,450.00	15,764.81

Figure 5. Among the powerful analysis tools included in SiteTrak is this job-cost report, which compares estimated costs to actual job expenses.

Figure 6. Data in the “Nsite” Bank Ledger displayed at the bottom of all four screens can be sorted according to almost any criteria. Here, for example, year-to-date transactions have been sorted to show only framing costs. The overlaid box shows how framing costs can be further narrowed to a single job or supplier.

Nsite Bank Account Ledger [by Date]

Type	Date	Check No	Payee	Amount	Supplier	Job Site	Category	Bank Acct
Chk-Desk	8/1/98	5819	REH Construction		Hollingsworth	Framing	2,180.00	
Chk-Desk	8/8/98	5844	Dube Constructio		Hollingsworth	Framing	489.00	
Chk-Desk	8/8/98	5851	Warren Andarsac		Hollingsworth	Framing	84.56	
Chk-Desk	8/11/98	5857	Goodson Lumbe		Hollingsworth	Framing	5,893.66	
Chk-Desk	8/15/98	5864	Dube Constructio		Hollingsworth	Framing	887.98	
Chk-Desk	8/15/98	5876	Lane Jones		Hollingsworth	Framing	278.28	
Chk-Desk	8/21/98	5888	Dube Constructio		Hollingsworth	Framing	1,250.00	
Chk-Desk	8/27/98	5908	Dube Constructio		Hollingsworth	Framing	1,850.00	
Chk-Desk	9/9/98	5959	Goodson Lumbe		Hollingsworth	Framing	4,834.12	
Chk-Desk	9/15/98	5990	Dube Constructio		Hollingsworth	Framing	733.76	
Chk-Desk	9/15/98	5991	Jason Hays		Hollingsworth	Framing	213.45	
Chk-Desk	10/6/98	6055	Goodson Lumbe		Hollingsworth	Framing	782.11	
Chk-Desk	11/10/98	6180	Goodson Lumbe		Hollingsworth	Framing	1,832.66	

Set Supplier(s)

Available Suppliers:

- A. Stern Hutter
- A1 Roofing
- Austin Lums
- Best Construction
- Beacon Valley Foundation
- Beverly Backhoe
- Brick Layers
- Consolidated Siding
- D & J Doors
- Dumas Patching
- Dudley Construction Co.
- Faske Electric
- Fine Foundation
- Forest Door Service
- Gibbs House Framing
- Godfrey Construction
- Ground Basic
- Haley Campbell
- Jake's Sales and Service
- Kerry Sibus
- Kirk's Drywall

Selected Suppliers:

- Dube Construction

Include: ☐ Unassigned

OK Cancel

Limitations

The current version of SiteTrak handles only businesses using a cash accounting system; accrual or percent-age-of-completion accounting methods are beyond the scope of the program.

Also, although the program does a good job of organizing the raw data, you'll still need a CPA or a dedicated account-ing package to produce tax reports, profit/loss statements, and other reports your banker or Uncle Sam might ask for.

SiteTrak also won't yet produce invoices or other business documents. According to Beacon, invoicing capabil-ity is planned for a future release to accommodate specialty contractors and service industries that process multiple work orders every day. For the typical builder producing a few dozen jobs a year, however, these chores can be taken care of with a word processor or simple spreadsheet.

Even without advanced accounting functions, SiteTrak does what it was designed to do — give you control of your jobs and your checkbook — better than anything currently available to the small contractor. The retail version of SiteTrak sells for \$495 and requires Windows95. A free, full-working demo version good for 15 uses is available (download at www.beacon-systems.com, or contact Beacon Systems, 4001 East 29th St., Suite 170, Bryan, TX 77802; 800/714-2229).



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