



Agency saves \$150K/year posting bid-related documents online

Needs analysis: NJDOT was concerned about the effort and paper waste involved in printing plan sets for highway construction projects. Expenses included printing, shipping and labor. **Solution:** NJDOT implemented the Online Plan Sheets service on the Bid Express website. Contractors can view plans, print to an office printer, or order prints for delivery 24/7. **Results:** Contractors pay less and have instant access to plans. Paper waste was eliminated and significant staff time was saved.

Like all public agencies, New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) is trying to find ways to do more with less. Reductions in staff and the need to reduce costs are constant reminders of this.

One area of focus for NJDOT was to explore technology solutions to increase efficiency. The agency noticed that they were especially burdened with paper-based processes in their road construction business.

The problem was too much paper. Each time NJDOT was bidding a project, they had mounds of paper plan sheets for the job. The staff tried to predict how many sets of plans the bidders would purchase, but this was a moving target, so there was often waste.

These documents were either picked-up in person by bidders or shipped. Neither of these options was especially bidder-friendly; pick-up hours were not always convenient and the cost for plans and, if desired, shipping, added up quickly.

"The average cost of contract documents for the bidder was around \$250 per set," says Joe Weber, CPM, project manager for NJDOT. "Pick-up times were limited to Monday through Friday 8 AM to 4:00 PM, excluding holidays."

Handling the paper took a great deal of staff time and producing it was expensive. It was costly to the environment as well, since any sheets that were not requested were simply wasted.

NJDOT looked inward to see if there was a way to solve the problem, but found the costs associated with setting up and implementing a home-grown electronic document distribution system were quite high. The electronic files were large and the physical documents themselves were difficult to handle.

"We looked at an in-house solution but found that the logistics were too much for us," Mr. Weber said. "So we decided to explore other options."

Bid Express, an online bidding service used by public agencies across the U.S. and Canada, had an offering that was just the right fit: Online Plan Sheets service.

Since there was no cost to NJDOT to set up the service, it was an ideal solution. The bidders pay a monthly fee of \$95 to access the documents, and the fee simply replaces the money bidders were spending on 'per sheet' fees, shipping and/or traveling to pick up documents. In most cases, bidders are actually spending less now, since the flat fee covers viewing, downloading and printing of an unlimited number of sheets for the month.

To avoid duplicating effort, NJDOT decided to only supply plan sheets through the Bid Express Online Plan Sheets service. Since they would no longer be offering sheets in any other manner, it was vital that they communicate the change to their bidders so the transition would be smooth. "We posted the information on the NJDOT web site and did a bulk mailing," Mr. Weber said. "We also reinforced the changes during the training."

"Get with the times. Give your contractors the ability to access contract documents 24/7. The bottom line is it will save time and money for your agency."

Joe Weber, CPM, Project Manager
New Jersey Department of Transportation

Providing plan sheets on the Bid Express web site exclusively saves NJDOT money since they don't have to print excess sheets that could be wasted and they don't duplicate effort of offering sheets in a variety of forms and places.

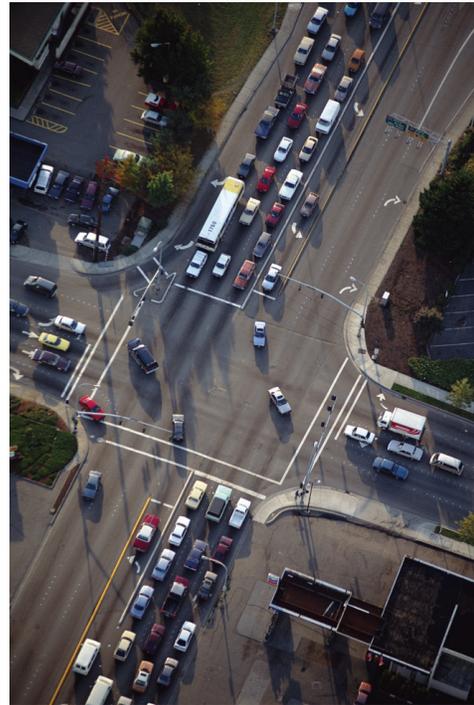
The Online Plan Sheets service went live for NJDOT in July of 2005. NJDOT personnel used a simple upload feature to post documents to the agency's web page on the Bid Express site. Bidders who were subscribed to the service were able to access a variety of project-related documents online that had been posted by NJDOT. At any time of day, they had the option of opening and viewing the files, printing them to a printer in their office, or ordering printed copies from a selection of vendors and having them delivered.

The initial reaction from bidders was very positive, says Mr. Weber. "Bidders immediately saw a convenience," he said. "They liked the idea of 24/7 access to the plans."

While offering a convenience to contractors is great, Weber indicates that the biggest benefit is the huge savings in time and money for his agency. He estimates that his agency is saving around \$150,000 per year since implementing the service. Not having to handle and process (and sometimes waste) large amounts of paper has reduced the burden on staff. A simple upload procedure is all it takes to provide access to documents. This is in addition to the environmental benefits, including less paper waste and reduced emissions from shipping/pick-up.

Weber also points out that the team at Info Tech is available to help when needed. "We have a great working relationship and response times are excellent."

Weber recommends other agencies provide this service. "Get with the times," he says. "Give your contractors the ability to access contract documents 24/7. The bottom line is it will save time and money for your agency." •



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