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A BETTER WAY  
To Estimate Construction Projects

# Cloud **Empowering** Modern Contractors



## **ESTICOM: A New Era of Estimating Software Has Arrived**

This whitepaper was developed to introduce Esticom cloud-based takeoff and estimating software to contractors looking for a better way to streamline the preconstruction bidding process. Specifically tailored to meet the demands of electrical and low voltage contractors, Esticom is an easy-to-use, takeoff and estimating solution. It not only produces thorough and accurate project estimates quickly and easily, but also simplifies many other aspects of your specialty contracting business.

Some of Esticom's value-added features include on-screen takeoff, estimating and sales pipeline management. A software as a services (SaaS) application, Esticom taps into the power of the cloud to deliver the speed, flexibility and collaboration required for today's contractors.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

While construction employment continues to rise bringing it to the highest level in nearly a decade, the construction industry is still facing many challenges. Some of the most pressing issues involve heightened and dampened levels of activity in certain markets while confronting skilled labor shortages, including talent from the electrical and low voltage specialty-contracting industries.

According to a recent survey sponsored by the Associated General Contractors of America, more than half of the contractors and owner-representatives surveyed reported having problems finding skilled tradesmen. To offset the shortage of qualified labor in the marketplace, construction firms are relying on a variety of methods, including the use of new technologies and strategies that increase efficiency, allowing firms to win more work and increase their workload without adding staff.

In some areas of the country, contractors are facing not only a labor shortage, but also a competitive market, tight schedules and slim margins, leaving no room for error in bid packages as well as schedules. Furthermore, clients have become more technologically savvy, expecting the same from their builders, including standardized processes, collaboration and quick access to information, which a digital paper trail through all phases of the project can help provide.

To keep up with industry changes and the demands of today's marketplace, it's more important than ever before to find smarter and more efficient ways to improve productivity and handle every aspect of your business seamlessly. Incorporating the right technology solutions to assist in managing daily processes such as project coordination, estimating, labor productivity, material procurement and handling, will help eliminate waste, boost efficiency and lower costs, freeing up more time to get the job done and turn a profit.

## **THE CHALLENGE: Choosing the Right Software**

### **OUTDATED TECHNOLOGY**

While much progress has been made to streamline the takeoff and estimating process, many contractors in the electrical and low voltage space continue to use outdated software systems, involving complicated applications on dedicated servers—or even worse, in-house built spreadsheets. To gain an understanding of where we need to go, we must first look at where we've been.

Not long ago, estimators would use the sluggish and laborious process of marking up paper plans with highlighters, taking care to avoid accidentally concealing the plan's markings, as additional copies were expensive and took time to obtain. Measuring wheels were used to calculate lengths, which were then tabulated on lists or in a pre-printed worksheet along with the quantity counts. These processes were time consuming, expensive and required considerable training, leaving room for human error. They were also difficult to organize and track by the project team for future reference.

### **MOVING FORWARD**

More recently, the computer age and networking digitized the process. This advent allowed for the delivery of plans in computer format via PDF, and the creation of digital spreadsheets to record counts and calculate the project's material costs. Eventually, the formulas in this method became extremely complex, requiring substantial training. Furthermore, they were inherently risky, with any undetected error making the difference between turning a profit or losing money on a project. The use of a spreadsheet also inhibits the seamless flow of takeoff information into an estimate, requiring duplication of work.

Improving upon this process, IT developers created the first generation of takeoff software. Desktop offerings like PlanSwift, eTakeoff, ConEst, Accubid, Sage and Turboid simplified the activity. This new development combined PDF plans and job-costing calculations into one package. Additionally, formulas were built into the software, making it much easier to prepare an estimate.

### **NOT GOOD ENOUGH**

Although these advancements offer a significant improvement over the past, they still have substantial drawbacks. Developed for individual and networked desktop computing, these first-generation offerings limit collaboration, multi-user ability and accessibility—all essential elements for tapping team talents and increasing productivity.

Many current offerings also operate in silos as stand-alone tools, creating separate “islands” of information which require duplicate activities like re-keying data into other software programs. Furthermore, they are shortsighted, falling behind industry advancements, such as the use of tablets and smart phones, which provide anywhere, anytime access in support of a busy and increasingly mobile workforce. Access to timely and updated information such as current labor and material cost databases also pose challenges in estimating desktop applications, requiring outside subscription services, frequent uploads or hand keying data into the software. Other inefficiencies include the need for expensive servers to host the software along with IT professionals to install it, manage updates, and keep the hardware up and running to alleviate data loss.

“*Incumbent electrical and low voltage estimating software solutions are a decade behind in technology. We have combined our industry experience and technical knowledge to design Esticom and fill this gap. With Esticom, contractors in the electrical and low voltage space now have a comprehensive takeoff and estimating tool to produce accurate estimates, win more work and ensure success for all project stakeholders.*”

—Rob Hock, Co-founder of Esticom

## THE SOLUTION: Looking to the Cloud

Fortunately, a new era of estimating software has emerged in Esticom, a holistic cloud-based solution that provides significant advantages over the limited offerings of the past.

### A ONE-STOP ON-SCREEN TAKEOFF AND ESTIMATING SOLUTION

Powered by the cloud, Esticom incorporates modules for takeoff, estimating and job management, taking into account every aspect of the preconstruction process and more, including:

- Anytime, anywhere accessibility using your internet-enabled device
- On-screen takeoff allowing estimators to upload digital plans, analyze the project scope and start producing takeoffs in minutes
- Integrated estimating allowing simultaneous production of the estimate while the takeoff is being generated.
- Powerful material and labor database with pre-built and customizable assemblies
- Labor and material cost calculations, which address difficulty factors and profit margins
- Professional bid and estimate templates
- Syncs team calendars and set deadlines
- Tracks customer communication and changes

## THE BENEFITS: Boosting Operational Efficiency to Drive Better Outcomes

### MOBILITY AND COLLABORATION

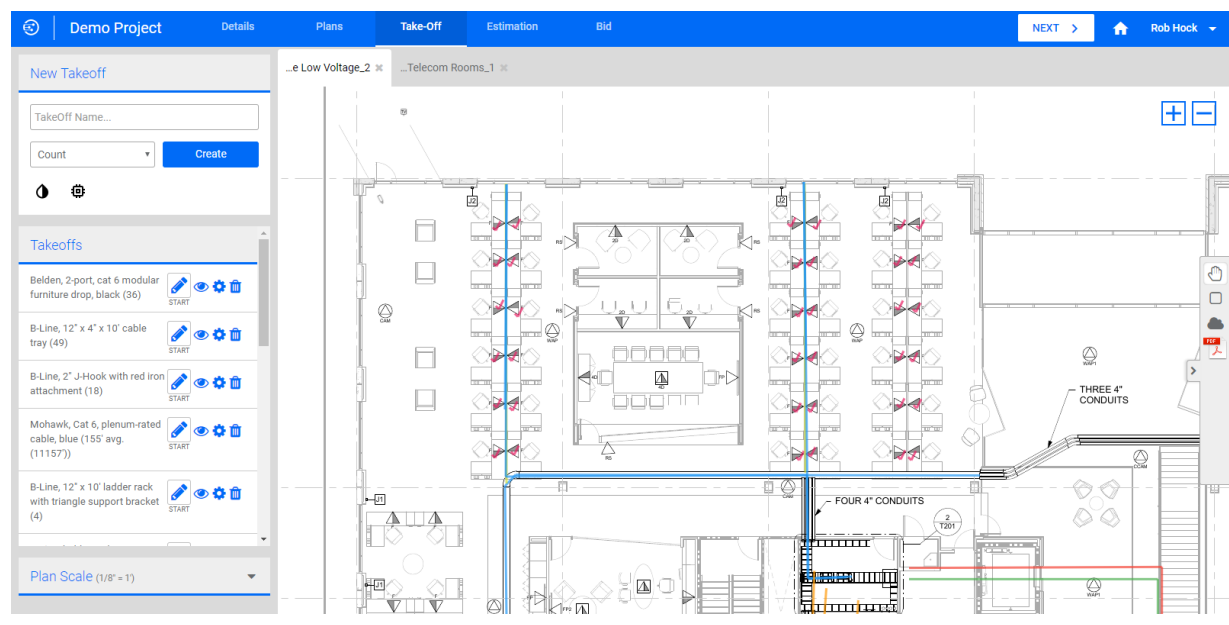
By simply logging into your account using any web browser from any device at any location, field or office personnel can instantly perform a labor and material takeoff on a potential project, create an estimate or gain access to important project information. **Esticom not only supports individual mobility, but also allows for collaboration among the project team who may be spread across different offices or jobsites.**

Enabling continuous access to a single source of information by all team members, Esticom improves accuracy of data at all times. It also increases productivity by supporting timely input from those on the go. From the initial RFP to construction and change management, your installers in the field or other personnel can check bid numbers or review plans and make notations from any location using their hand-held or other portable device.

### SPEED AND ACCURACY

Providing a timely and accurate bid that utilizes current material and labor costs is essential to winning work and gaining client trust, which is necessary for securing repeat business. To ensure the accuracy of your estimate and remove the burden of price-finding, **Esticom features a current and robust database of labor and material costs, as well as national average pricing for craftsmen.** This information is updated every six months, mitigating the risk of creating an inaccurate estimate.

To further ensure bidding accuracy, Esticom is optimized specifically for the needs of electrical and low voltage contractors, providing purpose-built takeoff types that are unique in the industry. For example, there is no need to measure every cable run. By using our Linear Average takeoff, simply measure a few sample cable runs and the system automates the rest. (See Esticom takeoff screenshot below)



“*Before Esticom I can’t count how much time I spent at the print-shop and wrestling with spreadsheets. Now, I’ve been able to streamline my process and can turn in bid proposals in a matter of hours. My bid win rate jumped.*”

—Brendan Mealia, NP Structured Cabling

## PROFESSIONAL AND ORGANIZED

With nearly every business relying on technology to conduct daily activities, clients expect companies they do business with to keep up. **Esticom not only produces quick and accurate estimates, but also produces professional estimating documentation and a clear paper trail that is beneficial during every phase of the project.**

As soon as the estimate is complete, professional-looking bids and estimates are generated and emailed to the client with just a few clicks. Any communication from the client or changes to the estimate are also tracked and documented within Esticom for future reference. Additionally, the sync team calendar and set deadline features ensure the timely transmittal of information.

Providing further value, the data in Esticom is useful even after the project is won. Once construction is underway, estimating details can be accessed by the project manager to help ensure project costs match the estimate, keeping the budget on track.

## SECURE AND RELIABLE

**Built on the [Microsoft® Azure](#) platform, Esticom is infinitely scalable as a cloud-native application, providing infrastructure reliability, as well as a fast and secure user-friendly experience.** Using this industry-leading platform with its vast support and server systems, downtime is a rare occurrence. Furthermore, data in Esticom is encrypted end-to-end with AES-256 encryption for maximum security. Information is also physically segregated using advanced privacy protection standards, giving only the subscriber companies and their authorized users access.

## EASY TO USE AND ECONOMICAL

The adoption of new technology is only a smart business decision if it is used and its cost and time investments don’t exceed the value it provides. **Esticom provides a user-friendly interface that is highly intuitive and doesn’t require extensive training to learn.** Once a subscriber logs into the application, navigation to the software’s many features or existing project information is quick and easy. Most new users can complete their first project bid in less than an hour.

Furthermore, since Esticom is hosted in the cloud, there is no software to install, and no expenditures for IT staff support and maintenance. Exhibiting additional value, **Esticom’s monthly subscription pricing is transparent and straightforward.** Subscribers may sign-up or cancel at any time. Before purchasing a subscription, interested users may register at [Esticom.com](#) for a full-featured, 14-day free trial. Software subscriptions start at just \$150 per month, per estimator and include free online [customer support](#), as well as video tutorials and one-on-one training for larger groups.

## SUMMARY

Challenges that can adversely affect business performance, such as a skilled labor shortage or adapting to the demands of new and different project types will always abound. Forward thinking-solutions like Esticom consider the many challenges as well as the vast opportunities available to contracting businesses today and tomorrow. Developed by electrical contractors with first-hand industry knowledge, Esticom provides an economical, user-friendly solution that incorporates a host of functions that will give your firm the competitive edge to thrive well into the future.

A cloud-based takeoff and estimating software purpose-built for electrical and low voltage specialty contractors, Esticom not only automates the estimating process, but also provides real-time cost estimating data. Additionally, it fosters collaboration by allowing multiple users within the same organization to easily access up-to-date information on any device, at anytime from anywhere.

A comprehensive offering, Esticom streamlines the end-to-end quoting process from initial PDF upload to finished bid. Furthermore, it incorporates features that continue to bring in new business long after the project is completed.

Because the software is hosted offsite, it eliminates the need for expensive infrastructure and IT personnel to back-up information, update and manage it. Easy to try and easy to buy as a subscription-based service with a free-trial and affordable pricing, its value by far exceeds its cost.

As activity in markets change, projects become more complex and the cost of materials and labor continue to fluctuate, your contracting business needs to remain agile and poised to adapt to the changing business landscape. Contracting firms who adopt innovative technologies like Esticom to empower their business operations will certainly outperform the rest.

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## ABOUT ESTICOM

Esticom is a cloud-based takeoff and estimating software solution purpose-built for electrical and low voltage contractors who focus on medium to large-scale electrical, structured cabling, security and AV projects. The company's mission is to help contractors build a profitable and successful business by providing estimating, project management and operations management tools, built, tested and proven by industry experts from the electrical and low voltage industry. Serving customers throughout the U.S., Esticom was founded in 2015 and is headquartered in Austin, Texas.

For more information, visit [www.esticom.com](http://www.esticom.com) or contact us at [info@esticom.com](mailto:info@esticom.com).