



Chicago, Ill.

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## INVITATION TO INNOVATE

When was the last time you sent out 700 invitations to bid on a job and received more than 100 responses in less than a day? How about instantly sharing project documents with suppliers online rather than having to relay details over the phone?

These are becoming common occurrences for customers of GradeBeam, [www.gradebeam.com](http://www.gradebeam.com), Chicago, Ill., a company that is steadily gaining traction as one of the top private online communications networks used in the construction industry.

Founded in 2000, GradeBeam specializes in contractor database management, electronic file sharing, bid invitation messaging, document distribution, as well as historical reporting for contractors.

According to the company, its primary focus is to provide a secure, efficient, affordable starting point for every construction project. In other words, GradeBeam helps eliminate the communication boundaries that often exist because of the disparate levels of technology and proprietary systems used by the different members of a construction project team.

Primary among GradeBeam's offerings is its Web-based project invitation technology that allows clients to abandon internal contractor databases and paper-based communication methods.

In the event GradeBeam is unable to deliver email or fax messages in a timely manner, a customer service representative contacts the recipient on the phone to ensure information has been communicated. This combination of methods ensures more than 98% of targets receive information within 24 hours.

Perhaps the greatest testament to the success of GradeBeam throughout the past few years is the fact other technology providers have tried to emulate its set of services through various add-on components to their business model.

While some might prove effective in various instances, GradeBeam's unique knack for understanding the construction industry—the company was founded by construction professionals—gives it a consistent stream of success. The proof of this assessment comes straight from its customer success stories.

In 2007 GradeBeam handled more than 2.2 million project messages, up from the already impressive 1.6 million project messages sent in 2006. This past year also saw GradeBeam achieve its five millionth invitation to bid sent by its clients.

One of its biggest customer wins in the past year was The Ledcor Group of Companies, [www.ledcor.com](http://www.ledcor.com), Vancouver, B.C., which adopted GradeBeam company-wide allowing it to securely share project information with subcontractors. Regardless of which division of the company Ledcor's users are located, all subcontractors are managed in the same database.

The reason this is such a big customer win is that it signals a move for GradeBeam into the Canadian market and allows it to boast the fact it is efficiently connecting more than 220,000 contractors across North America on a single platform.

Helen Markey, technical analyst for Ledcor's Canadian offices, was instrumental in bringing GradeBeam north of the border.

Company branches across the United States are already using the system and when the Honolulu, Hawaii branch recently became part of the Canadian side of Ledcor, GradeBeam was one of the first suggestions made to Markey by estimators in that division.

“We like their innovative approach; they see it as more of a communication network rather than just having bid solicitation and the subcontractor database split off from document management—we like the fact it is all integrated,” says Markey.

The only branch yet to sign on using GradeBeam is Calgary. But even so, Markey believes the technology will add consistency throughout the company. She also anticipates the platform being a great tool when entering new markets.

“We work in some fairly isolated areas and one of the hardest parts of going into a new market is getting familiarized with the base of trades,” continues Markey. “With GradeBeam we will have access to a database for trades in those areas, so if we have not bid that area previously we can go into GradeBeam and access the list for that particular area. With

GradeBeam being new into the Canadian market that might be a secondary wave of benefits for us, but one that we think will be very beneficial.”

While online communication tools are proving highly valuable for contractors, the challenge is getting contractors to standardize on such technology across their entire organization. Thus, it is quite an accomplishment when contractors choose to standardize on technology across all offices of a construction company. This was the case with both Ledcor and McCarthy Building Companies Inc., [www.mccarthy.com](http://www.mccarthy.com), St. Louis, Mo.

Other notable new customers for GradeBeam include Duke Construction, [www.dukeconstructiononline.com](http://www.dukeconstructiononline.com), Indianapolis, Ind., which adopted GradeBeam’s services across 13 offices throughout the country, and Barton Malow, [www.bartonmalow.com](http://www.bartonmalow.com), Southfield, Mich., which added GradeBeam to seven offices.

Jeff Baxa is director of preconstruction with Barton Malow and says one of the greatest challenges in pushing

the technology further long-term will be getting the subcontractors more involved.

He recounts multiple instances where a subcontractor receives an email from Barton Malow, yet proceeds to print it out and fax it back in to the contractor—in a sense defeating the purpose of electronic communication.

Bryan Jurewicz, president, GradeBeam, is always looking forward in an effort to improve the technology for customers.

One ongoing goal is to help get subcontractors actively involved in the communication process rather than having the subcontractors depend on general contractors to update databases and project information responses.

“Almost all of our clients tell us that they want everyone to use technology, but that the services need to be user friendly, fast, and affordable for all members of a project team,” says Jurewicz. “As a result, any specialty contractor can receive messages or access projects that they are invited to through GradeBeam. Plus, if they want to be fully connected, vendors can have total access to all of the features in the entire GradeBeam system

across North America for less than \$1 per day.”

This helps general contractors continue to demand active participation in the network from vendors, posting project information online, and using GradeBeam as a hub for all to

access the same information in realtime without great overhead costs.

GradeBeam subcontractor clients can update their company qualifications online and market themselves through the GradeBeam network.

GradeBeam’s customer support also updates the database whenever they find faxes or emails are failing to reach a certain company or when subcontractors notify them of changes. Subcontractors can also securely access any project they have been invited to on GradeBeam in order to update their bidding responses.

Since its inception, GradeBeam has focused on offering an affordable starting point for all projects, while eliminating the burden of administrative tasks. So far, it’s a concept that has been well-embraced.

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**—Bryan Jurewicz, GradeBeam**