



Mike Merrill:

Hello, and welcome to the Mobile Workforce podcast, sponsored by About Time Technologies and WorkMax. I'm your host, Mike Merrill. And today we're joined by Todd Weyandt for the second time. And Todd is the host of the award-winning Bridging The Gap podcast. So thank you again for joining us. Todd, we're excited for the discussion today.

Todd Weyandt:

Thanks for inviting me back. I'm looking forward to it.

Mike Merrill:

Absolutely. Well, it's your fault. You did such a good job. We're going to have that guy on again.

Todd Weyandt:

I don't know about that, but thanks for inviting me all the same.

Mike Merrill:

Sure. No problem. So for those of you that haven't heard the previous episode that Todd and I recorded, it was ways back. It was episode number 16, and we talked about the hurdles in the construction industry and the things that we're working to overcome. So today we're going to talk more about construction technology and mainly focus on that hybrid workforce and how things are functioning maybe differently with I guess, the post COVID or as we're working through COVID I'll say, and we just want to talk about what that balance looks like moving forward. So thanks again, Todd. Excited for the discussion.

Todd Weyandt:

What's on the packet? There's a lot to go over there for sure.

Mike Merrill:

Well, so I guess to start out, what changes are you seeing in the industry because of this COVID pandemic and our adaptation to it?

Todd Weyandt:

Well, originally there was so much tech that had to be adopted and implemented over the course of the last year and a half. So I think that construction that historically may have been some laggards in embracing technology, found out that the waters were okay and that they could swim in those waters and that gave them some confidence to figure out how to not only take on new technology, but then once you have it, how do you make it more streamlined? How do you make it more efficient? And I think coming out of COVID and as things that are opening back up, I think that that's the big kind of open question for a lot of people is what do you go back to? And then what do you keep that has worked well? And how do you embrace kind of the best of both worlds and create this balance because there's certain things that it's just not feasible to go back to the way it was beforehand, before you adopted all this technology.

Mike Merrill:

Hard to rewind that tape. And obviously you don't have a crystal ball to know exactly, but just from your perceptions, what's going to be different Q3 and Q4 of 2021, even now?

Todd Weyandt:

Well, I think it's a great question. There's probably a lot of surprises still in the next two quarters as we are opening back up. I think that one of the things is learning this balance of virtual and in-person. And what does that really look like? For the office people, do you have to go back into the office? Full-time or is it part-time? Do you do a little blend of both? I think my personal opinion, it's going to be really tough to

get a lot of people back into the office that got used to working from home and were able to prove that they can do it. What's the incentive structure to get them back into the office. Is it just to see people? It's a huge reason for a lot of people and it has its benefits and its perks, but that's not going to get everybody back in there.

Some people that are like, yes, I hope I never see another person again, working for him. So I think that's a question that people are going to have to address in the next two quarters. I think the second question that people are going to be addressing is how do you double down on technology or what technology I should say, do you double down on with innovation because not everything that you had to adopt in the last year and a half is useful going forward. Something was just a stop gap, measure. Some, I don't know how you do without them now. So I think that that's a question that's going to look a little different for everybody.

I don't think every construction firm is ready to fully adopt AR solution or go to the extremes, but there's little steps along the way that you might be able to take. For Zoom for instance, I know we're all probably very tired of Zoom, but it is useful tool, it serves a purpose. So do double down on that and have some meetings where people can still interact and see each other through Zoom instead of having to always meet up in person and save that travel cost. I think that's some soul searching that companies have to do.

And then the third kind of question that is going to be popping back up is probably around events as trade shows start coming back in person. What does that look like? When should you go, when should you not go, what do those events even look like? How's that dynamic going to work in a post COVID world? That's probably going to look really different.

Mike Merrill:

I think when we were talking before we hit record about the hybrid conferences and different things that we have coming up, and I know as a vendor, we don't love those remote experiences. It's just not the same at all. And so we're really actually not interested in participating very heavily in any of those. If we can get in front of people, then we feel like we have a great

experience, but if it's just remote, it's just not a captive enough audience. We feel like at least from a vendor perspective at some of these construction events.

Todd Weyandt:

Which I totally get. It's an interesting balancing act that I think conferences going to have to take into account as we move forward. Because from the conference side of things, they're kind of silly to get away from virtual because they can reach such a wider, bigger audience than they could in person. But you so sacrifice those touchpoints and that relational aspect, which is huge and why most people go to conferences. And so what does that blend look like and how do you get a good experience for both? I think is going to be really an interesting question. The next couple of quarters are going to be the battleground for what that really is going to look like.

Mike Merrill:

Well, I look back and I remember when e-commerce was really coming online and there was a lot of fear that, oh my goodness, all these malls are going to shut down. Nobody's going to go buy anything in person anymore. And we've seen booms in different parts of those industries, but I think just like you're saying, some people are in it for the experience as much as anything else. So we definitely don't want to take the human element out of those opportunities that we have to be together and spend time together and have that comradery. However, from an efficiency standpoint, some things can be done virtually and are probably best on virtually. So I think that's what you're saying is it's having that tug of war internally and soul searching, like you said, as an organization that each of these companies is going to have to make that decision what's best for them.

Todd Weyandt:

Yeah, for sure. I think there's a lot of soul searching that's going to be done. Going back to the e-commerce thing, I think that there's, it's a good example because there's always going to be kind of unknown variables that enter into this situation. When you talk about e-commerce, who knew that the global pandemic would be that, what we would do in malls once and for all. The malls by me, at least here in Atlanta, nobody is

in them right now, but that's really because of the last year and a half. But yeah, I think that there's always these unforeseen circumstances that you can't really map into the equation. So you just have to kind of build in contingencies around it and what you're going to do there. But yeah, I think that the next couple quarters is the interesting balance between virtual online and in person for sure.

Mike Merrill:

It's an evolving discussion. So it'll be interesting to continue to see, but I know one of the tools that is still utilized, that probably is more heavily utilized now than before is LinkedIn. What are you seeing with that as a tool for construction companies?

Todd Weyandt:

I think LinkedIn is a huge tool. I'm admittedly biased because I'm a LinkedIn addict, but I think just having a social media presence can't be understated. I know a lot of construction firms kind of drag their feet. They don't see the benefit of it or the purpose of social. But I think that especially over the last year and a half, it really has become the like watering hole, hallway conversations, if you will, for people in the industry and you get to interact and meet up with people that even if we were all in person going to every single conference imaginable, you're meeting people on LinkedIn and in social that you would never get to meet at those conferences, even if they were there, the chances of you bumping into them and having an in-depth conversation probably wouldn't really happen. So I think for those who take LinkedIn as an opportunity to expand their network in and bring what would be an in-person conversation into LinkedIn, I think there are seeing a big boom and a big bang for their buck.

Mike Merrill:

And it's interesting because if I go all the way back, it's literally about two decades now I was a builders and a general contractor and I had a LinkedIn account. And I remember, well, what it was like to invite people and people would call me up, hey, you email me this thing. What's this LinkedIn thing. And nobody knew what it was or understood. I felt like when I first joined it, I didn't have a very good company website. And so I felt

like that was one way that I could bridge that gap. No pun intended Mr. Bridging The Gap podcast. But since then, obviously at this point it's flipped completely around where it's very rare that somebody that's in a professional status, even in construction, doesn't have at least a profile set up and some general info there.

Todd Weyandt:

I think it's a great place to interact. And I know I have met and talked with so many really interesting people that I never knew existed or like I would never have the opportunity to know that they exist outside of LinkedIn. And the richness of information that people are sharing out on LinkedIn kind of goes back to our last conversation in the previous podcast episode, where we were talking about sharing the success stories that are out there. I think construction, we can be better at it. There are people out there that are sharing insights and information and what they're learning on a project and how they're adapting to new technology. So I think as we are going through this question of how do you adapt as things open up? I think LinkedIn is an incredible source for people to go to and crowdsource ideas and see what's working with other companies and what's not working and be able to learn from peers and people in the industry. People are pretty remarkably open to sharing stuff out on LinkedIn.

Mike Merrill:

Actually, it's interesting. I mean, I see a lot of your stuff. I see a lot of really good articles and people sharing industry statistics also have a lot of customers that are heavily engaged. I could think of one customer, BakerTriangle out of the Dallas-Fort Worth area, there in Mesquite, Texas. And it seems like every day or every other day, they're giving a 15 or 20 or 25 year medallion or an award, a safety award or something to their employees and their staff. And it's truly amazing that they're retaining and keeping employees for this longer period of time.

And I think if I was in a dry wall or interior construction and I was looking for a company to work with and work for, and I looked very hard, I would come across what they're doing. And it's almost like a form of marketing of how they engage with their employees and how they recognize them and celebrate them and how they value that family environment. And I can feel that even

if I didn't know BakerTriangle, I could see from their LinkedIn activity that they're probably a really good company to work for. So, that's another way we can leverage those tools.

Todd Weyandt:

I think you bring up a great point on LinkedIn can actually be a really powerful recruitment tool for the company as well too, to share and also so it can, but to share your culture and really put the spotlight on your employees and what you're doing. I was talking with somebody recently on my podcast and they were sharing that they were looking at their social stats and who was following their page. And they were really surprised to find out that most of their followers were actually people that worked at other construction firms and that's interesting where you thought it was going to be clients or prospects or something. And they thought that that was one of their number one recruitment tools was people finding out about them through social media. So I think that that's definitely an underrated feature and benefit of social.

Mike Merrill:

Agreed. So tell me this, do you have any advice or thoughts on how people can be more engaging with their requests or their meeting invitation so that they get accepted more and those tools end up being useful?

Todd Weyandt:

Man, just started doing it. I think that that's the biggest stumbling block, is people overthink it. It's a normal conversation act the same way on social and LinkedIn as you would in person. I think if it doesn't come naturally to you to say it to somebody face to face, probably don't say it while on social media. And I think it's just a normal conversation. I think people far overthink, what do I post? What do I say? How do I just interact as a human. You know how you would normally say something so just do that.

Mike Merrill:

I think that's great advice. Anyway, generally the quote unquote, keyboard warriors that are super vicious and bold and blunt online, hiding behind their keyboard,

but in person they're probably sweetest peach pie, right?

Todd Weyandt:

Right. Well, if you can tell when it comes across, you see these posts and you're like, there's no way that you would, like there's so just over the top or super arrogant or whatever, just be a normal person and share what you would normally share.

Mike Merrill:

So from a budgetary standpoint, and we talked about trade shows, maybe the value as a vendor or as an attendee and exhibitor, et cetera. How is an ROI determined on a virtual event versus an in-person event? Those are obviously pretty different mediums, like a e-magazine or an e-newsletter versus something in print. But do you have any thoughts on that?

Todd Weyandt:

I mean, I think that they carry different expectations for sure. If I'm putting on my marketing hat, my expectation going into a virtual event or conference or something from like a vendor side of things would be more, how can I interact with the people probably outside of the conference and what do I do with the list of attendees that I get? How can I reach out to them in a creative way that stands out from the noise and get them interacting that way, because the chances of you having a credible conversation in the chat on a breakout session is, not saying it couldn't happen, but it's probably not going to happen every single time. But it's interacting outside of it. So you would measure it the same way that you would measure any other kind of outbound marketing tactics, whether that's on your email channel and you're trying to get your opener clicks or on your social channel and you're measuring engagement and all that stuff.

In person, I think it shifts differently because hopefully you are going to have those more hot leads coming in directly from the show itself during that specific time period of whatever, however long the show lasts, hopefully you get X number of hot leads coming back from you. So I think it shifts. The virtual is more of a long game and the in-person is hopefully a little bit shorter game.

Mike Merrill:

I think that you answered that really well. They're different. You're right. Ultimately they hopefully roll to the same benefit, but they are a different situation and maybe tools like LinkedIn or digital tools to follow up and build that relationship that you couldn't do in person could be in play and give you an option to get more value out of those remote events.

Todd Weyandt:

I think an interesting thing with a virtual event too is that you can use that to leverage people that aren't even in the conference by pushing it out on social and engaging people that way of that the virtual world opens you up to interact with so many more people than you would normally have access to. It kind of goes back to what I was saying at the beginning, from the conference provider side, they're most likely a virtual event concept is staying around and it will go into a hybrid format from here on out because they're kind of silly to get rid of that virtual component because they can reach such a bigger audience. So as a person, either attending or sponsoring a virtual event, use that to leverage it outside of your people that you're interacting with in the conference and put it down on social and engage people that aren't involved.

Mike Merrill:

And maybe a great analogy. And I think a lot of people could relate to this, or at least they've heard of it, even if they're not religiously inclined or don't attend a church or synagogue of some sort, lots of churches had online church, online meetings, online speeches, pastors and all kinds of people getting up, sharing a message virtually, and I've attended some of those and I've attended them in person. And I prefer in person, but in the absence of all of it, I would certainly go in online through Zoom.

Todd Weyandt:

For sure. I mean, I think it's a great example of it.

Mike Merrill:

Yes. So now that we're, at least it looks as though we have our nose up and we're trending out of this, what people are calling the new normal post COVID, or at

least on the other side of vaccinations and other things, what has changed from a construction company's perspective on this balance between in person and remote work?

Todd Weyandt:

I think a lot. And I think that we are fortunate because we're going to be able to take the best of both worlds moving forward there. For example, I was talking with a company the other day that is in the AR space and they have the technology that somebody on site can put on like a hollow lens and walk around the site. Everybody else can be like on a Zoom call basically. And you can mark up this live space in the AR setting just by one person being on site. Other attendees can mark it up and like measure things and pinpoint stuff of like, oh, I see that area. Let's mark this as a cause for concern, or we've got to circle back to this. And so with this technology, you don't have to send somebody to the job site for every single site visit.

Maybe you streamline it and you hold them back for the last main one at the end of the project that they can come in and everything's pretty much cleaned up and they have just a quick punch list or if there's another bigger meeting that everyone needs to come in beforehand, you can do that. And it allows us flexibility that you can leverage the tools while still keeping people, being able to come home to watch their kid's baseball game at night and not have to be stuck in a hotel room. I think that work-life balance is a lot better with the technology when we're able to leverage that.

So I think there's cool opportunities like that, that people can look forward to take the best of both and figure out how do we create a work-life balance that is, is better than what it was before the pandemic hit. Construction is full of incredibly hard workers that will work very long hours, but do we have to go in that long all the time? Or do we have to go to that site visit or can we be home and leverage technology with it and save a couple of hours that we can be home for dinner? I think that there's there's opportunities for that.

Mike Merrill:

I talked to some of our customers or companies that we meet with that are in California and some are sitting

in traffic on 9-5 for three hours in the morning and two or three hours in the evening. And it's more than half of the workday sitting on the road, so it doesn't even have to be out of town work, so to speak. How much efficiency could be picked up for their time and their fuel and all the other expenses, not even to mention the quality of work-life balance, like you're saying. So it's a great takeaway. There's some benefits that we can enjoy and get to in this virtual world that can maybe take over some of our less effective habits prior.

Todd Weyandt:

And construction, it's still a people driven industry. So I don't want to be like, let's go hardcore into technology and everything is remote. That was terrible the last year, nobody has gone for that again. But I think that there's, we have to look for those ways that we can leverage the best of both. And when we maximize the time when we have to be in person and we are building those relationships, but not every single instance has to be that time. And I think it makes it even more impactful than when you are in person if we have that balance of both.

Mike Merrill:

And I mentioned BakerTriangle before, and I've shared on the podcast also, they've got a prefab shop where they're constructing huge wall panels inside of their building. And then they've got an in-stock crew to go out separately and install those. So there's some other things like that type of technology that could be adapted to do less onsite in-person with the whole crew and other efficiencies that can be gained. So implementation of technology in all forms can help improve construction, even though nobody's ever going to swing a virtual hammer or a virtual DeWalt drill isn't going to sink a screw 20 miles away, but...

Todd Weyandt:

I don't know. Maybe spot will one day, who knows?

Mike Merrill:

Well, these drones, right? You talked about VR. I mean, what about drone technology? That's something there too, right?

Todd Weyandt:

Yeah, absolutely. I think there's a ton of whether it's on the drone side or you mentioned prefab, obviously prefab was get big beforehand, but I think this last year and a half has proved that if you can go into prefab and you can bite it off and for the upfront cost of it, it makes so much sense because you're going to be able to control that environment. You're going to be able to really get those efficiency gains in the long run on the project. So yeah, I think being smart and being tactical on which technology you use and when you go into it, test it out and then ramp it up from there. I think that's going to be the key to the next six months here.

Mike Merrill:

And back to the prefab again, not to harp on that too much, but it's so much safer. It's a controlled environment. You're not three stories up on a scaffolding, right? It's laying horizontally on stands in a shop room floor, you know?

Todd Weyandt:

Well, and you don't have to have all the trades working at the exact same time and a very little space that nobody can fit into all at once. You can space that out and you have it ready when it's needed. So the efficiencies there are crazy in lots of ways.

Mike Merrill:

What about, and maybe the last point to hit on that would be, what about mobile technology or mobile solutions to help provide more efficiencies and communication also?

Todd Weyandt:

Well, I think that that's a cool play kind of going back on the AR side of things. I'm pretty fascinated with where AR is going and there's so many cool applications that you can bring into the mobile space around AR to help increase that and really kind of figure out where things are. And just pinpoint with more accuracy. I think that over the last, little bit here too, you saw that adoption of mobile technology, whether it was as simple as the health screens that people had to go through coming onto the job site, or just being able to on a more basic build fundamental level, pull up the documents

and interact with them in real time and see what the designers are doing in the model and be able to have that in real time interaction. I think that that's huge.

Mike Merrill:

It sounds like there's plenty of benefits, plenty of opportunities and plenty of efficiencies gained by this more digital, more mobile, more remote world where it can be. It doesn't replace the in-person stuff, but it certainly can enhance and make it safer, more efficient. And ultimately that all leads to an ROI. It leads to more profitability and less waste, right?

Todd Weyandt:

Yeah, absolutely. And not to bring up the skilled trade shortage here that is talked about all the time, but embracing these technologies and pulling in the mobile tech and AR or whatever your tech of choice. What we're going to have to do that as an industry in order to make up for the people that we don't have coming into the industry, I think is one aspect to tackling that. Our last conversation talked about another aspect of that of how to pull people into the industry and make construction cool again. I think you have to tackle both of that as well as just why we need more people. I think we have an opportunity coming out of COVID with the hospitality industry, people leaving that and not having the jobs there. I think being able to say, hey, look at construction. It's a great industry to come into as well too. So there's an opportunity there.

Mike Merrill:

Love it. Well, another great conversation. I've enjoyed exploring some of these things with you and talking about maybe where we're at today versus several months back when we spoke before it's changed. And I imagine in another four, six months it'll change again.

Todd Weyandt:

Only guarantee in life. Changes happening.

Mike Merrill:

That's the guarantee. So just as a takeaway, what's the parting thought that you would leave the listeners with you hope that they gain from our conversation today?

Todd Weyandt:

I think just be open to continuing to leverage technology and see where you can bring on more tech or double down on tech that you've already used. We don't have to go back to the processes that maybe didn't work as well beforehand. And like I said before, we have the advantage now that we can pick the best of both worlds and find that balance. And I think that, I said at the beginning to well, soul searching, I think that people need to take the time and really map it out and have a plan of what is the best of both worlds look like for us?

Mike Merrill:

Love that. Well-stated well, thank you, Todd. Appreciate it again. We've really enjoyed this conversation on our end and I hope you have as well.

Todd Weyandt:

Yeah, absolutely. Thanks so much.

Mike Merrill:

All right, we'll do it again down the road. All right. And thank you to the listeners for joining Todd and I on the Mobile Workforce podcast today. If you enjoyed the conversation that we had, please share this episode with your colleagues and friends and subscribe to the podcast. We also love those five star rating and reviews. Those help us to continue to bring great guests like Todd on so that we can continue to help you not only improve in business, but in life.