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Wayne Newitts

THE MOBILE WORKFORCE PODCAST

Mike Merrill:
Hello, and welcome to the Mobile Workforce Podcast, sponsored by AboutTime Technologies and WorkMax. I'm your host Mike Merrill, and today we are sitting down with the Wayne Newitts. Wayne is a marketing director at Viewpoint, a Trimble Company. Viewpoint is an integrated construction accounting, and project management software company and solutions provider. So Wayne's been in the industry for about 20 plus years, so you've been doing this a long time, is that about right Wayne, 20 years or so?

Wayne Newitts:
It depends, right now it's feeling like 40 but yeah, most days 20.

Mike Merrill:
Perfect. Okay. So we'll go with 20. So Wayne knows what it takes to really survive and also thrive in this economy, in this industry, within the construction accounting platform space, I'll say. So today we're going to talk about what data is collected out there, how it's collected, and also how we can leverage that data to boost productivity in construction? But most importantly, how do we protect that data that's been collected from the outside sources and threats that can come into the space, that we hear about so much in the news today? So hello Wayne, and thank you for joining us today.

Wayne Newitts:
Well hello Mike, you look familiar to me, I think we've met before, haven't we?

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, I was on some Mr. Clean Commercials a while back, but anyway-

Wayne Newitts:
That's what it is. Okay. Thought so. Anyway, it's great to be talking to you again, sir. Mike and I do go back a little bit in this industry for being the second or third largest industry in the country or in the world. It's amazing how sometimes it does seem like a smaller community sometimes right, Mike. But no, I'm thrilled to be here, thank you so much for inviting me so. I'm sure you've got some questions for me.

Mike Merrill:
I do. I mean, and one other thing too, I'll have the listeners take note of, Wayne's work for three of the largest providers in the construction software space historically. So definitely a long resume, a long tenure at each of those places, and one of the things that I really enjoy about Wayne's background and his experiences, he approaches this from the sales and marketing angle. So it's a little different than some of the guests that we've had on in the past and I'm really excited about the conversation today.

Wayne Newitts:
Yeah. Or as my wife would say, I can't keep a job Mike, so yes. Anyway.

Mike Merrill:
Eight to 10 years at a time, right.

Wayne Newitts:
Right. Right.

Mike Merrill:
Then the day comes and you do something different. All right. So today, I guess one of the main things that I wanted to talk about is if we're talking about data generally, what types of data do you think construction companies should be collecting if they're not already?

Wayne Newitts:
Well, gosh that's, I'll make a general statement Mike, it's that any and all data is potentially valuable, but it is only valuable if it meets three general criteria and that's, is it accurate? Kind of no-brainer. Is it real time? Because the longer the shelf life, the less accurate it actually tends to be, but also something we'll hopefully talk about a little bit is, is it connected? Are your data points connected or do you just have a big old bucket of data that you have to go fishing through, right? So really any data is of value if it's accurate, real time and connected, and that means you can put it to some use, which we can talk about it in a bit. That's my short answer to that question, and then we can get into maybe what types of data are contractors collecting, or maybe should they collect? Am I anticipating it?

Mike Merrill:
Yeah. Love that. That's great. You're definitely in the same wheelhouse I'm thinking of. And maybe even a little precursor to that now again, you've worked for these large construction accounting companies and ERPs solutions providers. How are they doing today? I mean, not just specifically Viewpoint where you're at now, but how generally is the market today at collecting that data, protecting it, et cetera.

Wayne Newitts:
Well, of course the answer is it varies all over the place. The one I think salient point I'd like to bring up is we're seeing in the marketplace in general, not talking about anyone specific company, including my own, but we're seeing this almost a bifurcation between systems that are more holistic and platform based, where all of your data is gathered in more of a warehouse type of environment, and then applications are running off of that. Versus these, I guess, so-called, but a best of breed point solutions which... And I'm not saying that one is better than the other, in fact, I think they both need to compliment each other.

But in the point solution domain, where you're, you have an application for X and then different one for Y, and different one for Z, it is an environment that does cause you to think about data security, data capture differently. So in a general sense, the way the industry's working with data right now depends on whether you are a platform provider or a more specific application provider. If you're a platform provider, you're looking at different things like, am I delivering via the cloud? What type of cloud services? Or am I moving away from on-premise software? If you're a point solution provider, usually those things are a little more determined for you, but let me just stop there and you can redirect me Mike, if I'm heading off the reservation.

Mike Merrill:
No, that's perfect. So obviously you pointed out there's cloud solutions, there's on-premise solutions, then there's cloud hosted where they've got an on premise solution in the cloud, that obviously would dictate some of the security functionality that's available for those platforms.

Wayne Newitts:
Yeah, no, for sure. And the type of data, the volume of data that we're gathering right now is also having a big impact where now looking at data that is, oftentimes can expose us even more than it has in the past through security breaches, potential ransomware attacks and what have you. And we can get into some of the protections that companies should be considering again, whether you're using a large platform based solution or more of a point solution application. But anyway yeah, full stop there, sir.

Mike Merrill:
So you think obviously when we talk about data, we're talking about something that's already digitized or collected in some form digitally, are companies doing better at that?

Wayne Newitts:
Well, I think we're seeing less of the coffee stained sticky notes that come back in the, in your Ford F-150 once a week from the job site to the office and you have to, you toss it on the accounting's desk and they have to make sense of it. That is more or less going away, but certainly not in all cases, I think a lot of us see examples of that all the time. But yeah, turning data into digital resources is the way to turn data into value for your company. If it's on paper, if it is even digitized but disconnected, you're not going to be

getting value out of that data. And we see this often, companies will go to extremes to gather tons of data from their job sites, from their individual crews, and then it just enters a black hole. Nothing happens to it, it's not working together, it's not connected, it's not correlated. That's something I can definitely talk more about.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, I think you're definitely echoing something that, I believe he's your general manager, but Matt Harris, with Viewpoint also was on the podcast. And he talked about collecting data by the half day, and that was a new term that we hadn't heard before. So I really, I liked that you brought that up.

Wayne Newitts:
Yeah. And in fact, as granular as you can make it, half day would be a dramatic improvement for many contractors. But imagine a world with me Mike, where data collection has become more and more automatic as technologies like the internet of things, right? I mean, what application could that possibly have in construction? Well, quite a few applications. Where we've got our devices and our equipment and even our structures themselves are able to now talk to us, so to speak, and deliver data on a real-time basis. A constant communication established between elements of a job site, not just individuals, not just supers and CMs, PMs gathering data on their mobile devices, which by the way, is a dramatic improvement over a number of years ago. But we're quickly moving to a time when our inanimate objects are becoming more animate and are able to give us data. It's up to us however, to make use of that data and very importantly secure it so.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, I love that. And I think I've heard you speak in the past or talk about the term actionable intelligence. Can you talk about what that is and how that relates to this data collection that you're talking?

Wayne Newitts:
Well yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's still, this garbage in garbage out saying which does definitely apply here, but that's a little bit more towards, is my data accurate real-time and connected? If it is then it's probably not garbage, but still it doesn't have to be garbage, is it valuable to you? And how do you make data valuable? And the answer is in the premise you just stated, which is make it actionable. If you gather all the data in the world, but it changes nothing and it doesn't drive any different behaviors or activities.

Well, there might be some value in that it could be a benchmarking tool for you in the future. But that's also contingent upon you using it as such. So when I talk about making data actionable, what I talk about is along two dimensions. Number one, it's got to be connected. Let me give you just probably a bad analogy. You're driving down the road, Mike you see a pothole in the road. What's your first inclination? You're clicking along at, okay. I'm sure it's just 55 miles an hour.

Mike Merrill:
Sure.

Wayne Newitts:
All right. Sure. You're driving down the road, you see a pothole. What do you do? Go ahead.

Mike Merrill:
You're going to swerve hopefully hit the brakes.

Wayne Newitts:
You're going to swerve. Absolutely. Right on it, hit that thing. My gosh. When's the last time you checked your shots, who knows? So you swerve, oh no. You didn't check your side view mirrors. You're in trouble, buddy. You're going to run that Prius right off the road with your big old pick them up truck. Well, that's not good, right. So I mean, very basic example of needing to have connected data. You see what's in front of you through the front, through your windshield, got to also look in your side views, and your rear view. You've got to have a 360 view of your situation in order to make smart decisions. These data inputs, pothole in front of you, the Prius on the side of you, have to be connected in order for you to make a decision.

Now, ultimately I would argue that if you're driving down this road and there's tons of potholes and cars on either side of you, the right decision to make ultimately from that data, if you're capturing that over time is, maybe I should be on a different road. Maybe I should check my maps application or find a different path. And that ultimately is of course, where you want to get to, if you're running a business. Is gathering this data, using it to be reactive but most importantly, using it to be proactive and that more or less leads to the next topic, which is you've got to correlate the data. So what does that mean? We've all heard about artificial intelligence, machine learning, all of the many different terms and acronyms around new information technologies these day.

A little bit of a secret, behind all of this predictive capabilities now of software tools, it all is fundamentally correlation. And that means when X happens, Y is it going to happen more or less likely. That doesn't necessarily mean X causes Y right, that's the difference between correlation and cause and we can get philosophical about that. But the key is when you're gathering data to make it really actionable, nothing lives in isolation. When X happens, what will the likely results be? What can I expect to happen next? There are many examples of this. For example, one contractor I was talking to who was using predictive analytics, got into it because they were just losing money on certain jobs. And they did not understand why. They were trying to get down to, immediately dive into the causes.

Well, maybe it's the project manager, or maybe it's the subs that were bringing in on this job. Maybe we're using the wrong equipment. I don't know what it is, maybe we're... What is it? So the answer was let your software, which is now available, predictive analytics software, look for correlations, not necessarily causes but, and in this particular case, it was an issue of the jobs in which the project managers working these jobs were relatively new. And that's a pretty simple conclusion. One could have come to that without predictive analytics, but the predictive analytics showed their ability to actually identify the likely, and in this case real cause for profit fade on these certain projects. And you can imagine a lot more complex situations, perhaps it's his combination of subcontractors you've got on certain jobs.

We had one contractor working with analytics who realized it was just purely this zip code. They never really understood why when we, when they did work in a certain zip code in their area, it just never worked out well for them. Nothing particular about it always happened. Well, they just stopped really looking actively for business there. It turned out it really did help their bottom line. And to this day, I have no idea if they figured it out, figured out exactly why, but you could also argue, does it matter as long as you're making good decisions based on data. So connected data. So you know whether or not to swerve, hit the brakes or ideally find a better road and then correlate the data together.

And for that you do need tools, either teams of really smart people looking at it or more efficient I would argue, the software tools that are now becoming available to the market. So went on a bit of a diatribe there, sir. Hopefully I was sort of addressing your initial question, which I honestly have forgotten by now.

Mike Merrill:
That's okay. No, that was great. Actually, I love that analogy. The dynamic of the pothole right, along with the blind spot is a really good visual, I think for people to think about. It's not just the problem in front of you, but you've got to be aware of the domino effect that may fall over because of that, right?

Wayne Newitts:
Yeah. Yeah. You can't operate on one data point alone.

Mike Merrill:
Love that. That's a great takeaway. So when we talk about actionable intelligence, what are some ways that can go wrong? Are there times where people overanalyze or over depend and then they maybe missed the boat on something that could have been more obvious?

Wayne Newitts:
Well, a hundred percent, it's paralysis by analysis, right. And there often is a feeling like, well, okay, if we're going to be a data driven company, everybody's using that term when is enough? When do you have enough

data to start making decisions? My fairly simplistic response is, well if right now you're pretty much flying by the seat of your pants, any amount of data that you bring in to help you make decisions is good. But when you find that you're spending time gathering and analyzing data, and you are not seeing anything come from that, any change in your workflows, any improvements in your profitability, that's when you've probably gone a bit too far, there is... Like, with everything in life, there's a sweet spot.

And it depends on the type of contractor, the complexity of your jobs, how much data you really need to be successful. I will say that even if you are gathering data that you're not putting through the analytics machine and churning out actionable results, raw data still has value in benchmarking, right. So you can benchmark what happened on certain jobs, because you never know down the road, whether the data you've captured and have stored away, now with technology is little or no effort on your part, if it's all coming to you automatically, you can use this data in the future in ways that you may not even realize you can use it today. And here we could, I could go syfy on you and give you all sorts of my scenarios for what I think will happen down the road.

But I'll just point this out, who would have thought that drones flying around a construction site even five years ago, who would have thought that they would add much value to live construction, right? Other than well, let's check security on the site, et cetera. It is right now, amazing applications that drone based data are giving contractors during live construction, to monitor and help them improve project delivery. So anyway, that's a whole another podcast I imagine. So let me pause there.

Mike Merrill:
We'll have to circle around and do some other discussions as well. I mean, you brought up the drones, I still remember, I mean, it wasn't that long ago, but I remember hearing out of multiple contractors mouths, "Oh, I don't need that. That's a kid's toy, that's not a construction tool."

Wayne Newitts:
Yep. And the thing is the construction tool is visibility into your projects and yes, you can use a drone just to get pretty pictures. Sure. But you can use a drone also to, and I've seen this in real life, more accurately estimate job progress than you can in any way, using any other method, by simply... And I've actually seen drone data be turned into 3D models that can be compared against BIM models and you can get very accurate job progress reports. And we all know that for progress billing and other reasons, having accurate identification of your progress on the job is key for cash flow and many other things. Yeah, absolutely. And that was just five years ago to today who knows what three years from now we're going to be talking about? And I'm sure will involve augmented or virtual reality and other technologies that are coming on board so.

Mike Merrill:
Well, and I guess, to back up on the conversation, we talked about digitizing and collecting and putting it in the cloud. I guess one of the negative impacts could be if you've got everything digital and you've got it all in a format where it can be accessed, but then you don't properly protect it, now all of your data is at risk.

Wayne Newitts:
Yeah, I mean, I won't even call up any examples because I think we've all been hearing them in the news lately, right. It's every week, that's the latest exploit or hack. And construction, our industry is very much affected by and vulnerable to data security breaches, I can give you many examples. I would say this in general to anyone, any contractor listening, every device you've got, every computer, every desktop at your headquarters, in your office, every tablet that a super or CM is using in the field, every mobile phone that one of your workers, one of your techs or your subs are using, look at those as front doors, into your own personal house. That's the level of danger here we're talking about.

I mean, there's huge opportunity. If you're a contractor not using digital technology today, you're probably not going to be a contractor for terribly much longer, right. I think we all know that. But you're also opening your yourself up to vulnerabilities with every single electronic device. Or any device that runs off of data

and I can share, I will share a story, time permitting about this. So there are really three things about data protection that I would like everyone to understand. And first is just access and that's step number one. How do people who need to access your data, how are they doing it? And by way I've some I guess, life pro tips I can share with the audience, here's some things that might seem obvious, but you really should be paying attention to.

Number one, the software that you're using, how many people have admin rights to that software? How many people can get in and change permissions, right? So we at Viewpoint, we sell ERP systems. These are fairly holistic, going across multiple departments of an organization. Permission setting is terribly important. You do it wrong and you can give anybody permission to see anyone's payroll, for example, not so good. So very basic stuff here, but make sure that you have your software locked down and you understand who are the admins? And the admins understand what permissions they're allowed to give to the different folks using it.

And of course, as a corollary, make sure that the software you're investing in a wonderful software like WorkMax, or possibly Viewpoint, but make sure that your software does have that ability to give different permission levels to different folks who are using it. So step one, step base, step zero, really there. Now, mobility, of course. Obviously Mike, I'm talking on a podcast all about that. Mobility has given us great benefits, but also it's really exponentially opened up the potential threat vectors for us in data security. Make sure you have first of all, a plan for mobile security. It doesn't mean you need to necessarily go out and buy MDM or mobile device management software. Although I personally would recommend that, I wouldn't recommend any particular vendors, there's a lot of good ones out there.

But at least have a plan and a written policy for how you and your staff, your crews are going to use their mobile devices or devices that you provide for them. And that's usually decision number one, right. Again, that could be an entire podcast on mobile device management and security there, but have a plan, have written processes, have it be part of onboarding and training for all your crews, and consider looking at some software for that. And then Mike, I go out on the road all the time and talk about the wonders of the cloud, back even when it was a dirty word right, in our industry. And now it's pretty much table stakes. And I will say, and I've seen it that the cloud, believe it or not, you kind of just have to let go. Just be a little Zen about it and let go and realize that just because you can put your hand on that server under your desk or in your server room and know that's where my data is, that does not make it more secure.

All it takes is one upset employee with access to that device and a USB drive and security is gone. And a lot of your data, it might be gone or corrupted. Enterprise level cloud providers, whether it's one of the major ones like Microsoft Azure or Amazon Web Services, they have to provide, it's their business to provide a high levels of not just availability to the software, but security. So look for SSA type, SOC type two compliance. And of course with enterprise providers, it's always going to be the case. But the security provided by the cloud I mean, we're talking biometric security. You can't get into a data center without literal retinal scans, hand prints and speaking very nicely to the ladies and gentlemen carrying automatic weapons around, securing these places. Your data in a enterprise clouds environment is generally super secure. Sorry, I went on a little bit of a proselytizing mission there for cloud-based software, but I do believe it.

Mike Merrill:
It's a great point. I don't think you could echo that loud enough.

Wayne Newitts:
Yeah. One other thing though, and I want to end on this because I do think it's the most important aspect of security and I'll say it twice, implement multi factor authentication. Implement multi factor authentication, MFA. It's as simple as having to have two devices to log in. Every time I login in the morning, I try to remember on a Monday morning what my password is, okay. Got it right. I get in before I can access any of my company's applications. It goes, all right, we're going to push something off to your cell phone, Wayne. And now I've got to find my cell phone, darn it. Oh, and charge it. But it makes me have to prove that not only do I have the information to log in, but I am physically the person,

unless I've been kidnapped or something, I'm the person who is really doing it.

So having two, ideally three mechanisms to log in, if you want to be terribly secure. The number one way to avoid any type of technical hacking of your system. Kind of leads me to my next point, mike. I feel like I'm really rambling on here, but I'm passionate about this. And the next point is it's not all technology, it's training. Y'all have seen some of the attacks read about, heard about the attacks recently that have, at various industries, Colonial Pipeline, et cetera. Almost every case, it began with social engineering, not any fancy coders sitting in dark basements doing fancy Mr. Robot coding on their computers. No. It was someone picking up the phone or sending an email that was a phishing email with a pH, trying to get some basic information from you just enough so that they could then access your company systems.

And so training your folks in how to identify phishing attempts and how to avoid social engineering, phone calls and texts, and what have you. And we all get them every day, right. You've just won a new sweepstakes, click this link, right. Sadly, it's a numbers game and sadly, and you don't want to be on the wrong side of that numbers game. So train your folks. There are plenty of, I mean, in numerable companies, consultants who can come in and help train your vendors in many cases. Mike and myself, our companies can step in and give you some basic help in that regard as well. But that's super important. We'll leave it right there. And those are just some of my obvious, many thoughts about the importance of data security and things that you should do about it.

Mike Merrill:
Well, I love that, and your point about two factor authentication that I also like, is that if for some reason somebody was nefariously trying to access your data, you would then get that text on your phone that somebody is trying to access your system, using your credentials.

Wayne Newitts:
Absolutely. Happened to me, happened to me. And so that's where training comes in too though, Mike. Because I could have easily said, "I don't have time for this. I'm just going to hit. Yes, it was me because I have work to do." That's where training comes in. That's where you realize no, my company could be really, really damaged by this and my career, right. So very important. Yep. Absolutely.

Mike Merrill:
Lots of great points Wayne, this has been very insightful. I've really enjoyed this conversation and I think we definitely need to have you back on and further some of these other discussions.

Wayne Newitts:
Anytime, sir. I live for these types of discussions and I never have enough mic time so.

Mike Merrill:
Microphone or Mike Merrill, I don't know which, but-

Wayne Newitts:
Oh well I'll just let you run with that. All right.

Mike Merrill:
Well, before we wrap up, I do have a couple of other questions that I wanted to run past you. All right. So what is Wayne Newitts, superpower?

Wayne Newitts:
Oh, well it sure isn't Jujitsu, still a white belt there. Yeah, I get choked regularly. No. All right. In business and really in life, but particularly when I'm going through my day, it's really listening. There are two types of listening and one is not real and the other is. Be present with the person you are engaged with or the audience you're engaged with. Be very aware of what you're doing, not thinking about the next cool thing you're going to say or how you're upset that Sally or Joe just said that, and you disagree and you can't wait to get in there and argue.

Listen very carefully and listen without an agenda and without an ego. Now you can have an agenda and have an ego we all do, but when you're engaged with a client, with an owner, with a vendor, anyone, listen very

actively and very attentively, just be present. And that has really helped me I think, in my career and in my personal life.

Mike Merrill:
That's fantastic. I hear you, Wayne. I hear you.

Wayne Newitts:
Do you really, mike? Do you really?

Mike Merrill:
I do.

Wayne Newitts:
Okay.

Mike Merrill:
All right. So then secondly, what's a business challenge that you've overcome, and worked through and how did you do it?

Wayne Newitts:
Well, let's go back to ego. My ideas Mike, of course smell better than anybody else's, right. I know just the thing to do in every situation, and I've been doing this for 30 years. Oh my gosh. So it is a challenge sometimes, especially if you're working with either newer folks who, people of a certain age like myself have younger folks coming in, different ideas, different perspectives. It can be a challenge too and again, kind of a callback to listening, right. It can be a challenge to have the humility, to shut up, open your mind and really consider what the other person is saying. And that's been a bit of a challenge for me as I've gotten further on in my career.

So look for ways to be humble because that's how you grow. And so that's how I've overcome it, is by just realizing everything I've ever learned in my life, I didn't just magically make it up, it came from someone, it came likely from either someone more senior than me, or now I'm realizing it's coming from people more junior than me, who understand things differently about the way our industry works, the way data works. For example, a lot of the ideas I talked about today, I didn't come up with any of them, they were all shared with me. But that's the biggest challenge again, the callback to listening, but also realizing that there are often many different ways to look at an issue and a problem.

And it's very important to take yourself out of your mental comfort zone and look at things from different perspectives and get that 360 view of your business and your life. And that's been my challenge. It's one I work on every day, because been there, done that, bought the T-shirt, right. But, no, no, that T-shirt doesn't fit anymore, right. You've got to always listen and look at different perspectives.

Mike Merrill:
I love that. Well stated. I appreciate you being vulnerable and sharing that as well, it's something I can certainly learn from myself.

Wayne Newitts:
There you go. My heart's out there, Mike. My heart's right out there.

Mike Merrill:
I can feel it. So the last thing, what's the one takeaway you want the audience to have from our discussion today? What's the last thing you would say?

Wayne Newitts:
Well, we're talking about data. We're talking about, from a mobility or not standpoint. I would say when asked yeah, more data is better, but, a capital B, on that but, you've got to have a plan first for what you're going to do with it, and you've got to... And depending on what you want to do with that data, how you want it to turn into that actual intelligence, that's really going to change something, then stop and think do I have the tools to make that happen? Do I have the expertise? Do I have the knowledge, to make that happen? More data is better, but it actually is worse if you're just dumping it all into a bucket and things just get harder to find. I think we can call a scene on that one there.

Mike Merrill:
Okay. All right. And cut now. Thank you, Wayne. I really, really appreciate the conversation today. And again, look forward to having another one down the road on a different topic.

Wayne Newitts:
I would love to Mike, thanks so much for having me today.

Mike Merrill:
Absolutely. Our pleasure. And thank you again to the listeners for joining us today on the Mobile Workforce Podcast, sponsored by AboutTime Technologies and WorkMax. If you enjoyed the conversation that Wayne and I had today, please give us a follow, on our LinkedIn platform as well as at WorkMax underscore on Instagram. Also, please share this episode with your friends and colleagues in the industry. Of course, our goal here is to continue to bring valuable conversations that help you make the difference. Our goal of course, is not only to help you improve things in your business, but also your life.