

## More Than Muscles

**L**ike many other people in the construction industry, Scott Thornberry grew up in the business. Today, he is the operations manager for T+C Contracting Inc., a heavy/highway contracting company his father, Don, started in 1982 in Louisville, Kentucky. “Dad is still around, but he wants to spend more time in retirement,” Thornberry says, adding, “I don’t want him to let go—this is a big nasty headache to have by yourself.” He continues, “Basically we’re going through a shift right now.

HeavyBid, an estimating software package. “He bought HeavyBid when it first came out—years and years ago when it was DOS-based,” Thornberry says. “He spent months comparing estimating software, and he felt he got better support from HCSS. We got really lucky that he did that research.”

Piggybacking on its successful HeavyBid implementation—which it still uses today for estimating—T+C uses HCSS’ HeavyJob for project management and Dispatcher for equipment tracking and maintenance. The important thing, in Thornberry’s opinion, is the increased communication that has resulted from using HCSS software. “We’ve got people on two ends of the office who are talking now—and they have never really communicated about their jobs before,” he says. “Instead of me just saying, ‘This is what we’re going to do and how we’re going to do it,’ everybody that has a dog in the fight is getting into this.”



**T+C employees make a deep sewer tie-in at a commercial business park site. The foreman standing on the bank is responsible for entering all daily data about the project into HCSS HeavyJob project management software.**

My father did it all by himself [for years]. Now we’re getting larger, and we’re getting in more young people, so we’re trying to take more of a team approach. We’ve outgrown our roots so to speak.”

According to young Thornberry, T+C hovers around 150 employees, and has averaged \$40 million per year for the last several years. As a growing operation, T+C needed to modernize and streamline its business operations to stay profitable. So in the early 1990s, the company looked to HCSS software.

T+C’s relationship with HCSS began when Dave Amlung, chief estimator and part-owner, purchased

### Evolving Project Management

“When we started out, HeavyJob was [used] strictly for data collection, and the foremen were the only ones who used it,” Thornberry says. In addition to the foremen, T+C HeavyJob users today include accountants, estimators and project managers. In the beginning, T+C exported the labor hours reported by the foreman directly to payroll, and the big advantage, Thornberry says, was “no more

**CONTRACTOR:**  
T+C Contracting Inc.

**LOCATION:**  
Louisville, Kentucky

**PROJECT:**  
Update and overhaul operations of a heavy/highway contractor to streamline project management and increase overall efficiency.

**TOOLS USED:**  
HCSS HeavyBid, HeavyJob and Dispatcher software

chicken-scratch, unreadable timecards.” But, he quickly points out, the software can do much more than just replace timecards—it can help manage labor, units, materials, budgets and costs. This standardization is the biggest benefit Thornberry sees from using the software.

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T+C Contracting Inc.**

“What I’ve learned is that HeavyJob is not terribly difficult to figure out. It’s a matter of keeping information within it accurate so you can track [it] accurately,” he says. He notes that using HeavyJob helps train foremen to “be specific and conscious of what you’re writing in your diary.”

The production analysis capability of HeavyJob is the “show-me-the-money” part of the software. “We use it to get a daily snapshot of how our job cost is doing,” Thornberry says. He explains that if T+C were using a regular accounting software system, its estimate of job cost would not be accurate for 30 days, since labor costs would be added in later and incoming material invoices could take 24 hours to two months to register. “The advantage that HeavyJob gives you is when the foreman turns in labor and materials, it gives a snapshot compared to the budget. The foreman can see if he’s going into the red.”

T+C has set the deadline for entering information in the system as “midnight the day of,” according to Thornberry. “Once you put in all your data—labor, equipment, diary notes—you can see how you’ve done that day or week or month. When they’re happy with it, the foremen have Sprint air cards, so they log onto the Internet and send it into the office.”

“The very next morning, the project managers look over those timecards and try to make sure everything is there. At the end of the month, it’s very easy for accounting to see what we’ve done this month, and then have a project manager look it over and approve it.”

### **An Accurate Record**

In praise of HeavyJob, Thornberry tells of a project the contractor worked on at a military base. “It was a very large job for a large general contractor,” he says, “and right off the bat, the general contractor and the client got into a big disagreement over the scope. We were instructed to keep working. I had at that time six foremen working there, and I did all the timekeeping and recordkeeping for the job.

“I would e-mail [the general contractor] a typed daily report that had every ounce of information you could possibly want. The other subs had a guy in a pickup truck filling out a handwritten form they gave him, and they were always chasing them down to get their dailies turned in. I was generating the same daily report in one fell swoop. It’s redundant to fill out a daily report after you already filled it out for your own company.”

Now that the project is complete, the general contractor is going through its claims process. “They call and ask us, ‘What happened when we did this?’” Thornberry says. “I go through diary notes in HeavyJob and answer all their questions.” He then adds, “I didn’t have to dig through handwritten notes. A lot of my HeavyJob notes are ending up in a court case now.” Thornberry notes that this helped his client—the general contractor—more directly than it helped T+C, but he knows that establishing this kind of reputation will help his firm garner future work.



**At a business park site, T+C employees pour concrete for abutment walls. All of their labor hours are recorded in HeavyJob software to maintain accurate records.**

### **Smart Logistics and Support**

In addition to the project management made possible through HeavyJob, T+C has also started to implement better fleet management through HCSS’ Dispatcher. “If I have Job 1 and will need a D8 dozer for three months, I go into Dispatcher and allocate it for three months. Then everyone can see that D8 is utilized,” Thornberry explains. “It’s a way to move things around

the chessboard, so to speak. We move things around so much and are in such a variable environment—it's rain and dry, rain and dry here."

In addition to keeping up with the locations of equipment, T+C uses the maintenance tracking functions of Dispatcher. "Every 250 hours," Thornberry explains, "Dispatcher pops up and says this machine's up for an oil change."

T+C has purchased network subscriptions of HeavyJob and HeavyBid and pays annual fees based on how many concurrent users it has. The contractor has only allocated one user to Dispatcher because it only wants one person in charge of moving things around.

T+C has maintained its investment by attending HCSS users group meetings. "They have two-day classes and do some rudimentary training," Thornberry says. But what really impresses him is HCSS' focus on product development. "They scribble down every good idea they hear, and they evolve very quickly." One year, someone in the users group said it would be nice to be able to attach photographs to diaries, and according to Thornberry, HCSS sent out another version of HeavyJob within six weeks that had the ability to attach photos.

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**T+C uses the production analysis screen in HeavyJob to get a daily snapshot of job cost.**

"I know I can pick up the phone and go straight to the top," Thornberry says. He cites examples of HCSS staff supporting T+C "even down to the nuts and bolts of exporting and importing glitches between HeavyJob and our accounting software."

In tight times, T+C believes its team-oriented approach to implementing and maintaining smart software will keep the contractor in business. "Housing is shrinking," Thornberry says, "but there's still a lot of commercial and industrial work going on. We have to chase larger state and government projects. It's going to get tough for a couple years—and you'll have to be a strong, intelligent contractor to make it. The tight constriction will weed out the bad contractors."

This year, Thornberry says, his father Don wants T+C's employees to think: "We're not going to survive by out-muscling our competition—we're going to have to outsmart them." Thornberry adds, "I've been in the field my entire life, and now I'm in the office trying to figure out how to outsmart them." **SP**

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