SAY "APP": MOBILE TECHNOLOGY PRESS

By Lincoln Brunner

Jeff Broderick *Facility Control Systems*	*Karen Edwards* *EagleView*	*Rob Minialoff* *RoofLogic*	*Dale Thornberry* *Pictometry*	*Scott Potteiger* *Dataforma*

As if on cue, the roofing industry is riding a collective wave of new technology, thanks to mobile applications, or apps, that promise to join the roof to the office like never before.

Although satellite and aerial photographs have helped roofers gather better and better measurement data for the past several years, mobile apps for Apple's iPhone and iPad and devices running Google's Android OS are just now hitting the market *en force.*

These new apps—from the likes of Dataforma, EagleView, Facility Control Systems, RoofLogic, and Pictometry—put data and photos at inspectors' fingertips in one platform. And with a few taps, inspectors can fill out entire reports with on-the-spot measurements, repair data, and images—while they're still on the roof.

The apps offer some key advantages: time savings for roofing contractors, a more tech-savvy presentation to their customers, and the ability to forge newly gathered data with a company's existing office software.

And the real fun has just begun.

"This is in its infancy," says Rob Minialoff, owner of RoofLogic, Mississauga, ON, Canada, which just launched its Mobile Lite app for phones and tablets running on Android. "I talk to people regularly about this, and they say, 'I'm not sure about my guy [employee] having a smartphone or a tablet.' They're kind of getting their head around it."

Minialoff likens the game-changing nature of the new mobile technology to the large-format digitizers that took the industry by storm in the early 1990s. It took a few years for those devices to reach a "critical mass" in the roofing industry, where most people couldn't see doing business without them. Minialoff doesn't see the market reaching that point with mobile apps for another 4 years.

Others, like EagleView's Karen Edwards, think that time is today.

"No, we've crossed that chasm—the early adopters were in 2008 and 2009," says Edwards, whose company started in 2008. EagleView, Bothell, WA, uses aerial photographs of houses and other buildings to construct 3-D roof models and calculate pinpoint measurements for customers.

EagleView already offers an iPhone and Android app and is now launching an iPad and tablet app. The company's software helps its users do a variety of tasks, from modeling and measuring to production planning and materials staging on site to storing the work history of a certain property.

Indeed, the revolutionary nature of mobile apps lies not in the devices they're used on but in that *integration* of processes that contractors already do every day.

Industry stalwart Pictometry, with its database of 100 million aerial photographs, features an app that allows its customers to place offers from either a tablet or an iPhone. Customers can review orders, view images and reports, and even get turn-by-turn directions to a job site.

"I believe that mobile applications and the integration of those into other estimating platforms is going to be the industry's driver going forward, because by nature, roofing is mobile," says Dale Thornberry, vice president of Pictometry, Rochester, NY. "The ability to go get that data more efficiently or more accurately is going to be of critical importance."

Like most vendors serving the industry, Dataforma, York, PA, began its foray into mobile apps by allowing photos to be integrated with reports. That's just the latest twist on a software system that already aims to be a one-stop shop for customers, from the initial phone call to invoices.

"The whole idea of Dataforma is taking all those individual processes and systems and combining them into one integrated program that's made specifically for the roofing industry," Dataforma Vice President Scott Potteiger says. "It's web based, so you get access to it from anywhere. We bring our customers a lot of efficiencies by not having to re-enter information in three or four or five different places, making sure everyone knows where to go to find information."

Saving Money, Time, and Headaches
Before that integration happens, perhaps the most obvious benefit that apps offer to roofing contractors is big time savings—on the roof, in the truck, and behind the desk.

RoofLogic's MobileLite allows inspectors to take photos, import them into a report, create a PDF document, and send the document to an office staffer or customer immediately from the device. Minialoff estimates that using the app could save a roofing contractor hundreds of hours a year in photo time alone—a big step

up from using digital cameras to photograph roof repairs and downloading those photos manually into a computer.

Mobile apps also can save an inspector a serious amount of time on the inspection.

For example, Facility Control Systems' FCS Inspect app for iPad 2 and iPhone 4 and 4S populates reports with photos, videos, and other data during the inspection. However, it also allows the inspector's coworkers to collaborate on the report he just generated in real time—pricing repairs, correcting spelling, and changing wording in the report while he's still three or four stories in the air.

"It's 100% collaborative with the office," FCS Vice President Jeff Broderick says. "Before the guy comes off the roof, all those corrections are made and they have the report waiting for the customer." Broderick says FCS Inspect probably saves a user an average of 5 hours per inspection compared to measuring, photographing, and writing the old way.

A Better Sell

And while contractors are fitting more work into the workday, they're also coming up with sharper reports for customers that, again, are generated more quickly.

"It becomes more and more important every day, and we're seeing that our customers are further differentiating themselves and separating themselves from everyone else based on these technologies that they're using," says Potteiger.

EagleView's app allow users to take a picture on a roof, mark up the photo on screen, drop those photos into a report, integrate the fresh photos with aerial shots of the property, refresh the property report, and then show it all to the property owner immediately. "It allows them to have the property owner on the roof with

them—but not really," Edwards says.

"More contractors are telling us that they're using iPads and tablets in their sales presentation," she says. "They don't want to go in and hope they have the lowest bid and get selected for the project. They need things that set them apart, that bring added value and convince that property owner that this is a professional business that knows what they're doing."

Let's face it, Broderick says: As more and more twenty-somethings, who have never known a world without the Internet begin sitting behind desks and purchasing roofing work, technological acumen won't be a choice.

"It's a non-negotiable with these kids," Broderick says. "When you are able to bring to them the communication that they're used to, so that they are able to do business with you on their terms, you end up capturing that business. You're not telling them that you have to come

back to the Stone Age to handle your roof."

"It would be as if someone asked one of us to go wash their clothes on a scrub board," he jokes. "It makes no sense. We would never want to learn how to operate a scrub board. We know we can throw it in our washer and dryer and it's done."

Potteiger adds a caveat, though: Technology is great, but you still have to know how to use it well to make it an asset instead of a liability.

"If you're doing something in real time, sometimes you don't necessarily take the time to think or look at it," he says. "Sometimes we think it's good to have the human filter in place to say, "Do I really want to make this available to the customer?" or "Are these definitely the photos I want to send over?" as opposed to having everything automated.

"Having that technology at your fingertips is definitely a good thing, but more importantly, you have to understand how to use it and have a system of checks and balances in place to make sure you're pushing out the information to your customer that you want."

When all the work has been done up in the air, what contractors really need is a tool that gives them and their customers a way to collaborate on the bottom line.

"If you look at what [contractors] really want, at the end of the day, they need a number to tell a customer or work with an [insurance] adjuster," Pictometry's Thornberry says. "So it really becomes, 'How do I integrate this nice data that I've got now, that I can get in a fraction of the time at a reasonable fee; what do I do with that data; and how can I get that into my workflow?"

Edwards says the real question for contractors is how technology can help them be more efficient and profitable.

"We need to make it as easy as possible for the contractor, because they don't want to go 10 different places to get what they need to produce an estimate for that job."

Now, they don't have to. How quickly apps will move from no-can-do to no-brainer is anyone's guess—but it will happen.

"I think 5 years from now, it's going to be like a FedEx guy: You can't do your job without one—you would never want to go on a roof again and do an inspection without a mobile app," Minialoff says. "It would be agony."
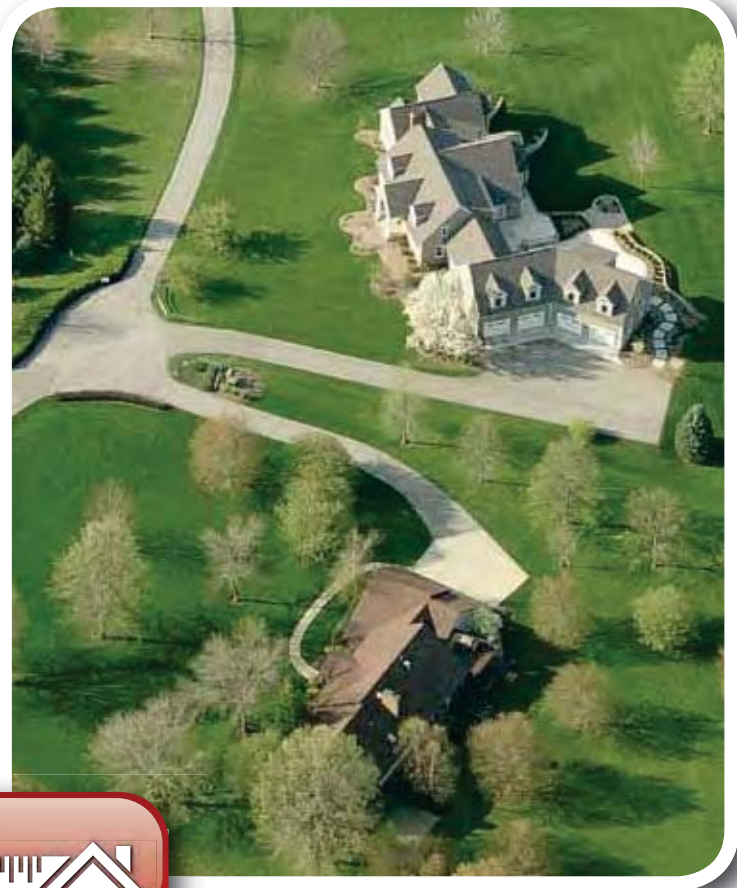
Pictometry's roof measurement reports feature aerial images that contain data to remotely measure area, height, distance, elevation, bearing, and pitch, among other things.