

# The Electrical Industry Gets Computerized

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When Jack McCormick entered the electrical trade in 1958 as an apprentice, the electrical industry worked in paper. But as McCormick rose from a Journeyman to a foreman to eventually a contractor himself, the traditional paper field became computerized.

Computerization was merely a buzz word for electricians in the early 1970's. Hardly any contractors owned or worked with computers. But McCormick realized that if electricians were to find a better and faster way of doing things, they would have to take advantage of new technologies. After years of struggling as a contractor with traditional estimating efforts and some primitive software programs, he created an estimating software package for electricians that made bidding easier and faster. "Originally, I developed this software to use in my own construction company. I didn't do it to go into business," says McCormick. "But then I recognized there was a need out there."

ABC-member firm McCormick Systems, based in Mesa, Arizona, began operations in 1979. About one year later, the ESI 1000 estimating system, its first product, won several awards from electrical associations and groups. Today, more than 5,000 companies use McCormick software.

"The industry hasn't changed—switchgear is still switchgear—but the demand is changing," says McCormick. "Contractors are beginning to realize what could be done if they had this software."

Ninety-five percent of the users of this software are electrical contractors; many of which are ABC members. Gaylor Electric, Carmel, Ind., for example, has been using the McCormick software for about two years now.

"Using this software has made us much more efficient. We have found that we are ahead of a lot of companies because of it," Now, nearly all electrical contractors have computers, and about 75 percent of them use some sort of business software. "It's been a continual steady climb. In the early 1990s it really exploded."

Tim Weir, Sr., who is chairman of ABC's Electrical Contractors Council, says ABC has worked with software companies to assure useful products for the industry.

McCormick has worked for many years with ABC. "Electrical contractors are asking for more control, information, timeframe schedules, and change orders. They want us to take it beyond estimating into project management," he says adding that "more and more of the private industry is requiring that some form of pre-construction software like estimating, accounting, or scheduling software be used when doing bids. It keeps down the errors," he says, "especially in the electrical field where details are essential."

Experts in the field suggest electrical contractors move quickly to get up to date with technology. While not all contractors are currently equipped to handle heavy duty computer installations that include fiber optics and other high-tech lighting systems, McCormick says at the very least electrical contractors should now be computerizing their own offices.

"If you don't," he says, "you're gonna be walking down the road. Alone."