

Connecting the Enterprise Dots

How GovCons and A/E can dramatically improve productivity, visibility and profitability by integrating processes and applications using a modern integration platform

To most people, 2020 was a year characterized by chaos. To government contractors (GovCons) and architecture and engineering (A/E) firms, it was just another year of struggling to connect all the moving parts in their organizations.

For years, these organizations have employed numerous applications, processes, and teams to try and meet their changing business needs, only to realize that a lack of seamless coordination across their software and systems create significant roadblocks to productivity that only hurt the business rather than help it.

The top [A/E] firms constantly benchmark their performance against well-established business performance measures.¹

GovCons and A/E firms have traditionally relied on industry-standard but outdated legacy ERP solutions or a series of start-up solutions to monitor and manage their projects and processes. These platforms are generally limited in scope and capability, requiring teams to use a range of disparate applications and peripheral email, content repository, and collaboration systems to manage other critical business functions such as payroll, HRIS, inventory, and customer relationship management (CRM).

As companies continue to deal with siloed data and information that creates visibility gaps across process and people and stifles collaboration, organizations are increasingly looking for ways to work more efficiently and with greater transparency to set themselves apart

from competitors, improve profitability, and enhance compliance management to position themselves for long-term growth.

In response, many forward-looking firms are looking to modern integration and automation platforms to integrate their processes in one platform. These solutions are designed with today's organization in mind, providing a single marketplace of pre-built application connectors that creates a single source of truth in an efficient, cost effective, and organized manner, allowing organizations to seamlessly integrate and automate processes, so teams can focus on the creative activities that drive business growth.

¹Burns, Steven. "9 characteristics that distinguish leading A/E firms." BDCNetwork.com. August 25, 2015.

CUSTOMERS DEMAND THAT FIRMS DO MORE, BETTER, FASTER, WITH FEWER RESOURCES

Customer demands are changing across all industries, from the smallest niches to giants like GovCon and A/E. B2B and B2G customers are people, after all, and they're increasingly expecting the same level of speed and responsiveness they get from consumer-oriented companies like Amazon.

This is a conundrum for firms in the A/E and GovCon industries. On one hand, their customers are expecting them to deliver more or better services, faster. But on the other hand, they're already struggling with tight margins, strict compliance requirements, and rapidly shifting business needs. Their legacy ERP systems often don't help matters, creating production bottlenecks from manual workflows and processes that stifle productivity and kill efficiency.

"Sixty-two percent of B2B customers have purchased more from a company after a good customer service experience."²

Disparate systems lead to inefficient, error-prone processes

Poorly integrated software and systems can result in chaotic processes that make work messy, difficult to manage, and ultimately delay time to value.

Users sometimes have to duplicate data entry across multiple applications and systems, increasing the likelihood or risk of miskeying an entry. And, since these different systems don't sync, an error in one

system that isn't rectified can wreak havoc when it comes time to try and reconcile data between multiple systems. Users have to scramble to cross-reference information, which can add days or even weeks to crucial business processes like invoicing, estimating, and even future business projections for revenues, operating margins, and profit.

Small to mid-sized companies use an average 73 apps.³

Repetitive workflows are done by hand instead of automation

Poorly integrated systems also make it impossible for the firm to automate workflows and connections between applications, forcing teams to waste time on repetitive, menial tasks instead of collaborating on higher-value strategic initiatives.

The statistics about how much time is spent on manual processes are staggering:

- Over 60% of business users say at least one-third of their job could be automated⁴
- Over 40% of workers spend at least 25% of their week on repetitive manual tasks like data collection and entry⁵
- 55% believe they can eliminate human error and manual data entry by automatically collecting, uploading, or syncing data into a system of record⁶
- Nearly 60% of workers say they could save six or more hours a week — almost a full workday — if the repetitive aspects of their jobs were automated⁷

²Zendesk. "Quantifying the business impact of customer service." <http://www.zendesk.com/blog/business-impact-customer-service/>. Accessed 10/15/2020.

³"2019 Businesses @ Work." Okta.com. Accessed 10/12/2020.

⁴Manyika, James et al. "Jobs lost, jobs gained: What the future of work will mean for jobs, skills, and wages." McKinsey & Company Report. McKinsey.com. November 28, 2017.

^{5,7} SmartSheet Automation in the Workplace, 2017.

Key processes such as project startups, task handoffs, or even new hire onboarding often require specific workflows that, when executed manually, dramatically slows communication and progress.

Typically, they'll have to share information by phone or back-and-forth emails, which can lead to miscommunication, version control issues, and assigning oversight responsibility. Worse, manual processes are also unpredictable, as they depend on people completing each step in the workflow quickly and correctly.

UNIFIED SOLUTIONS FOR A UNIFIED ORGANIZATION

New innovations in integration and automation platforms are changing the game for both GovCons and AE firms. These cloud-native platforms are more flexible, extensible, and efficient than legacy systems enabling teams to effortlessly connect the various tools and technologies they use into a single, cohesive environment and core system of record.

APIs are the key to greater success

Application programming interfaces (APIs) are key to solving the disparate systems challenge. They create an interface between applications and outside parties through a set of protocols to deliver requests and responses. That is, APIs are like phone operators for applications that enable developers to easily connect and integrate applications like CRMs, marketing automation tools, and payroll systems with the ERP to create a cohesive, end-to-end ecosystem.

Think of APIs like waiters in a restaurant. The customer (application A) requests a dish from the kitchen (application B) through the waiter (API)

who takes the order, delivers it to the kitchen, then returns with the dish. weeks to crucial business processes like invoicing, estimating, and even future business projections for revenues, operating margins, and profit.

APIs are a foundational component of modern integration platforms since they connect formerly disparate applications and processes in a point-to-point manner. But the newer platforms take the concept a step further. Unlike legacy platforms and ERPs, which integrate applications one at a time, the modern integration platforms leverage pre-built application connectors that enable implementation at scale with an accelerated time-to-value. The result is a single fully-integrated platform that serves as the nervous system of a business.

Speed, reliability, and efficiency through automation

One of the biggest advantages to modern integration platforms is their ability to streamline operations and improve business agility by automating time-consuming manual processes. These solutions provide the ability to quickly stand up complex integrations and automations in a way that greatly improves time to value.

Whereas traditional integrations take months to plan and implement, the new standard for integrations and automations can take place in a matter of days or even just minutes leveraging reliable, secure, and fully supported enterprise-grade APIs.

Integrating applications and systems with the core ERP platform enables more widespread automation opportunities so teams can better standardize processes for a variety of tasks and then eliminate

manual work to streamline processes, shorten time-to-value, and significantly improve data accuracy for greater responsiveness and efficiency.

For example, an organization might integrate its ERP with Cosential or another CRM along with its collaboration tools. The hand-off of a new project from the sales team to the project management team would automatically trigger appropriate notifications across email and other applications like Slack or MS Teams with data about the new project and new customer transferring

automatically from Cosential into the ERP. The seamless step-by-step workflow alleviates wasteful manual operations while also providing teams with a 360-degree snapshot of their business in real time.

More importantly, modern integration platforms are certified and thoroughly tested to ensure each integration meets high standards of availability and security, which is especially important in highly regulated industries and sectors. They feature enterprise-grade APIs that securely connect applications with robust security measures, including end-to-end encryption, data masking, and enforceable security policies to ensure privacy.

Automation Use Cases for GovCons and A/E firms

- Project starts/launches
- Project handoffs with subcontractors
- Proposal generation, approval, and signatures
- Recruiting and new hire onboarding
- Notification automation across productivity applications
- Document management and versioning

Steps for a successful integration with your ERP

- 1** Identify measurable goals: “We want to save X dollars,” or “We want to spend Y fewer hours on work.”
- 2** Know the applications, processes, and key stakeholders involved.
- 3** Map out your current state. Identify key points of failure and how integrating and/or automating could meet those needs.
- 4** Map workflows to visualize how you would like your applications and teams to function in the future.
- 5** Collaborate with your software vendors. They should provide you with guidance and direction throughout planning, implementation, and go-live.

They're also engineered for maximum uptime and are routinely updated automatically by providers to keep software versions current, compliant, and compatible with other integrated tools — enabling faster scale and growth without the headaches of having to hire additional staff to manage and maintain it all.

Tight integration among essential systems and platforms enables widespread automation that can help firms significantly improve productivity by streamlining repetitive tasks while also enhancing collaboration, strengthening data integrity and security, and eliminating manual processes that cost time and money — all without expensive or extensive custom coding.

DELIVERING REAL-TIME PROJECT VISIBILITY

Beyond inefficient processes and a lot of manual work, many GovCon and A/E firms also struggle to gain visibility into their current work because their legacy ERP systems and ancillary apps create data silos and visibility gaps that make it impossible to manage people, projects, and financials effectively.

But modern integration platforms are designed to accommodate today's business demands with secure integrations across applications, automated processes, and in-depth and on-demand analytics that help provide a real-time snapshot of any project or the current activities of the firm as a whole for maximum visibility and control.

UNIFIED SOLUTIONS FOR A UNIFIED ORGANIZATION

Unanet Connect is setting a new standard for transforming ERPs from an important technology solution to the brains of the enterprise. The open, modern platform for integrations and automations leverages enterprise-grade APIs that allow GovCons and A/E firms alike to easily knit together formerly disparate parts of their business into a cohesive ecosystem that aligns people, data, and processes to help firms make incredible efficiency gains across their organizations.

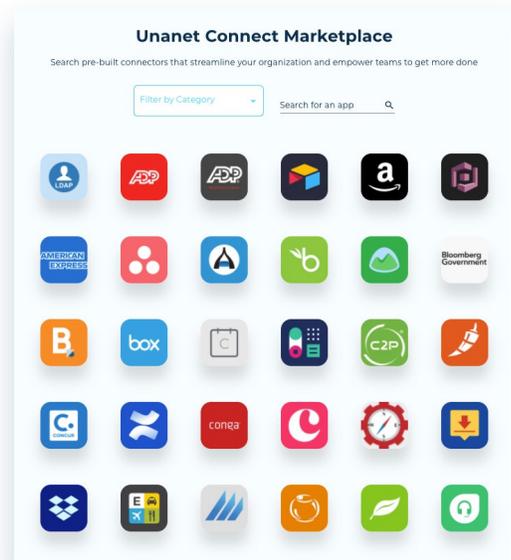
Benefits of a modern integrations platform:

-  **Time to Value:** Integrations built on a modern platform can be stood up quickly, greatly improving your time to value.
-  **Reliability:** Information syncs in real-time, all the time, through certified and thoroughly tested APIs and connectors with high standards of quality, security, and uptime.
-  **Scalability:** Integrate with dozens of apps and systems right from your ERP through simple, secure APIs that allow you to add new capabilities at any time to meet your needs in lockstep with your growth.
-  **Fully Maintained:** Integrated apps and tools are managed and monitored by the vendors, freeing your team of hands-on management during all phases of implementation, go live, and support.
-  **Enterprise-Grade APIs:** Securely connect applications with end-to-end encryption and data masking for privacy, all delivered on leading enterprise infrastructure for maximum security and reliability.

The platform goes beyond other ERPs that simply connect applications in a point-to-point manner. Now, teams can connect more than 100 best-in-class applications like CRM, inventory management, or payroll with pre-built connectors to commonly used software, including Paylocity, ADP, BambooHR, Oracle, MS Teams, Box, DocuSign and HubSpot while automating workflows between applications, and interacting with other essential business tools that orchestrate the flow of data and processes across the enterprise.

Unanet Connect ensures that key systems and apps are always in sync through real-time, multi-directional integrations. It eliminates manual work, all while ensuring business-critical data is accurate and in compliance. And unlike point-to-point integration platforms, it provides the flexibility and scalability to support an organization's digital transformation initiatives.

Today's GovCon and A/E firms face a rapidly evolving competitive landscape characterized by more firms bidding on work, increasingly stringent requirements for transparency and security, and a demand for faster, more efficient, and more collaborative work. Firms that embrace cost-effective, effortless integration across all their tools and systems will be best positioned to capitalize on new opportunities as they arise and lay a foundation for sustainable growth and profitability for years to come.



Ready to see how integrating third-party platforms with your ERP system enables you to enhance your business agility and profitability?

Visit unanet.com/connect to learn more or get **Unanet Connect now.**



Unanet serves more than 2,000 businesses with its ERP software solutions purpose-built for professional service organizations. Unanet's software helps project-driven organizations reliably plan, track and manage projects, people and financials. Unanet's customer-centric culture means we strive to deliver insights with personal service.



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