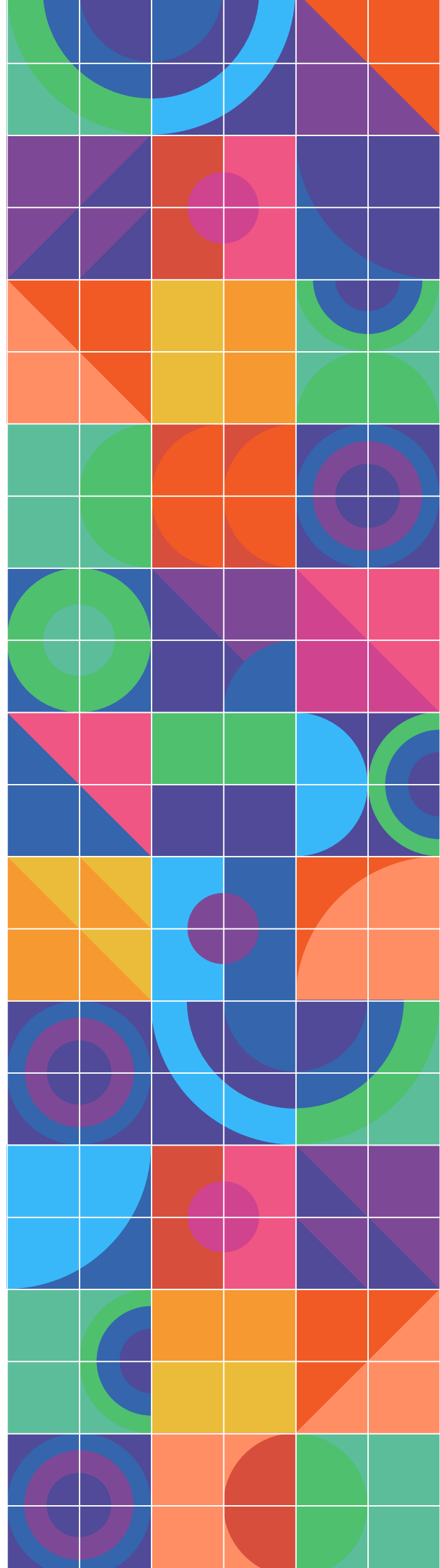**Reclaim your time**

The modern estimator's guide to smarter estimating

Looking at how estimating has changed, the options now available and how to build this into your estimating workflow, using best practices.

countfire

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Introduction

For a long while now, the estimating industry has been stuck in the past. With processes and software following the same inflexible model.

Lacking the ability to move away from paper-heavy, unsustainable processes. Despite feeling increasingly time-poor and under pressure from competition.

Yet many estimators are beginning to question this.

The world has seen unprecedented change over the past two years. Digital transformation that was always coming (and indeed, is already well-advanced in many parts of the construction supply chain), was accelerated thanks to the events of 2020.

Leaving those in almost every industry, estimators included, questioning how we live and work.

As former electrical estimators ourselves, we have lived the old game of estimating. It's what encouraged us to build Countfire; something we believe encourages smarter estimating. Where estimators have more time to focus on what matters, by cutting the busy work that can, and should, be completed with automation and intelligent processes.

In this whitepaper we'll look at how estimating has changed, the options now available and how to build this into your estimating workflow, using best practices.

Across the following chapters you'll learn:

» Recent developments that have affected estimating

» How estimating software has evolved, and what you need to know

» How automation helps, rather than hinders, estimating progression

» Ways that smarter estimating benefits clients

» How estimators can work more effectively, while reclaiming more time

It's time for smarter estimating. We look forward to showing you how.

The old world vs the new world

You are likely already familiar with the old world of estimating. It's the world where:

» Takeoffs are completed with pen, paper and highlighter pens

» Estimates rarely live in one place. So that collaboration, fact-checking and responding to change is difficult

» Estimates take days, and sometimes weeks

» Client changes are difficult to respond to, and often mean more hours spent at the desk

» Estimators are so busy trying to get the estimate finished, that there is rarely time for "big picture" thinking or project analysis

Many of us have lived in this old world of estimating for so long, that it feels normal. Where long hours, rush deadlines and pleas for extensions are the norm.

Yet the old world of fallible estimating has long since changed. Enter the new world...

Digital transformation as told by the pandemic

The pandemic accelerated the transformation of traditional IT practices in all industries, including electrical estimating. Suddenly estimators found themselves working from home, with no access to on-premise servers, or space to pour over drawings.

This changed everything. From being able to collaborate with your team easily (and in person!), to being able to access physical printed drawings, and day-to-day working practices such as takeoffs.

Digital transformation became a necessity, and one that was urgent. From the organisation's point of view, this left almost every department with changes to make. IT departments had to move systems online, HR had to adapt processes. Employees themselves had to adapt to remote working, and a series of new tools and changes, while staying on top of deadlines and trying to communicate with clients.

The rise of cloud-computing and remote work

Fueled by the need for digital transformation, teams quickly adopted a series of new digital tools. Simple tools such as Teams and Zoom for communication were adopted fairly easily. What was more difficult for many estimators, was finding ways to move manual, paper-heavy ways of estimating, online.

Most estimators, while working from home, didn't have access to plan tables or printers. This led to many looking for online takeoff solutions. Unfortunately many of these simply replicate the manual method of highlighting symbols and counting them individually - just on screen.

While estimators likely wouldn't miss symbols on paper, working across screens can make it very difficult to achieve 100% accuracy while doing manual takeoffs.

As well as the need for truly accurate digital takeoff, the new estimating workflow also needed to address the parts that remained time-consuming, tedious and manual for estimators. Which leads us onto...

Automation & AI

What do you think of when you hear the word "automation" or "AI"? For many; visions of robots, human replacements and inaccuracy. The lack of trust around these types of technologies is what holds some industries back from moving into transformation, whereas other industries have been far quicker to adopt.

In estimating, automation is used to enhance what people do, not take away from it. Far from being a "one-click" button that completes an estimate end-to-end, it should be used for the parts of the estimation process where manual work isn't needed.

For example, repetitive tasks such as:

» Counting the same symbol across tens of drawings

» Re-populating pricing that's the same across every estimate

» Manually comparing two specifications to see what's changed

In all of these instances, the estimator isn't learning anything new or using a level of expertise to assess what's needed. It's repetitive, monotonous work that could, and should, be done by machines.

This type of technology creates time freedom, enabling estimators to spend their time on other areas of the project, where human input really does count.

> **"I would print off large sheets of paper, work over a plan table and look at everything repeatedly. Today, I'm looking at three screens to do those takeoffs which makes that process much harder and induces a certain amount of potential error."**
>
> Project Quotations Manager

Traditional vs modern estimating software

So how does all of this affect electrical estimating?

The most major shift to come from the new world, is that companies are striving to reinvent what we recognise as estimating software.

Traditional estimating software tends to be:

» Server-based

» On-screen "point and click" takeoff

» Handles just one or two parts of the workflow

When we talk about *modern* estimating software, this all changes.

Cloud-based as standard

Traditional estimating software keeps estimators in the office. Unable to work effectively from home, or on site. Whereas modern estimating software is cloud-based. This enables remote working (essential), and also aids collaboration.

True automated takeoff

On-screen takeoff simply transfers what you do with your highlighter pens and paper to on-screen. It doesn't offer you any time savings and the only real benefit is simply the reduction in paper. True automated takeoff allows you to select a symbol once, and have it counted automatically across every single drawing, across the entire project.

This takes a job that would usually take days, just minutes. Without losing accuracy. In fact, many estimators actually report an increase in accuracy, as automated takeoff isn't fallible to human error and missed symbols.

End-to-end estimating

Traditional estimating platforms rarely took care of the entire lifecycle of an estimate. Instead, estimators would be moving from system to system, paper to on-screen, piecing together the different parts of the project.

This reduced collaboration (colleagues would have to ask where items were stored), and made it very difficult to react to client changes quickly.

With modern estimating systems you can do everything in one place, and not only that, you have a home for everything. This digitisation of records puts everything in one place; cloud-based and easily accessible by the whole team.

The ultimate benefit? Being able to reduce the number of monotonous tasks, so that estimators have more time to look in-depth at projects.

Smarter estimating benefits for clients

While smarter estimating provides many benefits for estimators increasing speed and helping them to reclaim more time, it also provides benefits for clients.

Faster response to changes

Modern estimating software that's underpinned by automation allows estimators to respond to change faster. In the old world, addendums received on a Friday morning would force estimators to push back deadlines and request more time. Or send estimators into a tailspin, working all weekend to try and meet the changing requirements. As part of modern estimating, these can be reviewed and responded to in the same day.

This is because work that's already taken place, such as takeoff of part-drawings, can be reused. Software such as Countfire even allows you to change how your final estimate looks, even after the estimate is complete. For example, changing how quantities are broken down within an estimate to suit a revised pricing schedule.

Better ability to measure and adjust for specification changes

Modern estimating software such as Countfire allows automatic comparison of two specifications. Whether many elements have changed, or it's a subtle change to a single number or floor, these are found and automatically highlighted.

This saves estimators the hours needed to manually find what's changed and ensure that all specification edits are recognised and reviewed.
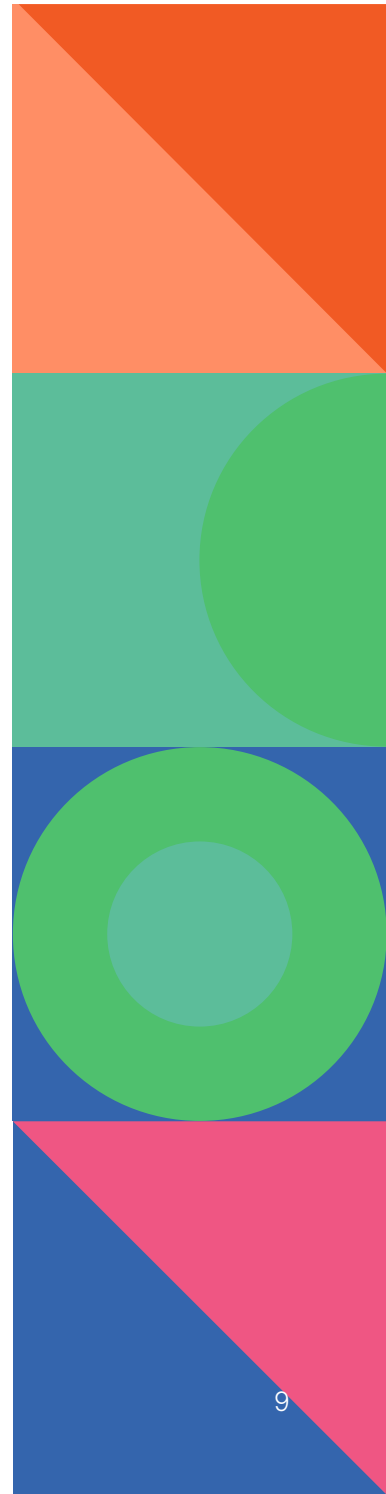
Higher-level project expertise

Today, estimators report spending the majority of their time on completing manual takeoff. With automated takeoff software, this goes from 4-5 days worth of work, to just a few hours.

Leaving more time to be in the detail of the project gives estimators a competitive advantage, and equally gives the client more insight into the project they are ultimately responsible for delivering.

Whether this is greater efficiency, working out trickier elements of the project *before* arriving onsite, or providing alternative solutions, this additional time allows for greater control and sustainability.

For too long estimators have been under a time pressure that prevents them from looking at tenders with a high-level perspective. Modern estimating software helps estimators reclaim that time, and better service their clients' requirements in the process.

Higher-level project expertise

Reclaim your time

Periods of economic change are undoubtedly stressful. Readjustment is difficult and the long-term benefits are often outweighed by the short-term pain of having to adapt to a new status quo.

However, for many estimators this transformation began long before the global pandemic. For too long, estimators have been forced to work evenings and weekends to keep up with a relentless workload.

Today, technology offers a better (and long-needed) approach. Adopting smarter estimating practices built upon modern estimating software improves accuracy and brings finesse back to estimating.

It may be labeled as the next generation of estimating software, but it's available now and to all generations who need it.

We hope to see more estimators adopt this modern way of working and reclaim their time - in 2022, and beyond.

About Countfire

Countfire is electrical estimating software that uses automation to help estimators work faster, cut busy work and increase accuracy.

Automated takeoff

» True automated takeoff across all drawings

» Auto-hide PDF backgrounds

» Count revised drawings easily

Intelligent estimating

» Intelligent algorithms to help price your estimate

» Automated specification comparison

» Adapt estimates to client requirements

Client-ready reports

» Automated Excel outputs

» Cloud-based - Mac or PC

» Multiplayer collaboration

"Game Changer. Saves more time than I care to count"

Ryan Beck, Senior Electrical Estimator

"Countfire is the biggest time-saving system we've ever implemented into our business"

Paul Williams, Managing Director

Get your 14-day free trial at **countfire.com/get-started**

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