

THE BIG TECH ROUNDTABLE 2023

Software for Asphalt
Professionals Comes of Age

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INTRODUCTION

Three industry leaders in the asphalt industry software market sit down with Brandon Noel from *Asphalt Contractor* for a discussion on the growing space for technology platforms in the road building and production space.

There are few industries experiencing as rapid a pace of change as road building and asphalt production. From pavers, operators, quality control engineers, jobsite, and production site management — every paradigm is undergoing major shifts. At the same time, large portions of the workforce are retiring along with their knowledge, skills, and experience.

Many are turning to technology and various software platforms, and recently AI, to try and fill the gap.

However, there can be a lot of confusion between what a contractor's needs really are, and what a platform or product really offers. The Big Tech Roundtable is meant to be a place where some of those questions can be brought directly from those contractors to the representatives of tech companies. We sourced questions from multiple contractors around the country, as well as other industry experts, and took them to three companies working deep in the asphalt space: Trimble, Cojali USA, and Pittbos. ■



KEVIN GARCIA
General Manager of Civil Specialty Construction for Trimble



MARK PEACH
CEO at Pittbos



JORGE VERDEJO
Sales Director at Cojali USA



In this role, he is responsible for multiple product groups serving the civil specialty construction market, including Paving, Landfill Construction, Drilling and Piling and more. Prior to this position, he served as Paving Product Manager for seven years. He has more than 20 years of experience in the asphalt and concrete paving industry, including six years with Lafarge. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Wyoming.



Over the past 20 years Mark has held a variety of positions within the construction materials industry. Starting in the early 2000's with Aggregate Industries as the Liquid Asphalt Coordinator helping buy and distribute liquid asphalt into the New England market. Having an interest in contracting, Mark moved into a position of Asphalt Contracting Salesman and was promoted to Contracting Sales Manager in his late twenties. Looking for more growth opportunities, in 2014 Mark was hired by Benevento Companies as the General Manager of the asphalt division. Providing value and growth in the asphalt division Mark was given the opportunity to manage the concrete division as well. Lastly, after building strong teams and culture Mark was promoted to Vice President of Benevento Companies only reporting to the owner.



Jorge spearheads the Jaltest OHW project in the USA as the Sales Director of Cojali USA. The Jaltest OHW stands as an advanced diagnostics solution tailored for construction equipment. Over the past three years, Jorge has been at the forefront of this project, gaining an in-depth insight into the industry's diagnostic and telematics requirements. Having worked professionally across four different countries, Jorge brings a substantial wealth of knowledge to the realm of technological and software solutions for heavy-duty equipment. Alongside his industry expertise, Jorge possesses an MBA in international business and holds a PMI certificate, further underlining his proficiency and unwavering dedication to the field.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION:

CHALLENGES TECHNOLOGY WILL SOLVE

WHAT IS THE NEXT CHALLENGE TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS AND CONTRACTOR SOFTWARE WILL TRANSFORM WITHIN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR?



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

I think we will continue to see data front-and-center

in conversations about construction technology. Today's contractors are collecting unprecedented amounts of data, but it's difficult to distill all that information into something actionable. The key is connecting data from all of these disparate sources, and then making it easy to access, understand, and use. Solving this challenge is a priority for us at Trimble, and I believe a priority for the industry at large.



VERDEJO - COJALI USA:

In the construction industry, it is very difficult to find technological solutions that are able to provide an integration of data and interoperability between systems. There is no doubt that streamlining data sharing and communication between various software platforms will enhance efficiency and collaboration in construction projects. I would say, that's the biggest challenge our industry is facing at the moment.



PEACH - PITTBOS:

There is a lot of activity with software companies entering the construction space currently. The challenges are applying modern technology to the actual day-to-day pain points that contractors face. Also, the major challenge that every software company faces in construction is adoption. Getting contractors to try new technology can be challenging, and your product better be solid and intuitive.

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WHAT ROLE DO YOU SEE AI PLAYING IN THE NEXT PHASE OF DEVELOPMENT?



VERDEJO - COJALI USA:

As it is the case in so many industries right now, AI is expected to play a crucial role in the next phase of development. It has the potential to automate and optimize processes, improve predictive maintenance capabilities, and enable data-driven decision-making in construction equipment management. Anticipation and careful planning have always played an essential role in construction. The contractors who had these skills lead the way. In the future, having AI solutions available might open a new competitive landscape where the regular players will have their capabilities and skills upgraded.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

Similar to the answer previous. AI will be used to analyze all the data streaming from a number of different areas in the field. Data in itself isn't easy to consume, so AI will collect and analyze the data and deliver back useful and actionable information.



PEACH - PITTBOS:

People (me included) look for the path of least resistance when facing an unknown challenge. I think AI will start taking over on tasks that people don't know how to do, or don't want to do. Also, I think there are some exciting opportunities to have AI applied to in-the-moment material production decisions, because lack of communication and logistics planning causes a tremendous number of wasted resources.

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WILL THE MARKET DIVERSIFY OR BECOME UNIFORM

DO YOU SEE THE MARKET FOR PLATFORMS EXPANDING OR CONTRACTING AS ADOPTION INCREASES? TO PUT THAT ANOTHER WAY, DO YOU SEE THE MARKET HOMOGENIZING OR DIVERSIFYING?



PEACH - PITTBOS:

I think we're in the early stages of seeing more construction related platforms starting to emerge. Overtime it's my feeling that only a few will dominate the market with a consolidation of offerings.



VERDEJO - COJALI USA:

As adoption increases, we anticipate the market for platforms to expand rather than contract. The demand for specialized software solutions tailored to specific construction needs will drive market diversification rather than homogenization.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

I think we will continue to see a diversification in technology solutions available to paving and construction contractors, especially when it comes to startups entering this space. There is still a lot of untapped potential for technology innovation and adoption in the construction sector, and I expect that we'll continue to see the big, established technology companies continue to lead the way, with smaller, more nimble startups looking to disrupt niche segments of the industry, or even niche segments of construction workflows.

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RISK OF A TECHNOLOGICAL PLATEAU

IS THERE RISK OF A TECHNOLOGICAL PLATEAU WHERE PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT DEAD-ENDS? HOW MIGHT INNOVATION AVOID SUCH A SCENARIO?



PEACH - PITTBOS:

In contrast to that answer, I do believe there are a finite number of problems that technology can solve, and to that end there will be a plateau at some point. The exciting aspect of this plateau question, however, is that we're just dipping our toes into the problems to solve in construction. I'm a believer that over the next 5 years industry experts will finally adopt and change the construction materials space. The present-day ability to build quality, easy to use, and cloud based software products is primed to move the old world contracting market.



VERDEJO - COJALI USA:

It is probably too soon to talk about technological plateau in our industry since we traditionally have been behind the tech wave. Regardless of our point of view, continuous innovation and development are key to avoiding such a scenario. Embracing emerging technologies, staying responsive to customer feedback, and actively seeking opportunities for improvement ensure ongoing progress and prevent stagnation.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

I don't see a development plateau anywhere in sight. There will always be new challenges to help overcome, which means there will always be a need for new ideas and innovation. As workflows and jobsites become more automated and the adoption of technology continues to increase, I think we could even see an acceleration in the development of solutions to solve challenges we may not even foresee today. I would say the road of technological innovation is long, winding, and never-ending. I don't see any dead-ends. As adoption widens, we see customers using technology in different ways and asking their technology providers to solve issues that we hadn't even considered yet. That pipeline will extend for a very long time.

TRENDS IN CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT WITH PRODUCTS & PLATFORMS

WHERE DO YOU SEE THE CONSUMER POOL IN TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PRODUCTS AND PLATFORMS? IS THERE MORE CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PRODUCTS AFTER-SALE, OR LESS ENGAGEMENT THAN THERE USED TO BE? HOW HAS THAT MADE AN IMPACT?



PEACH - PITTBOS:

I see the engagement with software products and platforms on

the rise. The smartphone has brought computing to the masses. Furthermore, there is a handoff of management currently underway as the forty-something's born in the late 70's and early 80's (Gen-X) are taking over as the boss. The Gen-X group has the unique understanding of life before the internet and smartphones, but also was young enough to absorb and see the value of applying modern tools to everyday life and business.



VERDEJO - COJALI USA:

Consumer engagement with products and platforms varies, but, overall, there

is an increasing demand for post-sale engagement and support. Customers expect ongoing updates, training, and access to technical support to maximize the value and benefits of the platform. What we see is that customers desire independence. They wish they had all the solutions needed to give problems timely and effective solutions. They want to be able to keep on growing and to take their operations to the next level. They see the products and platforms as allies for that endeavor rather than pushing back against change.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

Our dealer channel is a game-changer in terms of after-sale customer

engagement. We have dealers in local markets all over the world, and they are, without a doubt, some of the most experienced and knowledgeable construction technology experts out there. Through them, we have rich, informative, ongoing engagement and relationships with our customers. Dealers engage with customers on a daily basis to help troubleshoot, train, and think through solutions to jobsite challenges. This makes a big impact in several ways, because our customers have an additional resource they can rely on every day, and we leverage those relationships and conversations on a large, strategic scale to help drive product development. People are also increasing comfortability with technology and often become their own support. The abilities of contractors today to handle what may have been new last year is very impressive. The labor force now joining the construction industry is very comfortable with technology, as they were raised using it.

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REDUCTION IN OPERATING & MANAGEMENT COSTS

HOW DOES YOUR PLATFORM HELP REDUCE OPERATING OR MANAGEMENT COSTS?



VERDEJO - COJALI USA: Our platform helps reduce operating and management costs by providing efficient diagnostics, streamlined maintenance processes, and comprehensive equipment data. By optimizing equipment performance, minimizing downtime, and enhancing maintenance workflows, our platform enables cost savings for contractors.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

Trimble Roadworks is our flagship paving control platform. It is available in 2D or 3D, and is specifically designed to help operators be more efficient, more accurate and more productive. Trimble Roadworks has a direct impact on operating and management costs by helping operators get the job done right the first time, eliminating the need for costly re-work and wasted materials. 3D paving eliminates the need for setting stringlines entirely, which also saves time, money, and helps finish projects, hit accuracy and smoothness specifications, all of which can mean bonus income.

Machine control technology of all types makes the operator's job easier and more enjoyable, which helps with operator recruitment and retention. That's a big benefit in today's tight labor market. It's also worth noting that the use of paving control technology helps create a better, smoother, more durable road surface, which benefits the project owner substantially when it comes to maintenance and future construction needs.



PEACH - PITTBOS:

Pittbos provides a single place that contains all your costs, sales data, follow up ability, and backlog management in one place. Personally, I use it to manage a large group of salespeople who were out chasing contracting jobs. We had two fulltime administrators tracking and reporting on the salespeople's activities. The spend on manually tracking sales activities, knowing how much work we had, and invoicing in a reasonable amount of time was massive. Pittbos was built to centralize and streamline any contractor's business with an easy-to-use system. We're also working on some very exciting products for suppliers and their customers.



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SOLUTIONS FOR ASPHALT & PAVEMENT CONTRACTORS

WHAT CHALLENGES OR PROBLEMS ARE YOU TRYING TO SOLVE FOR ASPHALT/PAVEMENT CONTRACTORS WITH YOUR PRODUCT? OR IN GENERAL IF NOT ASPHALT/PAVEMENT SPECIFIC.



PEACH - PITTBOS:

Most of our customers are moving from pen & paper. From the outset of designing Pittbos our goal was to pack the biggest punch with the easiest user interface we could build. With a strong understanding of our client profile we knew going from zero tech to a modern SaaS platform was a lot to ask. Now our customers can pull up to a clients' project, enter all the job information, measure the project, take pictures, and send a very professional proposal before leaving the site.



VERDEJO - COJALI USA:

With our product, we aim to solve various challenges, including efficient diagnostics for paving equipment, predictive maintenance to prevent breakdowns, and comprehensive data analytics to optimize equipment performance and utilization regardless of the manufacturer of the equipment. In other words, we aim to keep all the diagnostics and maintenance capabilities in one single solution.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

Everyone is talking about automation and when we'll have fully autonomous equipment on job sites, which is certainly the way of the future and very exciting. But at Trimble, we know that autonomous equipment requires automating entire workflows, not just individual pieces of equipment. We want to help paving contractors work collaboratively and efficiently with other stakeholders on a job, and we want to help them use the data they're gathering to help them make better business decisions. Our goal is to help all of our customers get the right insight, at the right time, so they can make more informed decisions. We want to help them overcome challenges related to labor, sustainability, profitability, and the regulatory oversight required on public projects. We believe the way to do that is through connected construction workflows and making it easier to use data. We're also working on delivering critical information around "as built" metrics. Contractors and owners alike are asking for this information to be easy to deliver and consume.

MOBILE TRENDS IN THE FIELD

DO YOU SEE A LOT OF CUSTOMERS USING THE PLATFORM ON HANDHELD DEVICES IN THE FIELD? HOW IS YOUR PLATFORM ALIGNED TO CAPTURE MOBILE TRENDS?



VERDEJO – COJALI USA:

Many customers are utilizing our platform in the field, taking advantage of its mobile compatibility. In fact, Jaltest allows users to work on every piece of equipment, which is extremely useful when facing unknown challenges during field service.

Additionally, we have developed another solution called Jaltest Telematics. This platform is designed to be installed directly in the machine, providing proprietary live data, diagnostics, and even the ability to remotely perform advanced tests such as forced regens or resets. It offers a new perspective on telematics solutions by focusing on maintenance and features that minimize downtime and optimize diesel repairs.



PEACH - PITTBOS:

Yes, our customers are using their phones and tablets in the field to price up work and invoice. Pittbos was designed to really maximize the cloud and mobile devices. Our customers can enter an opportunity at their desk, head out to the job and capture customer information and images from their phone and attach it all to the project profile. When the salesperson gets home, they could finish the proposal and follow up with the customer on their tablet from the couch. Pittbos provides a lot of organized flexibility.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

This is something that we're starting to see, yes, but I wouldn't say it's

common yet. The data being delivered from Trimble today is optimizing the "pre-paving" process in terms of ensuring the machines in the field are working with the right constructable model. This gives operators in the field the added confidence of knowing they're working from the latest design. The most common use I'm seeing now for handhelds in the field is managing trucks for material deliveries. Trimble doesn't offer a solution in this space, but it's information we believe would be integrated into the platform so that users can verify quantities along with their as-built data.



DEVELOPMENT OF NEW FEATURES & PRODUCTS

WHAT NEW FEATURES OR PRODUCTS ARE CURRENTLY UNDER HEAVY DEVELOPMENT?



VERDEJO – COJALI USA:

We are currently in the process of developing new features and products

that aim to enhance diagnostics capabilities, expand compatibility with equipment manufacturers, and incorporate advanced analytics for improved decision-making. Our focus is on telematics, mobile solutions, and big data, as we strive to provide cutting-edge solutions that meet the evolving needs of our customers.



PEACH - PITTBOS:

We are working on some reporting and improvement to our backlog features. However, we're working on some really exciting products for suppliers and their customers that I can't wait to talk about more in the future.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

We are always focused on two key things from an R&D

standpoint: continuing to improve upon our existing technology, and expanding the types of equipment with which our technology is compatible. We prioritize these efforts based on feedback from our customers. Now more than ever, we're hearing from contractors that they want to make better use of the equipment in their fleets and specifically, equipment that is smaller, less expensive and nimbler. We are also looking at how to automate more of the dirty, dull, and dangerous tasks equipment operators do every day, as well as how to help connect people, projects, and workflows to make them all more efficient and more productive.

ADOPTION OF TECHNOLOGY

HOW ARE CONTRACTORS TRAINING THEIR WORKERS TO USE THE PLATFORM? IS THIS ASPECT OF ADOPTION A MAJOR ROADBLOCK FOR CUSTOMERS?



VERDEJO - COJALI USA:

Contractors who are engaged in the equipment maintenance part of the business and their teams receive comprehensive training and support from our staff to ensure effective platform adoption. We understand that training can be a critical roadblock for some customers, and we provide resources and guidance to facilitate a smooth transition. Down the road, they continue to learn about how to take advantage of all the functionalities the software and its future updates provide.



PEACH - PITTBOS:

Training the trainer is a challenge. Some clients click with the software quickly and have very little issues explaining how the product works to their employees. On the other hand, some clients need more training than others, and we always impress on them to call us right away if you're stuck on something or have a question. Pittbos also hired a fulltime customer success manager to stay on top of our customers' needs and requests. We love telling our customers, "Pittbos will never be done. Give us all your feedback and product requests."



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

This is not a major roadblock for Trimble customers. We invested a lot of time and resources into the development of the Trimble Roadworks user interface specifically to make it easy to learn and use. The Android-based system is highly intuitive, which shortens training times and helps increase adoption. Our local SITECH dealers are always available for training or troubleshooting, which also helps get - and keep - operators up and running quickly and easily.

QUOTE-TO-CASH PROCESS

WHAT PART DOES YOUR PLATFORM PLAY IN THE QUOTE-TO-CASH PROCESS?



PEACH - PITTBOS:

Quote-to-cash is a great description for what Pittbos Contractor is. The moment when you're providing a quote to a consumer is when you have the most control over your revenue. You want to make a great first impression. Furthermore, Pittbos allows you to invoice your customers the moment the project is done, storing that invoice, and pushing the receivable to your accounting software.



VERDEJO - COJALI USA:

Our platform plays a vital role in the quote-to-cash process by enabling accurate equipment diagnostics and efficient maintenance workflows. This leads to improved uptime, reduced repair costs, and enhanced customer satisfaction. It is easy to correlate how the introduction of Jaltest in the contractors' operation has a direct impact in the ROI of their pieces of equipment and repair and maintenance budget allocation.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

Trimble Roadworks sits squarely in the execution piece of the project. It keeps paving jobs more productive and efficient, while also contributing to quality and sustainability. For the Q2C piece, we look to other Trimble solutions such as B2W and Viewpoint.



STREAMLINED MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

HOW DOES YOUR PLATFORM IMPACT AND/OR STREAMLINE PEOPLE MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS, I.E. HIRING, ONBOARDING, DEVELOPMENT, ETC.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

This was actually a topic that arose at an event recently with contractors and DOTs. Contractors were describing how using technology is actually helping them attract and retain talent, as it's a major draw for those entering the workforce. One contractor explained that showcasing how they use Trimble technology on social media had attracted more applicants for jobs than in the past, and that seeing a career growth path using technology was motivating for their staff. When new hires are motivated in that way, the onboarding process is easier and has more buy-in from everyone involved. This can lead to a culture where new employees bring fresh ideas to the companies they work for and drive even more adoption of technology solutions.



PEACH - PITTBOS:

Pittbos makes adding new employees easier, because you'll have an established consistent sales system in place.

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SOLUTIONS FOR MAXIMIZING EQUIPMENT USAGE

HOW DOES YOUR PLATFORM ASSIST CONTRACTORS IN GETTING MORE OUT OF EQUIPMENT—UTILIZATION, ETC..



VERDEJO - COJALI USA:

By offering comprehensive diagnostics, real-time monitoring, and predictive maintenance capabilities. This allows for optimized equipment utilization, reduced downtime, and improved productivity.



PEACH - PITTBOS:

Within Pittbos our users create a library of labor and equipment costs that they apply to estimates to accurately come up with pricing. One thing that became clear is that a lot of our customers didn't really know what to carry in their bids for equipment costs. We help our customers figure out how to apply their cost to an estimate to cover purchase cost, maintenance, fuel, and future replacement costs of their equipment.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

First and foremost, it helps operators be more efficient on the job site. Trimble Roadworks allows you to execute the job right the first time. It also allows you to better plan your day and set up for success. Knowing exactly what you plan to pave, the asphalt tonnage you need and running efficiently means finishing jobs sooner and with higher quality. This means you can complete more jobs in a paving season, and therefore increase your machine utilization and ROI.

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REDUCTION IN TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP

HOW DOES YOUR PLATFORM HELP REDUCE TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP (TCO) FOR CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT



PEACH - PITTBOS:

Knowing what your equipment costs you on an hourly basis gives the contractor confidence that they are taking in enough revenue to buy new equipment in the future, before they have spent too much on repairs and maintenance on old equipment.



VERDEJO - COJALI USA:

Our platform assists contractors in getting more out of their equipment by offering comprehensive diagnostics, real-time monitoring, and predictive maintenance capabilities. This allows for optimized equipment utilization, reduced downtime, and improved productivity.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE:

Similar to the answer previous. If you are paving more efficiently and getting more jobs completed, you are seeing a higher ROI on that machine purchase. Trimble Roadworks for Compactors also assists in getting your asphalt compacted in the appropriate number of passes and eliminates over compaction. By only running your equipment when it needs to be and eliminating unnecessary passes, you can save on machine wear-and-tear, as well as fuel and maintenance costs.

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DIGITAL SECURITY WITH BROAD INTEGRATION OF NETWORKS

HOW DO YOU MANAGE EXPANSIONS OF USABILITY AND BROAD INTEGRATION OF NETWORKS, WHILE PROTECTING CONTRACTORS' DIGITAL SECURITY?



PEACH - PITTBOS: We're asking our customers to enter in their most critical information: costs, customer details, pricing, and margins so security is of major importance to Pittbos. Our engineers have utilized the most current, military-grade encryption system to ensure that all our customer data is protected.



GARCIA - TRIMBLE: We take global data privacy very seriously at Trimble. We spend a lot of time keeping our systems current with data storage and security updates, and we have a robust system for managing software updates to keep users current with security and privacy updates in the field. These updates are often something the end customer may never notice as an enhancement to their platform, but it is as critical as any other feature Roadworks provides.

SOLUTIONS' INTEGRATION WITH OTHER SOFTWARE

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW "OPEN" YOUR PLATFORM AND ITS FEATURES CURRENTLY ARE? HOW DO THEY INTEGRATE WITH OTHER SOFTWARE AND VARIOUS HARDWARE? HOW FLEXIBLE IS IT FOR CLIENTS TO USE?



GARCIA - TRIMBLE: Because Trimble Roadworks was built on an Android platform, it is open to third party applications. While this isn't widespread yet, the system is built for this future expansion.

We also see customers taking their data from Roadworks and integrating it into third party applications outside of the Trimble platform to meet their needs. The industry is moving quickly in that regard, with data sharing being important for delivering actionable insights, which Trimble is embracing.



PEACH - PITTBOS: Pittbos is not an open platform and users would have to work with us to integrate outside software at this time. We have integrated with several products with API integrations like QuickBooks Online as one example. integrations like that allow our customers to automatically book their receivables as they generate invoices inside of Pittbos.

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