Maximizing efficiency with solar project management

Sitetracker's Director of Product Marketing, Energy and Utilities, Emily Obenauer, sheds light on the challenges solar developers face across project phases, from permitting complexities to construction coordination. PES wanted to ask her how Sitetracker's platform streamlines processes, centralizes data, and integrates AI, fostering efficiency and sustainability in solar development.

PES: It's good to talk to you today Emily. Sitetracker has a reputation for effective project management. What are some of the specific challenges you know that solar developers face in managing projects across different phases?

Emily Obenauer: Solar developers face several challenges in managing projects across the lifecycle, and Sitetracker's reputation for effective project management directly addresses many of these issues. A couple specific examples include permitting and regulatory compliance. Navigating the complex web of permits and regulations at local, state, and federal levels can be time-consuming and costly. Sitetracker helps streamline this process by centralizing documentation and tracking deadlines.

Site selection and acquisition can be another obstacle. Identifying suitable sites for solar installations and negotiating land acquisition can be challenging due to factors like land availability, zoning regulations, and community opposition. Sitetracker's GIS Link allows for the integration of critical data that supports site selection decision-making, and enables you to manage this process in a centralized platform

Coordinating construction activities, managing subcontractors, and ensuring quality control are essential for completing projects on schedule and within budget.

Sitetracker helps EPC teams standardize processes, centralize visibility and collaboration, and expedite timelines.

And of course it helps with operations and maintenance. Monitoring system performance, scheduling preventive maintenance, and responding to issues promptly are crucial for maximizing the lifespan and profitability of solar installations. Sitetracker's Work Management capabilities allow industry leaders to improve first-time fix rate, create automated maintenance schedules, track time, accurately match people's skills with job needs, and easily dispatch crews to the right site at the right time.

PES: How do you help developers coordinate multiple stakeholders such as site assessors, permitting authorities, financing partners, and construction teams?

EO: Sitetracker serves as a centralized platform where all project-related information, documents, and communications are stored. This allows stakeholders to access relevant data from anywhere, streamlining communication and collaboration.

It also automates task assignment and tracking, ensuring that each stakeholder knows their responsibilities and deadlines. Workflow automation streamlines processes such as permit applications, financing approvals, and construction progress tracking.

Its mobile application facilitates real-time information sharing from the back office to the field. This enables swift decision-making and issue resolution, minimizing delays and disruptions.

In addition, Sitetracker provides a centralized repository for project documents, including permits, contracts, designs, and financial records. This ensures that stakeholders across the lifecycle, from development to asset management, have access to the latest documentation and reduces the risk of errors or miscommunications.

It also integrates with other software tools commonly used in solar project development. This seamless integration enhances data exchange and workflow efficiency across stakeholders. Plus, it offers reporting and analytics features that provide insights into project progression and resource allocation. This enables developers to identify bottlenecks, optimize processes, and make data-driven decisions.

PES: Does AI technology have the potential to help in accelerating solar development, do you think? Are you incorporating AI into your platforms?

EO: Yes, absolutely there's potential for AI to impact the acceleration of solar development globally. Leadership at Sitetracker is continually evaluating our product roadmap to ensure our strategic direction aligns to the

needs of the critical industries we serve and support their growth.

PES: Real-time tracking and reporting are crucial in complex solar projects. How do you enable this, and what impact does it have on project timelines and outcomes?

EO: Sitetracker enables real-time tracking and reporting in complex solar projects through several key features and functionalities. It provides live project dashboards that offer a comprehensive overview of project status, key metrics, and performance indicators. This allows stakeholders to monitor progress in real-time and identify potential issues or delays.

The system also allows stakeholders to track tasks, milestones, and deadlines in real-time. Project managers can assign tasks, monitor progress, and receive updates instantly, enabling proactive management and timely intervention when needed.

By helping to optimize resource allocation by providing visibility into resource availability and allocation across projects teams are adequately staffed and equipped to meet project demands, reducing bottlenecks and delays.

Plus, stakeholders can report and track issues, deviations, and risks in real-time. Project managers can prioritize and assign tasks for resolution, ensuring that issues are

addressed promptly to prevent escalation and minimize impact on project timelines.

Sitetracker centralizes project documentation and ensures version control, allowing stakeholders to access the latest documents and revisions in real-time. This reduces the risk of errors, miscommunications, and rework, improving project efficiency and outcomes.

The impact of real-time tracking and reporting in Sitetracker on project timelines and outcomes is significant. By providing stakeholders with up-to-date information and insights, it helps identify issues early, streamline decision-making, and facilitate proactive management. This leads to improved project efficiency, reduced delays, and better outcomes in terms of cost, quality, and schedule adherence. Ultimately, real-time tracking and reporting in Sitetracker contribute to the success and profitability of complex solar projects.

PES: What common roadblocks do solar developers encounter during site assessment and permitting, and what solutions do you offer to address these?

EO: During site assessment and permitting stages, solar developers often encounter common roadblocks. Complex Navigating the complex and lengthy permitting processes at various governmental levels can be challenging, for example. Permitting requirements vary by jurisdiction and may involve multiple agencies.

Ensuring compliance with environmental regulations, zoning ordinances, building codes, and land use restrictions adds complexity to the permitting process. And local residents, environmental groups, or other stakeholders may oppose solar projects due to concerns about visual impact, land use, or environmental issues.

Acquiring suitable land for solar projects can be difficult and time-consuming, especially in densely populated areas or regions with

competing land uses. In addition, limited resources, such as time, budget, and personnel, may constrain the capacity of solar developers to effectively manage site assessment and permitting activities.

Sitetracker offers several solutions to address these roadblocks. It centralizes the management of the entire permitting process, from application submission to approval. It tracks permit status, and stores all relevant documents in one place.

It also helps developers stay compliant with regulatory requirements by providing tools to track and manage permits, codes, and regulations and assign any related tasks. Automated reminders and notifications ensure that deadlines are met and compliance is maintained.

The system assists in site selection and land acquisition by providing tools for evaluating potential sites like our GIS Link capability that allows developers to pull in critical land and utility information.

It also optimizes resource allocation and utilization by streamlining workflows, automating repetitive tasks, and providing visibility into project schedules and resource availability. This helps developers maximize efficiency and overcome resource constraints.

With these capabilities, solar developers can streamline site assessment and permitting processes, overcome common roadblocks, and accelerate project development timelines while ensuring compliance and community engagement.

PES: Financing and budgeting can be complex in solar projects too, so what's your support like for developers in managing costs and staying on budget?

EO: Efficient financial management is essential for success in solar. Margins are shrinking. Project volume is increasing. Labour is consistently harder to find and keep. Nevertheless, business keeps pushing

Emily Obenauer

forward. To overcome these challenges, businesses must efficiently manage their budgets and finances as well as their projects to ensure profitability and fast time to revenue.

Sitetracker financial management software aligns project finances with developers' projects and programs to shorten time to revenue, increase profitability, and ensure customer satisfaction. From managing vendor POs, to taking advantage of new federal or local funding, to seamlessly integrating with existing ERPs for full visibility, financial management is essential to developers' success.

PES: In what ways does the platform help reduce errors and rework during the construction phase of solar projects?

EO: The platform helps manage quality assurance and inspection processes by documenting inspections, tracking deficiencies, and recording corrective actions. This ensures that construction activities meet quality standards and regulatory requirements, reducing the need for rework.

It optimizes resource allocation and scheduling by providing visibility into resource availability, utilization, and dependencies. This helps prevent overbooking or underutilization of resources, minimizing disruptions and delays that can lead to errors and rework.

Stakeholders can report and track issues, deviations, and risks in real-time. Project managers can prioritize and assign tasks for resolution, ensuring that issues are addressed promptly to prevent escalation and minimize the need for rework.

Sitetracker integrates with construction management tools, such as scheduling software, BIM platforms, and IoT devices. This seamless integration enhances data exchange and coordination among construction teams, reducing errors caused by miscommunications or data discrepancies.

By automating workflows, enforcing quality control measures, and providing real-time visibility into project activities, Sitetracker helps minimize errors and rework during the construction phase of solar projects.

PES: Given the growing complexity of solar projects, what trends do you foresee in solar development, and how is Sitetracker preparing for them?

EO: Leadership at Sitetracker is continually evaluating our product roadmap to ensure our strategic direction aligns to the needs of the critical industries we serve and support their growth.

PES: What is your approach to project management in contributing to a more sustainable and efficient future for the solar industry?

EO: The International Energy Agency reports that, 'building clean energy infrastructure can take 10 years or more, typically involving large civil engineering projects that have to adhere to extensive local planning and environmental regulations. While construction is in most cases a relatively efficient process, taking two to four years on average, planning and permitting can cause delays and create bottlenecks, with the process taking two to seven years, depending on the jurisdiction and type of infrastructure.'

Sitetracker plays a crucial role in accelerating this timeline and ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and efficient future for the solar industry through its approach to project management. It empowers solar developers to deliver projects more efficiently, and effectively, thereby accelerating the transition to a cleaner, greener future powered by solar energy.

PES: How does your customer support and training programs ensure that users get the most out of your platform?

EO: Our customer success and support programs are designed to ensure that users get the most out of the platform by providing comprehensive assistance, guidance, and resources throughout their journey.

We offer dedicated customer success teams that are available to assist users with any questions, issues, or concerns they may have and provides onboarding and implementation services to help users get started with the platform quickly and efficiently. This includes personalized guidance on platform setup, configuration, and best practices to ensure a smooth transition and maximize user adoption.

The system offers certification programs to equip users with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively utilize the platform and maintains a comprehensive knowledge base and documentation repository in our community that contains user guides, tutorials, FAQs, and troubleshooting resources.

On that note, Sitetracker fosters a vibrant user community where users can connect, share experiences, and exchange tips and best practices. Participation in the user community provides users with valuable insights, peer support, and networking opportunities to enhance their proficiency with the platform.

We actively solicit feedback from users to identify areas for improvement and prioritize feature enhancements. By listening to user feedback and incorporating user suggestions into product development, we can ensure that the platform evolves to meet the changing needs and expectations of our user community.

Importantly too, we provide ongoing support and maintenance services to ensure that the platform remains reliable, secure, and up-to-date. Regular software updates are deployed to enhance platform performance, ensuring a seamless user experience.

Overall, our customer success and support programs are designed to empower users with the knowledge, resources, and assistance they need to succeed with the platform and achieve their project management goals effectively.

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