

The benefits and challenges of digital transformation for rail

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James Staines, Director at Project Control Tools, explains why by working together as an industry we can reap significant rewards of digitisation

The digitisation of onsite processes can transform a project, saving time, reducing costs, connecting large teams, and enabling project leaders to make informed, data-driven decisions. It's something the UK rail industry has been slow to adopt – but, with training, awareness-raising, and the right digital products, we can effect a step-change. Below, I'll outline the benefits of digitisation, and discuss the challenges that we, as a sector, must overcome to achieve it.

A new focus on digitisation

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digitisation across the rail industry. As lockdown measures were introduced in 2020, many project teams turned to specially designed software, collecting data remotely rather than onsite. **Project Control Tools'** (PCT) own products, Censite and CensiteStores, make the process of managing onsite documents and inventories completely paperless – a real benefit at the height of the pandemic, when reducing transmission risk was high on the agenda.

While this push brought digitisation to the forefront of the industry's consciousness, many teams are yet to embrace it, relying instead on outdated or inefficient processes. And as turbulent trading conditions put our sector under pressure, the question is no longer 'when will they adopt digital solutions?', but rather 'can they afford not to?'

The benefits of digitising onsite processes

For project teams, the benefits of digitisation are numerous. Censite, for example, enables users to create, share and analyse digital site forms, which are accessed and completed via a smartphone or tablet. Where the site team often find themselves filling out physical paperwork at the end of the working day (or even at home), digital documents can be completed immediately – saving valuable time which can be focused on delivery. Digital efficiencies also lead to cost savings; CensiteStores allows teams to tag, track, and manage tool inventory, reducing late off-hires and costly losses.

The benefits aren't just financial; digitisation makes projects more sustainable, eliminating the need for paper site packs and documents. Thanks to Censite, Network Rail reduced its use of paper by around 80% during one project.

Our flagship product can also be used to streamline health and safety reporting, with issues flagged clearly and quickly.

Captured in real-time, this accurate and detailed data drives informed decision-making. It can even be analysed automatically, yielding invaluable insights. And, with stakeholders able to access documents remotely, everyone stays in the loop.

Overcoming challenges

The benefits of digitisation are clear, and improved connectivity is making it increasingly achievable. Nevertheless, in an industry renowned for its resistance to change, encouraging project teams to embrace new ways of working can be tough. It's crucial that software is designed with their needs firmly in mind, addressing real pain points.

At PCT, we recognised that, if our products weren't user-friendly and effective, the busy workforce would quickly lose faith in them. To avoid this, we drew on our own experience of large infrastructure projects, developing software that would solve the problems we'd encountered onsite. User feedback was also key, and we've continued to develop and enhance our Censite suite as clients request new features and identify gaps in the system.

While workforces are becoming increasingly tech literate, some staff might feel less confident than others. The right training can address this issue, helping teams to adjust to new working practices. PCT offers training as standard and maintain regular touch points to ensure no body is left unsure on how to use the applications effectively.

By working together as an industry, we can overcome these challenges and reap the significant rewards of digitisation: more efficient processes, better insights, and stronger decision-making. In today's fast-paced

world, it's a question of, not if, but when.

To learn more about Project Control Tools, visit www.projectcontroltools.co.uk.



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