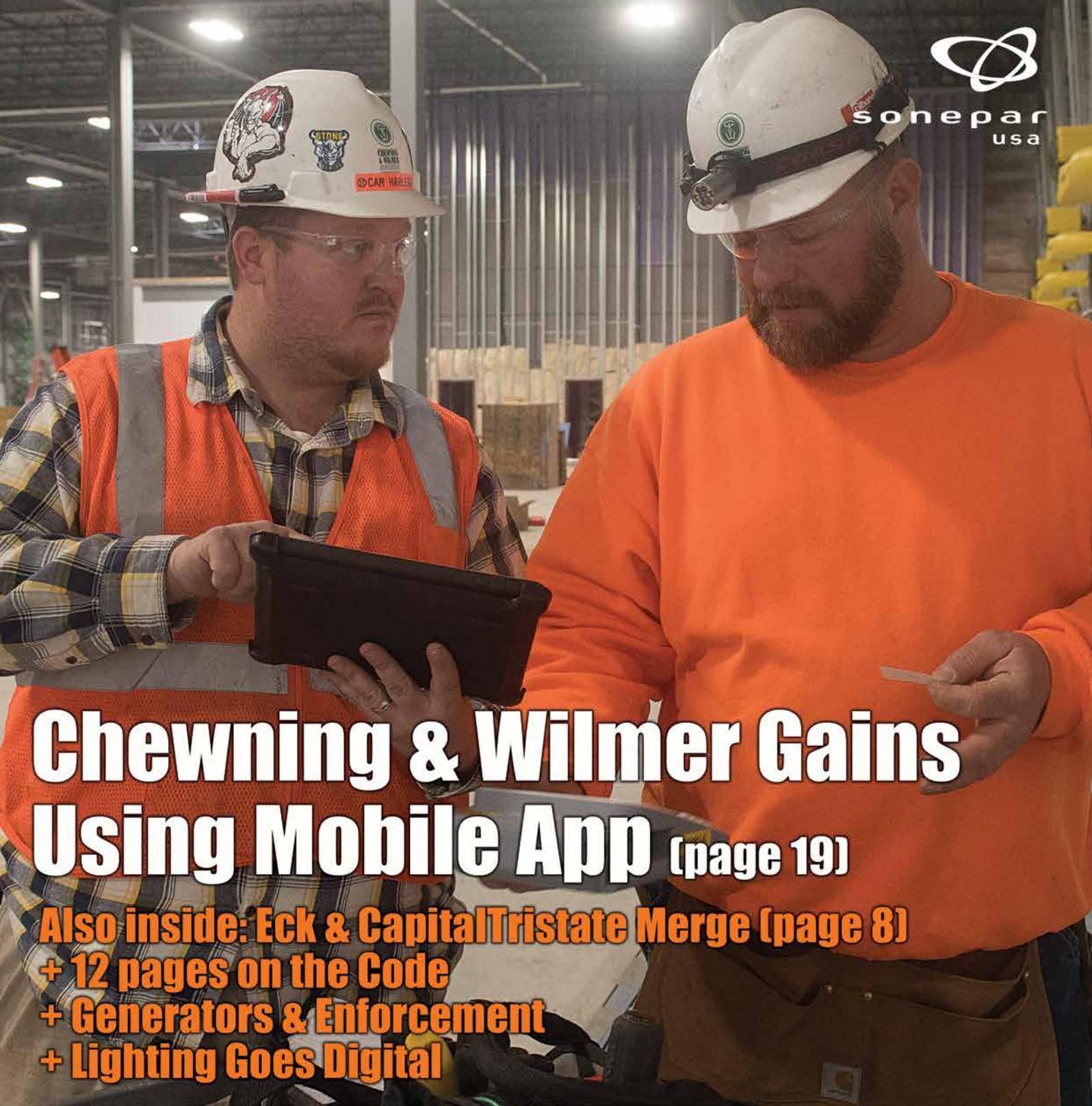


COMMERCIAL EDITION!

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SEE BACK COVER: Where Industrial Section Begins

Venerable Richmond Contractor Uses App to Place Orders

eCommerce? Mobile apps for field people? Sure, CapitalTristate offers all of this (and more) – but how does it work for a large, 92-year-old contracting company? Pretty darn great!

By Cari Bilyeu Clark



Photos by Steve Barrett

It's rare to find an electrical contractor that has been continuously in business for 90-plus years, but Chewning & Wilmer is just such a venerable institution in Richmond. Founded in 1924, the company specializes in commercial and industrial projects – and has worked on many public facilities in Virginia.

Of course, electrical work is not do-able without access to the proper

materials for an installation. Getting supplies to a job site in a timely manner is critical for success. Nobody likes slipping schedules, cost overruns, or employee downtime.

eCommerce, as provided by CapitalTristate, is customized to mitigate a customer's costly problems. It appealed to the contractor, as Mike Stahl, a Chewning & Wilmer project manager, explained: "We are not in

the materials-handling business; we are electrical contractors. Having CapitalTristate handle the materials takes a lot of stress off of our end."

eCommerce isn't magic

eCommerce does not simply "happen." Leonor Letson, Digital Solutions Manager, and Kenny Stewart, an

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Account Manager based in Richmond, put in some time to create digital solutions that would work for Chewning & Wilmer.

What they came up with: A system tailored specifically to this customer, based on Stewart's knowledge of the contractor's needs, and Letson's expertise. Said Stewart: "There was a lot of legwork up front. We set up price lists and really streamlined the system so they could order – literally, in seconds."

Letson added: "People are changing the model of how they buy materials for their jobs. The CapitalTristate mobile app is empowering the associates in the field to make their own materials purchases."

But will it work?

After finalizing the solution for Chewning & Wilmer, Stewart recalled: "My first reaction was, 'there's no way my customers will do this!'"

Despite that, he became convinced that once field people tried it, they'd love it. Stewart went straight to the top, to Robert Zahn, Chewning & Wilmer's CEO. Zahn saw the benefits right away, Stewart reported – and agreed to a pilot program. "

"He said, 'This is great! What do you want from me?' So he told his guys to try it," Stewart said.

Change can create push-back, but Mike Stahl overrode the grumbling about the new system and persuaded Chewning's superintendents to try the new process.

Here's what changed: The CapitalTristate website and mobile app enable customer personnel to use smartphones, tablets, or laptops to peruse inventory and place orders.

"Formerly, the superintendent would send a list of the materials he needed to our purchasing agent, who then sent the list to various vendors. He had to wait for them to respond, then go with the



'Having CapitalTristate handle the materials takes a lot of stress off of our end'

– Mike Stahl, Project Manager, Chewning & Wilmer

best quote, and create a purchase order to send to the vendor.

"Then we'd have to wait for delivery.

"This took, at a minimum, 48 hours," Stahl claimed.

Solutions adopted

If a distributor such as CapitalTristate can combine eCommerce and quick delivery, it solves another jobsite problem: Where do you store the materials that have been delivered but aren't needed today?

"Most customers don't want supplies stored on-site," Mike Stahl said.

"Having a lot of product at a jobsite means things get lost and misplaced," as well as raising the possibility of break-ins at night.

"Now the workers get the stuff they are using that day, and there are no mix-ups," Stahl concluded.

While overseeing a \$3 million project that sees Chewning & Wilmer at work on a 125,000 sq. ft. building (with a 100,000 sq. ft. parking garage), Superintendent Mike Stucke has adopted CapitalTristate Digital Solutions.

"I don't have to do as much paperwork as before," he stated. "It was frustrating to have to keep track of receipts that I had to turn in.

"Now, using the online site cuts out confusion and mistakes. I can order as late as 7:00 p.m., and the materials are at my site before 8:00 the next morning. If I forget something or make a mistake, it's not a problem because I can get the materials the next day."

And for Cam Harler, another C&W superintendent: "I use the mobile app every day. It's great, and I have far less paperwork. CapitalTristate comes to my job site every day, regardless of the size of my order."

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'I use the mobile app every day. It's great, and I have far less paperwork'

– Cam Harler, Superintendent, Chewning & Wilmer

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Do they still need him?

Stucke also noted that, in addition to customized lists of items he orders regularly, “You can also see different products you might not normally order, that can save you money.

“You can see what is currently in stock, and if there is another brand you can use instead of an out-of-stock item. This is far easier than going through someone else.”

Does that mean there's no longer a need for account managers like Stewart of CapitalTristate? Everyone who heard the question laughed in response. “I get copies of what they order every day,” Stewart said. “I still have plenty to do!”

For one thing, Stewart visits the job site himself. “That way, I get a clearer picture of what they are doing, and how I can help them do it better,” he noted. “If I have a question, Leonor is right on it.”

People still needed

Harler emphasized that, even with eCommerce and the mobile app, he still can't do everything alone. “We have Sharon Lawson, our Inside Sales person (at CapitalTristate), to help us,” he said.

“At one point, I needed some receptacle covers and I just couldn't find them online. So I asked Sharon to find them for me, and she did! It's very important to have human backup!”

Stahl claimed that his superintendents are now more aware of material costs, a side benefit of the use of CapitalTristate's Digital Tools. “We always got lists of products and their prices, but now that the supervisors are ordering their own stuff, they see the prices as they order, and they are shocked! So they look for ways to save money,” he said.

Of course, eCommerce is a method for ordering; CapitalTristate still has to do its job of taking material off of warehouse shelves, putting it on trucks, and delivering it to the jobsite when and where it is needed. Stucke of Chewning reinforces this: “One Friday, I had a large number of light fixtures that had been shipped without lamps.

“I had guys coming in to work overtime on Saturday to install them, but that was going to be pretty useless without the lamps. I called Kenny, and he had a courier bring the lamps from the Central Distribution Center to the Richmond site early on that Saturday morning – a round trip over 300 miles.

“That saved me! That's great customer service!” ■

Clark is a Virginia-based writer.