

Camera phones boost construction efficiency

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Mobile phones equipped with cameras are proving to be extremely useful on construction sites. That is according to a Tekes-funded pilot project being carried out with Skanska Tekra, a Finnish subsidiary of the Swedish construction and engineering company Skanska. “We’ve been using them in Finland for about half a year,” says Ville Saksi, Tampere-based Vice President of Skanska Tekra. If the results continue to be as positive as early indications suggest, the firm will likely begin using camera phones at all of its building sites.

“I’d be very surprised if we don’t,” says project engineer Miikka Voipio. “So far, we’ve had nothing but positive experiences. For me, the camera phone has cut down on how much I have to travel, since I can check on the situation at a site without having to actually go there.”

The company has distributed camera phones to 20 of some 200 employees at a 12-kilometre long construction site in Lohja, west of Helsinki.

“We’ve provided phones to people of various ages and levels. So these are not just toys for the bosses. After a few early hiccups, everybody has learned how to use the devices well,” says Voipio.

The most common application is sending pictures from one phone to another. Employees can also send photos as e-mail attachments.

“We mostly send general pictures, since the resolution is not yet good enough for detailed shots,” Voipio notes.

Skanska staff use DDM text message technology developed by the Espoo-based firm BookIT. This application allows managers to send information about work assignments to employees in the field.

Besides saving time and driving kilometres, the phones also improve occupational safety on site. Needed repairs and safety measures can be sent and confirmed quickly and easily.

Saksi says that Skanska Tekra opted for the BookIT technology because it is simple and versatile.

“Construction workers move around a lot, and projects comprise a lot of co-operation with a wide network of subcontractors. With BookIT's technology, confirming assignments with a mobile phone is really easy, which facilitates network management. This improves our cost-efficiency and enhances the fluency of work.”

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