

# Taking the hassle out of building

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Commercial Features writer

THE name Billcost is synonymous with excellence in the building industry. Its revolutionary electronic estimating, scheduling and management system has been in operation since 1987, and the company still finding new ways to merge cutting-edge technology and the building industry.

Unlocking the future of construction, Billcost and the newly acquired Merkel's building pricing and management manual (now also in an electronic format) are levelling the playing field, allowing small to large businesses to compete on equal ground for contracts and tenders.

An amazingly resourceful product, Billcost was launched in South Africa 21 years ago and, to date, exists as the only construction estimating software to incorporate a full database of material and labour rates.

The combination of its formulas and up-to-date information makes estimating a breeze for anyone in the construction industry.

From the humble DOS-based system it started out with in 1985, to the first Windows-based system in 1995, and incorporating today's powerful systems, Billcost has been at the forefront of construction estimating software.

Billcost was acquired by its current owner, Chris Steenkamp, in 2001 and has flourished under the new approach of dedicated customer service.

After seven years, the company's customer base continues to grow strongly. Currently, Billcost is based in Cape Town (headquarters) and Pretoria, but supports all nine provinces, as well as other southern African countries, including Swaziland, Botswana and Namibia.

"We believe in giving quality customer service. It is very important to us to make our customers feel as if they are number one," says Chris.

Passionate about the Billcost product and what it enables industry players do to, Chris exudes enthusiasm when explaining how the user-friendly system works.

Only two years after acquiring Billcost, Chris won the "Business Partners Entrepreneur of the Month" award in 2003, further affirming that he and the company are industry leaders.

## All types and sizes

Not only does this system allow builders, contractors, project managers and anyone else involved in the industry to estimate their material and labour costs, but there are a number of material types and lengths to choose from.

With a full set of management tools, Billcost takes users from their initial estimating stage to project management, with functions such as cost control, material orders, profit calculations, the issuing of certificates, project scheduling and more. It is possible to work from plans or bills of quantities.

The database – relating to all building methods

and materials – is regularly updated with the latest material prices and formulae, allowing users to make full use of the system from the word go.

The principle is simple: insert the dimensions of the activity you would like to measure, for instance building a wall, and Billcost calculates the type and number of materials and labour needed to complete the job, all with a general price for your province. Sixteen different reports are available for each job.

Billcost's dedicated team of professionals does not only sell software. Training courses, hotline support and electronic updates are all part of the back-up service provided.

With a comprehensive user manual, every user has the opportunity to be fully conversant with the product, thereby gaining maximum benefit from the package.

## Anywhere and everywhere

Due to the growth of the industry, Billcost is expanding and going mobile.

"We are addressing the problems of people who don't have computers. It is important to us that everyone has access to Billcost," says Chris of the next level in electronic estimating for the construction industry, Billcost (Mobile), which is not only easy to use, but affordable too. It makes use of a streamlined and easy-to-use version of the database used by "big brother" Billcost.

"The utter brilliance of the system is that the whole process can be completed within minutes!"

The same formula is used, with no hassle, in the palm of your hands. With the Billcost (Mobile) version, people can estimate anywhere.

Currently in its demo stage, anybody can explore Billcost (Mobile) at their leisure. All that is needed to use Billcost (Mobile) is a WAP-enabled mobile phone that has some memory capability.

To explore the free demo of Billcost (Mobile), SMS the word "demo" to 072 0160 092 and you will receive free instructions enabling you to make use of the Billcost (Mobile) demo free of charge. You will then be able to use this feature at your luxury.

## The best thing since cement

"It is so easy to use. Another great part of Billcost (Mobile) is that a client's request is sent to their nearest retailer (within the Billcost network)," says Chris.

After contact details and inquiries are sent to a retailer, clients will be contacted regarding their request, making the entire estimation process hassle free. For more information on Billcost, Merkel's or Billcost Mobile, contact 086 1111 273 or email [bcsales@billcost.co.za](mailto:bcsales@billcost.co.za)



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