

CASE STUDY

Willmar Electric

Challenge

When Willmar Electric switched to a partial digital field setup for payroll and drawings, their DropBox solution was spotty at best. Sync issues caused headaches for payroll admin, and field workers were likewise frustrated with constant phone calls from the office. Workers began to take personally what was really a tech issue, and the ill will was helping no one.

Solution

Willmar test drove—and eventually partnered with—the Procore PM platform, welcoming Procore's Viewpoint accounting system integration and the smoothing of many processes. Procore's cached data system also meant that even a spotty connection would preserve, and later sync, all a field worker's data entry. Payroll admin did away with paper, locked all critical data in the cloud, and secured worker trust.

Willmar Electric has been in business since right around the time the electron itself was discovered. Which is to say, this 4th-generation family operation has been a vanguard company from the moment of its inception, in 1920. Today, Willmar is a deeply rooted power player with offices all over the U.S., a globe-hopping portfolio, and a reputation in the field for knocking it out of the park. Their nimbleness and mobility can be attributed in part to their decision, some time ago, to switch to a digital environment for viewing plans in the field, and for payroll entry. In the beginning they were using DropBox to convey drawings back and forth, as well as payroll inputs, which worked like....magic. Someone would drop a file into the little server folder icon on the office computer, and the info would [occasionally] appear in the corresponding little cartoon box on the Willmar worker's tablet device, way out there in the field.

[Occasionally]?

“We were having trouble getting Dropbox to sync,” explains Misty Lauer, Willmar’s executive of operations. “We had launched all these different initiatives in the office— our goal was being able to easily relay information back and forth with our field guys. One of our ongoing conversations in the office was always about how Dropbox was having sync problems. So it was proposed that we should look at another solution.”

Misty was charged with spearheading the search.

“We looked at Asite, FastTrack, Procore, PlanGrid. Eventually we decided to do a trial, an A/B test. We tried PlanGrid and Procore. We asked our Procore contact for permission to use Procore for several weeks on a trial basis, which you guys allowed. We simultaneously launched Procore and PlanGrid in test projects to see which one we liked better.”

...and?

“PlanGrid was really great with transmitting plans to the field, but so is Procore. And PlanGrid didn’t have all the other features for managing the project that Procore had. They wanted to use DropBox for document storage, for instance.” Ouch. Procore’s cached data entry system was also a Procore feature that wowed Willmar. “Your guys’ offline mobility for entering data in real time, and then later syncing it; that’s a feature we really wanted,” Misty says.

“Our people use MyFIs. They rarely have 100% connectivity. We wanted them to be able to enter information when they needed to enter it, and then have their entries sync up when they’re within range of a connection. So, then we decided that Procore was the best fit for us. The user-friendly mobile app was probably the main selling point. But there were other features, too.”

A Healthy Viewpoint

At the time Willmar was shopping a new PM system, one of the selling points was that Procore was developing a platform integration with Willmar's Viewpoint accounting software system. That Procore promise has since been kept, though Willmar was approached by other suitors in the interim. Misty is frank about those overtures.

"There were lots of vendors who wanted to sell us a third party solution (for Viewpoint integration), but we held out for Procore," Misty says.

Patience is a virtue, but what was behind Willmar's loyalty?

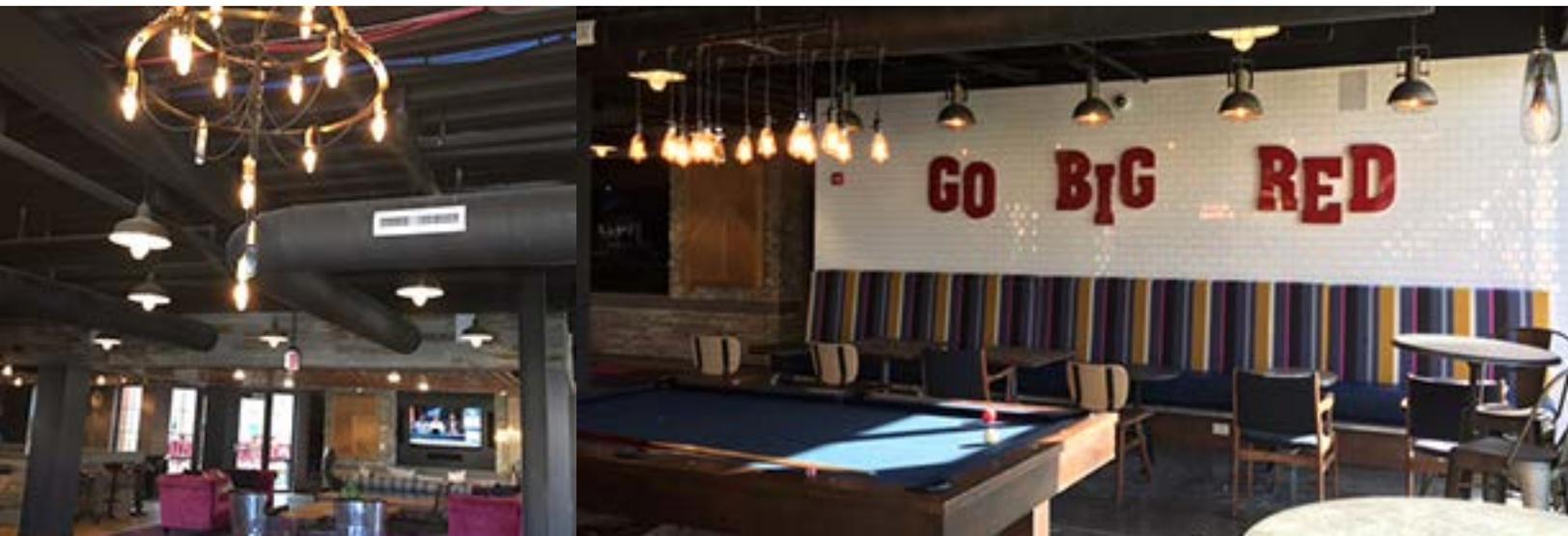
"Whenever you guys have offered a solution and said you were going to do something, you've always done it," Misty says. "Right now we're 30 days into our Viewpoint integration, and we love it."

Old Masters. New Tricks.

One familiar trope of the Information Age is that of the older worker struggling to adapt to changing technologies. In these anecdotes the older worker is often portrayed as cute and bumbling, silly and old-fashioned—we're talking here about the folks who built the Empire State Building, Brooklyn Bridge, and Hoover Dam with pencils and sheets of paper. So cute! Willmar has their version of the "Old dog, new tricks" story, and it's all heart.

"We have some folks who are retirement age, and past retirement age who work for us," Misty says with audible warmth. "When we gave everybody iPads they were a little surprised. They really wanted to stay with their papers. They weren't very trusting of the system. In the first weeks and months of having Procore, after getting off work they would drive in to the office and turn in their time sheets, even though they'd typed everything into Procore." She pauses. "We had to comfort them into trusting the system. It meant showing them that Procore is about helping them do their jobs better. Like changing from a Phillips screwdriver to an Impact Driver. Now they use Procore all the time and wouldn't have it any other way."

8N Lofts, Lincoln NE



Shiny New Recruitment Tool

Has Willmar Electric's adoption of Procore had any effect on recruitment?

"I recently had the joy and honor of subbing for our HR directors at recruiting fairs in Oklahoma and Nebraska," Misty says. "One of the exciting things about talking to job fair attendees is showing them the iPad we offer our workers and the Procore system we use, the digital plans. The job fair I attended yesterday, people were gathering around, asking what it was. I was showing them how to access the plans, how it all works. They all seemed really interested in it—there were a lot of questions about how it impacts the work day. It does draw people to Willmar because we are using this technology in the build."

Willmar's workers are even sometimes the inadvertent ambassadors of construction tech. Misty explains.

"We'll be out somewhere making a video about lean practices, and a general contractor will come up to our people. 'What are you filming over here?' And our worker will immediately pull out the iPad. 'Check this out,' and show them Procore and how it works. I definitely think our younger workers enjoy the tech and enjoy talking about it."

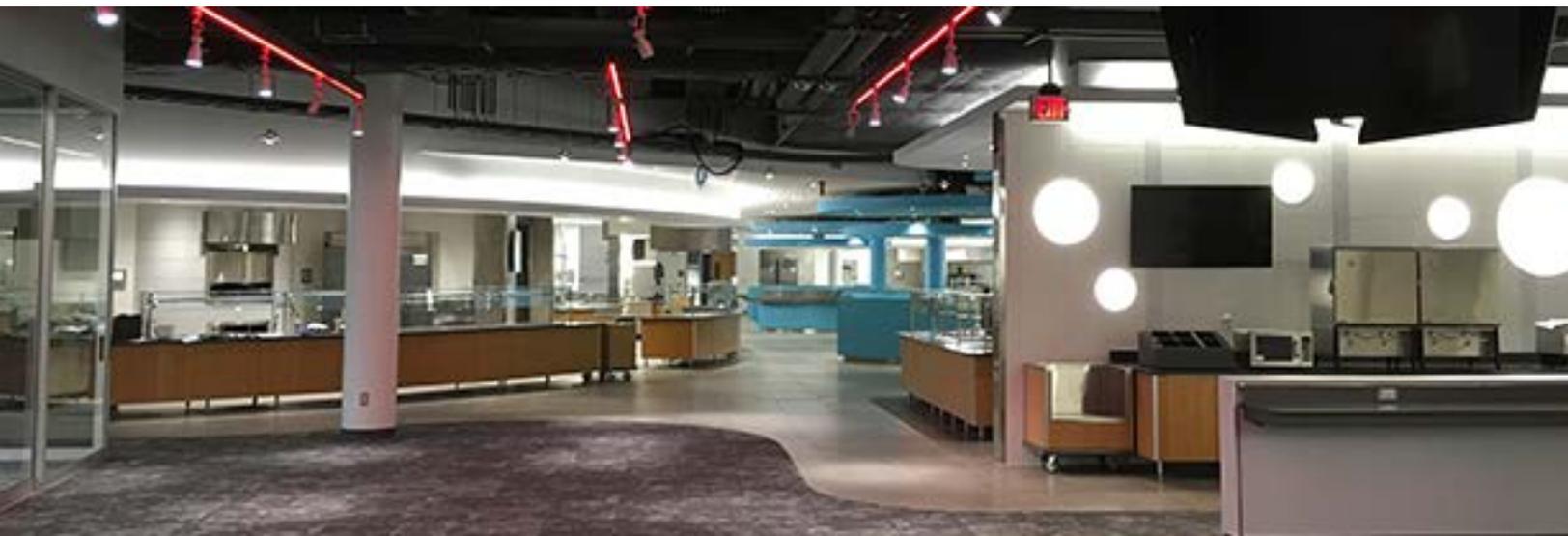
(Pro)Core Curriculum

Willmar Electric's stated purpose is straightforward; "People Making a Difference for People."

Always focused on that goal, this nearly 100 year-old company pushes its workers to continually improve.

"We recently did a Procore usage survey at Willmar," Misty Lauer explains, "to make sure workers are getting the maximum benefit of each tool. We now have Procore as part of our Continuing Education curriculum. Our goal is to increase company-wide usage by 10% per employee over the next 90 days. And now we're considering the Procore Timesheets and Pre-Bid tools. We're committed to making Procore central to how Willmar Electric conducts business."

UNL Dining Hall, Lincoln NE



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MISTY LAUER

Executive of Operations, Willmar Electric

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