

Case study: Chris Ashton

A Planner's View



Planning has been Chris Ashton's life for the past 20 years; starting as a trainee planner he has honed his career working all over the UK for companies such as Laing O'Rourke and Vinci Construction. From first using Asta Powerproject he has developed a binding loyalty to the product; he explains "I had my first experience with Asta Powerproject in 1999 on a £40 million distribution centre project in South Wales. I discovered that Asta Powerproject gives you a picture that you otherwise simply can't see. It is almost like a book of instructions on how to build a project."

His enthusiasm grew from first working with the product when it came to helping him time a complicated sequence of deliveries from all over the country: everything from steels from Nottingham to cladding panels from Eastbourne. Chris was aware that everything had to be timed very carefully, so that all orders placed would result in Just-in-Time (JIT) deliveries. He is quite clear: without

Asta Powerproject, this could have been a scheduling nightmare. He says "With around 100 sub-contractors on site we would have to ensure we put everything in the building at the right time - we had to programme everything into a clear sequence or it would go horribly wrong with things and people turning up too early, or too late."

Quick 'what if' scenario planning

Today he is a Senior Planner in pre-construction at Bouygues UK. In this role, Chris's experience is deployed to pre-build every building before they even go on site. He does this by going through what could be an exhaustive exercise of thinking up 100 ways to construct a building and then finding the fastest and easiest delivery route. Asta Powerproject allows Chris to test his ideas by running lots of different scenarios in advance, eliminating those that didn't work before getting onto site. This allows the site manager



About Chris Ashton

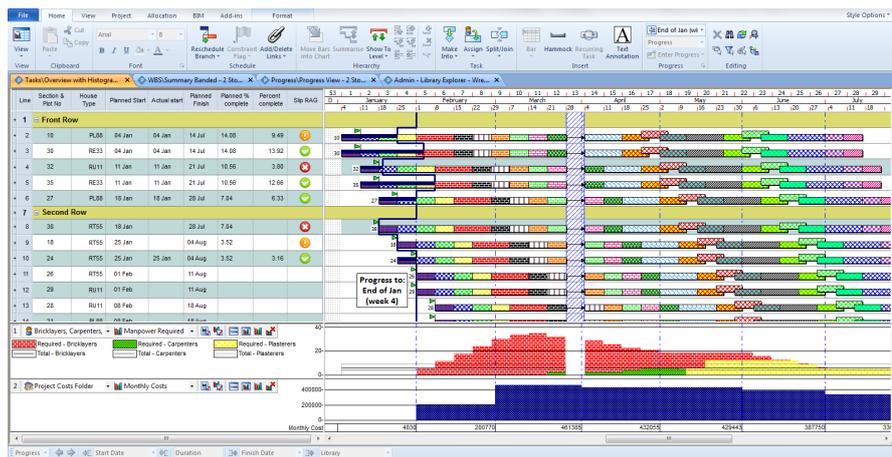
Chris Ashton has been a planner for nearly 20 years. From his first experience as a trainee planner on a retail distribution centre with Ballast Wiltshire in 1999, he progressed through site planning to senior planning roles. During his career he has worked on a diverse array of project types, from supermarkets to student accommodation, and high rise hotels to hospitals. He built his career working with construction players all around the UK, including Schimdtlin, David Mclean, Midas Retail, Vinci Construction and Laing O'Rourke. Today he is a Senior Planner in pre-construction at Bouygues UK.

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to get on and just build. This ability is planning gold for Chris: “Asta Powerproject is rather like a sat-nav for construction – you set out your overall goal of getting from A to B and, if something could (or does) go wrong on the way, you can plan a diversion to get back onto the same path and reach the destination.”

The scenario planning doesn’t stop at the pre-build stage: it is used during construction too to help in planning around delays or anything that might disrupt the build. Asta Powerproject’s ‘what if’ functionality helps to overcome roadblocks and indeed problems will arise all the time “Perhaps bathroom pods you ordered months ago are coming from overseas – but could get stuck in customs, while the pre-cast frame you ordered on a three-day turnaround will arrive anyway.” He also finds the product perfect for being able to drill down and know who is doing what and when it’s happening: “All I create is the overall picture, but with the software you can filter it down to individual trade, to a specific sequence, or even to a single corridor on floor 50 of a 100 story building. It’s that easy.”

Communicating with ease

The ability to drill down easily within a project has been key in helping Chris communicate what exactly needs to be done and when much more easily, something you could never do with a spreadsheet because of the sheer volume of information. He says “A large programme could run to 50 or more

pages overall – but people don’t want to see all that. For communications you need to focus on one element of work, to tell each individual where they will be on site, when, and exactly what they’ll be doing there, which you can do in Asta Powerproject. It helps sub-contractors to plan resourcing, and helps manage costs too.”

Switching tracks

The critical path is the core of a good plan: it is the shortest and most essential route to delivery goals. Chris creates critical path variations so that if anything goes wrong with the original programme, he and his teams can easily switch tracks by, say, slowing some activities and accelerating others. He says “If you fail on the critical path, you have had it – so seeing it clearly is vital. When you start linking activities together in Asta Powerproject it creates a critical path with one click. It sometimes won’t be quite right – since no software can know what the planner knows, or think about things like what the weather will be like during December and January during the build – but I can easily change the links or add in bits of float where appropriate, and massage the critical path to exactly how I want it.”

Dealing with the unexpected

All planners and project managers have their own practices when it comes to looking ahead. Some look only weeks ahead, but Chris likes to look months ahead so he can eliminate all possible problems. One of the most

difficult things to foresee is when a sub-contractor goes into bankruptcy, meaning all site work can stop suddenly. “We then have to create an alternative plan for that part of the programme, appoint and get a new sub-contractor working – and it can all take six to eight weeks. Yet we still have to keep on working on everything else.” Asta Powerproject helps Chris to quickly see cause and effect of any sub-contractor delays, continually update progress, and compare it against the original throughout the build.

Chris’s long and loyal history with Asta Powerproject is very much due to how it makes his life easier: “This software allows me to enjoy what I do. It makes planning enjoyable. I write stories, which create a 360-degree building on what was a blank piece of ground, and it’s easy to do because the software helps you do everything. In construction every job, whether it is a £100k refurbishment or a £100 million new build, requires the same input. Asta Powerproject allows you to put every single aspect in, fast and easily.”

“This software allows me to enjoy what I do.”

The road ahead

Continuous improvement is close to Chris’s heart, which is why he is really excited about Asta Powerproject BIM; it makes life even easier by allowing him to run the programme, press pause, and generate a picture for the PM of what the building needs to look like in four months’ time. “If delays occur I will be able to stop the programme, change it, and show people a 3D picture of where they are going to be at a certain time. I am a big believer that with the creation of 3D printing, this will only aid the future of 4D construction planning.”

Chris’s enthusiasm for Asta Powerproject is unlikely to diminish. He is undoubtedly one of the product’s biggest fans; as he says “The companies I’ve worked for use a range of planning products – but at every one I have changed their perception. I simply say it will be the best money you ever spend.”

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