

Software promises to cut guesswork in development

Charlotte firm marketing program that provides options, budgeting

FRED TANNENBAUM
 STAFF WRITER

A Charlotte-based company has launched cost-analysis software that promises to save real estate developers, engineers and retailers lots of time, money and guesswork.

BLUERIDGE Analytics Inc.'s technology, called SITEOPS, studies the features of a development site for a single building and offers up to eight cost-based options for grading, drainage and parking.



Detwiler

It can do that and provide a final engineering drawing with a budget within 24 hours, a fraction of the time usually needed to get such details.

Company officials do not disclose financials, but they expect the software and future versions to reap

\$100 million in sales by 2012.

The 20-employee company is creating a variation on the basic software for analysis of mixed-use developments; it should be ready next year. A version that can be used to design entire neighborhoods will debut in 2009.

"There's a lot of pressure to keep costs down and understand what the costs are before you get into these projects," says

QUICKINFO
BLUERIDGE ANALYTICS INC.

Business: Developer of analytical software for land development

Founded: 2003

HQ: 101 W. Worthington Ave., Suite 206, Charlotte 28203

Principals: Andy Watts, chairman; Mike Detwiler, president and chief executive

Employees: 20

Phone: (704) 373-1884

Web: www.blueridge-analytics.com

Mike Detwiler, BLUERIDGE president and chief executive.

Hall Johnston III, a partner at Real Estate Development Partners in Charlotte, sees a ready market for the software, although he's not used it. A program that can identify costs upfront "would have huge benefits in the industry," he says.

Commonly used computer-aided design software can't

provide analysis of a site's challenges and likely costs.

"This software looks at 10 billion permutations on land development and comes back to you with 'These are your best options to develop this particular tract,'" Detwiler says.

BLUERIDGE is marketing SITEOPS to developers, civil engineers and big-box retailers including Mooresville-based Lowe's Cos. Inc., which helped test the product.

"It takes away the risk associated with site assessments and speeds up the entire

decision-making process," says Dan Pardue, recently retired Lowe's vice president of engineering and construction.

Clients can pay BLUERIDGE to use SITEOPS on a per-project basis, starting at \$2,500 to draft and optimize a plan or \$2,000 to analyze an existing project. They can buy an annual subscription starting at \$112,500 for unlimited use.

The company was founded in 2003 by Jamie Reynolds, a Winston-Salem developer. During one of his projects, the cost of grading rose to \$1 million from an estimate of \$200,000. The experience led Reynolds to seek a software-based approach to avoid such surprises.

Reynolds joined with Andy Watts, a fellow Triad developer to provide some of the seed money for the technology. Through a mutual friend, they met Detwiler, who helped draft BLUERIDGE's business plan.

Pilot testing began in October, and the software was unveiled in May during the International Council of Shopping Centers convention in Las Vegas.

It can take weeks for an engineer to determine cost options, which reflect his experience and hunches, says John McAdams, president of John R. McAdams Co. Inc., an engineering firm.

"It seems magical, that you can take a site, site topography, take a project footprint and parking requirements, access points and sit back and it optimizes everything," McAdams says.

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Deniz Evin
 Sales Executive
 deniz@siteops.com
 (704)373-1884 ext 1600

Frank Harmuth
 Sales Executive
 frank@siteops.com
 (704)373-1884 ext 1610

BLUERIDGE Analytics
 www.siteops.com

Kate Mullen
 Director of Marketing
 kate@siteops.com
 (704)373-1884 ext 1300