Now let's take a look at a step-by-step approach to project closeout that you can use to make sure your next closeout stays on track throughout the project.

1. Gather closeout documents as soon as the project begins

Take it from Gagnon who claims, "Compiling a list of items that need to be addressed as early as possible is the most valuable thing that you can do."

Common closeout documents to start gathering and storing in a central location on your computer include:

» Warranty documents

» Punch list

» Lien release documents

» Financial contracts

It's fine if these documents are incomplete in the early stages of a project. The important thing is that you have them

Will they still stand by their unusual choice for lime green paint in the living room when they see what it looks like in the light of day?

As long as you've done your due diligence, you'll have much less to lose sleep over.

BONUS TIP - You certainly don't need to wear a three-piece suit for the walkthrough, but cleaning up all the empty water bottles on the job site and putting on a clean collared shirt with your company logo adds a professional touch.

6. Signing of final documents and handing over of keys

So you've walked through the completed construction project, let the customer ask all the questions they want and kick the proverbial tires. Now it's the moment of truth, when it's time to get the signature on the dotted line (either on a printed form if you're old school or digitally if you're using modern software).

When you hand over the keys, it's also a great time to show your customer all the warranty documents so they know where they are if they run into any trouble.

Gagnon says that his company gives customers ongoing access to their client portal so that they can also access these documents digitally years later.

"It simplifies things for us. In two years when a client comes back to us and asks for X, Y, and Z, we can just point them to the portal and all that information is housed there," he said. "They can lose that packet in a move, or if they're selling the house and they give it to somebody else, it's easier to keep track of."

7. Final project assessment

Once you have a final sign-off and you've been paid in full for all of your hard work, it can be tempting to close the door on that project and direct all of your attention to the next one. But it's important to take a little time to do a quick project assessment to see what went right, what went wrong, and what you want to do differently next time.

Did the project finish on time (or close to on time)? If not, where did it go off the rails? Were you close to the original budget? If not, what caused the overruns? What kind of feedback did the customer have during closeout? If they had any complaints, how can you address those complaints for future projects?

Tracking budget and timeline data in your construction management software can also help you identify trends over time. For example, if you notice that 90% of your projects have been completed within a week of their promised deadline over the past five years, you can use that information in your marketing material to attract new customers.

BONUS TIP - Send a survey to all customers when the project is complete. Even negative feedback is helpful if you use it to improve.

Tools For Project Closeout

Decades ago, construction firms of all sizes were forced to

Go Forth and Close Out

The bottom line is this: If you wait until the final stages of a project to start thinking about closeout, it's already too late. It pays enormous dividends to keep an eye on closeout from day one to take some of the stress out of an inherently stressful process.

It's important to remember that every firm will handle their closeout a little differently based on their size, number of projects, financing, and even regional regulations and requirements. However, if you follow these guidelines you should be able to nail your closeout every time:

1. Start the closeout process early, and keep at it throughout the project lifecycle.

2. Tackle change orders as they come, and update your client on how these changes affect their bottom line.

3. Use the project tracking feature of your construction software to eliminate surprises.

4. Use the client portal in your construction software to communicate updates and share documents throughout the project.

5. Don't forget to hold a project post mortem to track successes and failures to improve future projects.

About the Author

Andrew Conrad is a senior content writer at Software Advice, covering business intelligence, retail, and construction, among other markets. As a seven-time award winner in the Maryland, Delaware, D.C., and Suburban Newspapers of America editorial contests, Andrew's work has been featured in the Baltimore