

# DRAKE-WILLIAMS SAVES 30-40% ON BID TIME WITH SDS/2

Midwest fabricator supplies growth plans with increased estimating speed and accuracy

## A Drake-Williams Steel Case Study

Drake-Williams Steel has been providing steel fabrication services from America's Heartland since 1882. Now they fabricate an average 25 thousand tons of steel a year, and they have their sights set on 5-10 percent growth per year in both production capacity and labor force. In order to realize that growth, they'll have to supply it by winning more project bids. Speed, accuracy, and volume—they'll have to deliver on all fronts.

Speed and accuracy do not often go hand in hand. When you're looking at a 24-hour turnaround on a structural steel fabrication budget for a sizeable educational facility, for example, you might expect some tradeoffs in the latter. But with only an incomplete design model and their usual 3D steel detailing software, the estimating team at Drake-Williams Steel managed to deliver on both, providing an accurate material list and budget on an expedited timeline.

"We are able to develop a more accurate estimate in a shorter time period to help provide our customers with the best possible information," said Derrick Fitton, Director of Operations at Drake-Williams' Structural Division in Omaha, Nebraska.

Drake-Williams has been providing steel fabrication services from America's Heartland since 1882. They have expanded from their original location in Omaha, Nebraska, now housing four divisions across Iowa, Nebraska, and Colorado, and supporting 265 employees.

### **DRAKE-WILLIAMS STEEL**

**Primary sector**  
Structural steel  
fabrication

**Markets**  
Commercial, Industrial,  
Healthcare, Education,  
Railroad

Average production/year  
**25,000** tons

**265** employees

**100%** employee-owned

## DRAKE-WILLIAMS & SDS/2

**Customer since**  
2002

**In-house users**  
SDS/2 Detailing: 10  
SDS/2 Estimodeling: 5

### KEY BENEFITS

- 30-40% time savings on material lists
- Getting more—and more accurate—bids out the door
- Increased accuracy of budgets
- Early identification of expensive fabrication conditions like web doublers

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**“With Estimodeling, we can put together a more accurate budget in 30-40 percent less time by utilizing the model for materials and labor information.”**

**DERRICK FITTON**, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, DRAKE-WILLIAMS STEEL STRUCTURAL DIVISION

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Since 2014, they’ve been 100% employee-owned—a point of pride for the company, along with their hard-working, talented labor force, and the quality they deliver on every project.

Between their Structural Division in Omaha and their Mountain Steel Division in Aurora, Colorado, Drake-Williams fabricates an average 25 thousand tons of structural steel a year, and they’re looking to increase that number. Fitton said they have their sights set on 5-10 percent growth per year in both production capacity and labor force.

In order to realize that growth, they’ll have to supply it by winning more project bids. Speed, accuracy, and volume—they’ll have to deliver on all fronts.

### Early payoffs in bid productivity

Drake-Williams has been using SDS/2 for detailing in their Structural Division since 2002. Around three years ago, their estimating team recognized a need to adjust their process to keep up with tight schedules and budgets.

“They came to us about being able to provide the KISS file out of SDS/2 and using that—utilizing the tool we already had—to help with that process,” said Joe Bintner, a detailer at Drake-Williams who has been helping lead the charge in the company’s model-based estimating process with SDS/2.

Users can run an Estimodeling workflow in SDS/2 with a full detailing license or with the lighter SDS/2 Estimodeling software, which was featured as a 2020 Hot Product in Modern Steel Construction magazine, depending on the needs of their shop.

For Drake-Williams, it only took a few tries to get their SDS/2 models to play nice with their production management software, Bintner said, before they started seeing payoffs in productivity.

Adjusting to a model-based estimating process, though, is still a work in progress. “We would’ve jumped in a long time ago if we could go hire a detailer to help build the models,” Fitton said. But as everyone in the industry knows, new talent can be hard to come by.

They are still working through the transition, primarily using SDS/2 to create material lists for their larger projects. But that alone has made a huge difference, especially when it comes to time.

The most notable benefit, Bintner said, is “most definitely the speed of being able to help the estimating team.”

“With Estimodeling, we can put together a more accurate budget in 30 - 40 percent less time by utilizing the model for material and labor information,” Fitton said.

Drake-Williams' current process involves either importing REVIT or IFC models and cleaning them up in SDS/2 or building a model from a PDF or design drawings. SDS/2 automatically designs connections in the models, which allows them to pay as much or as little attention to the design details as the bid calls for. Fitton said they have used the design functionality on smaller projects to evaluate bracing and shear connections.

SDS/2 also allows them to pre-identify expensive fabrication conditions, such as web doublers, with a simple status search.

Once they have their model built, they then export the KISS model to Fabtrol, their estimating software, to get their material lists and build their budgets.

"We still have to work through the details, but now we're not spending time getting that tonnage and we have a better, more accurate picture for the customer," Fitton said. "We like to provide the customer the most complete picture that we can."

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**DERRICK FITTON**

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## Working toward next-level accuracy

Having seen the benefits of using SDS/2 for their material lists, Fitton said they are looking to take their Estimodeling workflow to the next level. The first step in that will be incorporating labor standards into their model as well to further home in their budget accuracy. They've also seen benefits in using it to map out their backlogs and identify machine workloads for connection materials, fabrication types, and painted versus unpainted steel.

Beyond that, he said he's just starting to understand all the benefits the software could bring them.

"You could take it all the way to Fortosi to help estimating aspects like that," Fitton said.



Detailer Joe Bintner at Drake-Williams Steel Structural Division in Omaha, NE.

The potential is vast.

To other fabricators looking to make a move toward model-based estimating, Fitton advises getting your workforce and processes into place.

"I think you need to have experts in the software—both SDS/2 and whatever estimating or production management software you're using to help understand how they communicate," he said. "That way you can support the growth you want to see from it."

"I think most fabricators would say they need to get there," Fitton said. "The challenge is figuring out how."

For now, Drake-Williams recognizes Estimodeling as a necessity, and they're willing to put in the time to get more out of it.

"It's necessary because of the technology advances, it's necessary because it's going to help us produce more bids and more accurate bids. It's just a matter of getting to that point where we can fully utilize the investment."