

# Appy shopper

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**Given the wide range of apps on the market, Craig MacDonald rounds up some of the most useful for surveyors**

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We're all conscious of the ways in which, as a sector, building surveying is becoming increasingly digitised. But this isn't only happening at a project level with software such as building information modelling – individual professionals can also benefit from a range of apps that speed up day-to-day work.

So this feature rounds up some of the most useful apps by function, based on my own experience and other members' suggestions. These aren't ranked in any way, or endorsed by RICS. However, they are all apps that are either free of charge or offer free versions, and surveyors can use them right away from app stores or through web browsers.

## Activity planning

There are few things that vary as much from person to person as the way they go about getting their work done. What is good for one person doesn't work for another, even though they both achieve the same goal.

An activity planning app or to-do list might be your thing, or maybe you stick to completing your Outlook tasks.

In app terms, then, [Wunderlist](#) is one you can use that synchronises well with calendars in Google and Outlook, thus integrating schedules and to-do lists. You may also share your list with other users such as your team members, and even chat with them using the app.

[Trello](#), meanwhile, takes its cue from the 'epic and story' school of thought. This one is for the surveyors who wear a project manager's hat, or manage tasks (stories) in a team of people working on a single project (the epic).

We've used Trello at [Beyond Condition](#) since we began development, and continue to use it to this day. It enables us to manage ideas that turn into new features and identify issues we want to address. Its strength is in assigning tasks to people, allowing them to take ownership and be accountable for them.

## Note-taking

Someone at Microsoft once told me that they don't believe in the idea of a paperless world; instead, they prefer the term 'paper-lite'.

With that in mind, these apps will help you reduce your paper use. While the notepad and pen have long been critical tools for the surveyor to pack in their travel bag, they can now be added to the list of things you don't need to carry around with you.

## **Evernote**

Evernote does to a greater or lesser extent many of the tasks done by some of the apps discussed below, such as [CamCard](#) , [OneNote](#) , [Genius Scan](#) and [Office Lens](#) .

However, it does these all in a single app that seamlessly syncs between mobile, web and desktop clients. It also works through your smart watch, so you can begin dictation right away in a hands-free scenario.

## **OneNote**

A former boss once contacted me on the off chance I could shed some light on an old project that was haunting him. With a quick search of my OneNote file from the job, I was able to solve that problem for him instantly.

The move from Evernote to OneNote made sense to me: Microsoft Office being standard in today's workplace, OneNote does everything Evernote does but it is also integrated into native Office apps, enabling you to send an Outlook email to OneNote, or go straight from OneNote into a calendar invite.

Notebooks in OneNote partition every part of my life, not only professional from personal but also separating my different work roles, all the while saving to OneDrive online and syncing across my devices. Since dumping my daybook, I've never looked back.

## **Todoist**

This is an [aide-memoire](#) I have been using for the past 18 months, and I find it invaluable as it makes note-taking very easy. It allows brief notes to be taken during inspections or meetings and it uploads these to the inbox on a mobile, as well as auto-syncing with my iPad and PC so I can flesh these out when I'm back at my desk. It's a great paperless solution that also integrates with Amazon's Alexa.

## **Document scanning**

The camera on your smartphone is a pretty good scanner, so you needn't worry about looking for a photocopier on site, and you can feel free to recycle your Rolodex as well.

Genius Scan, Office Lens and TinyScan are all different apps, but they do basically the same thing ? using your phone's camera like a scanner to create PDFs. Office Lens is Microsoft's offering, and this also syncs your scans to OneDrive whether they've been saved as an image or a PDF.

## **Office Lens**

I've been using this ever since someone suggested it in one of my LinkedIn threads, and now I find it indispensable. I undertake a lot of due diligence work and use it to convert any important documents we are permitted to view on site into PDFs. I can then immediately email them to my team for reference in our report.

## **CamCard**

I find myself raving about [CamCard](#) to anyone who asks: I have the app on my personal and work phones, and it syncs scanned business cards and the contacts between them.

As a bonus, because my work phone syncs with my work Outlook, any cards converted into contacts also end up on my laptop. One of my bosses asked me to update a spreadsheet with details from around 100 cards, so I CamCarded each one, synced them with my Outlook and exported them to Excel.

## **Room Scan**

As building surveyors, our note-taking extends to recording measurements and room dimensions so we can draw them up when we return to the office. Measurement apps that make clever use of your phone's camera can collect all this data and even draw the rooms for you.

If you are aware of accuracy and battery consumption then [this](#) may meet your needs and then some. To export your notes in the form of PDFs comes at a cost; however, recording the measurements into the app for later reference is free.

## **Report productivity**

Of each of the app categories in the article, this must be the most relevant to surveyors. Our deliverables so often include schedules of some form, repetitive but necessary tables, and fiddly photographic appendices that take up far too much of our time. Generally speaking, data entry and report formatting is not our favourite part of the job. There has to be a better way.

## **Beyond Condition**

Our app saves a large amount of time by using a tabled and captioned photo appendix for what would otherwise be a routine or a monotonous task. After using the interface to caption each image or batch-edit captions for hundreds at a go, you can export them into a Word document then copy and paste the table into a report template.

The app also streamlines bigger tasks such as Excel data entry, and exports georeferences from images to a Google Maps format.

## **iAuditor**

This app is great for creating health and safety audit templates and also provides a range of public ones, as well as exporting a ready-made report. As of May 2018, developer [SafetyCulture](#) secured \$60m in its series C funding, with plans to progress iAuditor further.

## **Site Audit Pro**

From a construction perspective, this [app](#) can be used to take photographs as part of a site survey and it allows you to create a professional-looking report quickly.

## **Photography**

The camera on your mobile device is amazing. All current models on the market are as good as any point-and-shoot digital camera you might have owned 5 years ago. What's more, there are some clever apps that work with it to peel away layers of your workflow.

Marking up images is generally native to iOS, Android and various specific smartphone models with a stylus such as a Samsung. Using iOS, I access the functionality from any image in the camera roll; while this is limited, it's still the mark-up tool I use most often. But you can at least annotate an image with your finger and email it straight away.

Another powerful way to provide further locational context for a third party is by using 360-degree images, whether this means showing someone a site using your own device or emailing them a link to open and have a look around. Google offers its own dedicated photo app called Street View, which allows you to stitch together 360-degree images quickly, while Android's OS offers a native facility for doing so.

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### **Further information**

- Related competencies include [Data management](#)
- This feature is taken from the [RICS Building Surveying Journal](#) (October/November 2018)
- Related categories: [Tablet-based surveys](#) , [Successful surveying](#)