



# Still Excavating After All These Years

Automation proves the ideal solution for Missouri contractor



Eric Still has been involved in construction since working alongside his father who owned a development/construction firm in the Springfield, Missouri area in the 1990s. That gave him a taste for the work and steered him toward excavation when the elder Still retired. Today, Still Excavating tackles projects ranging from those that are moderate in scale with some as high as \$8-10 million and does so with a staff of roughly 25.

To ensure that their crews could function as efficiently as possible, the company invested early on in a GNSS-based solution, specifically, a Topcon HiPer Lite receiver, which has since been upgraded several times. That move alone, said owner Eric Still, streamlined the time- and labor-intensive staking process.

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## Company

Still Excavating, Inc.  
Springfield, Missouri

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## Project

Earthmoving/grading projects  
Various southern Missouri locations

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## Topcon Solutions

[MC-Max Excavator solution](#)

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## Topcon Dealer

Ozark Laser & Shoring  
Springfield, Missouri

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"My dad bought that base and rover in 2000," he said. "We were doing a project at Lake of the Ozarks and learned that it could streamline our workflow. At the time, a staffing shortage impacted our ability to get staking done. Adding the GPS component to our workflow allowed us to bring the required staking in-house, which, in turn, reduced the time and money spent waiting on an outside surveyor's availability. We didn't eliminate surveyors, but we sure did reduce our reliance upon them."

Always looking for ways to improve their customers' operations, the team at Ozark Laser & Shoring presented Eric Still with a look at the possibilities automating his excavator could offer.

"Eric does a lot of design/build work in the Branson, Missouri area — work for which the specs are seemingly always changing," said Rodney Hunt, Ozark's machine control trainer. "For a company to succeed in that kind of environment, they must be able to adapt on the fly. We felt that equipping his Case 160 excavator with the newest Topcon MC-Max automation solution, would allow them to do that and a whole lot more."



Hunt's assessment did not need much time to prove itself, as one of Still's first jobs using the new solution presented a range of challenges.

"At that time, working an upscale development on a steep slope in the southern part of the state, we needed to create multi-level pads for basements," said Still. "Doing things in the traditional way would involve constant instrument setup, movement, and re-checking. With the automated solution, however, we could dig one level, step it down, dig the second, step it down, and so on — it was amazingly fast and accurate. Those five pads, which would have normally taken us a week or better to do, were done in 2½ days. That definitely sold me on the system."

The solution that so decisively won over Eric Still, Topcon MC-Max Excavator, is designed to allow the operator to perform a number of job site functions, including that of surveyor, operator and grade checker. And the platform does so while remaining truly user-friendly and intuitive, according to Cole Rains, one of Still's foremen and primary operators.



"I didn't have any GPS-type experience when I started here, right out of school," he said. "But, after only a couple hours, I had a real comfort level with the system — it was very easy to learn."

By anyone's standards, the improvement in productivity the company has seen is impressive. According to Eric Still, they've been consistently 25% to 30% faster with machine control than on work done without it. "That's a significant uptick that saves both us and our customers money."

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The advantages provided by the MC-X platform extend to the realm of safety as well. According to Hunt, situations in which it is necessary to put a worker into a ditch with a rover – doing grade checks or gathering as-built data, for example – can be all but eliminated.

"Simply by using the tooth of the bucket, Eric's crews can now shoot their as-builts from the cab; MC-X makes that possible – easy, in fact," said Hunt. "Anytime you take a man out of the ditch, you are enhancing safety. That's a huge positive for the operation."

Still's satisfaction with the automated excavator solution was so impressive that they recently began testing the system on a larger machine, a Case 300.

"I have all the confidence we will be as satisfied with MC-Max on the 300 as we are with the 160," he said. "Even though most of our work is negotiated, when we do bid a job, we can be extremely competitive, knowing that our machine control solutions – we also have Topcon machine control on our Case 1150M dozers – provide a 'cushion' no one else has. In this business, it's always better to be a leader rather than a follower and it's kind of nice to be there right now."

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A [full-length version](#) of this story is on the Topcon website.



Visit the [Topcon YouTube channel](#) to watch video on the [MC-Max Excavator technology](#) featured in this TAW.

