Webcor drywall finishing robot

IMPLEMENTED 2018–2022 · CONSTRUCTION AND PROPERTY · US · BAND D · CLAIMED ONLY
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Webcor, a US contractor that does its own drywall work, piloted Canvas's drywall finishing robot on several projects. On one project the supplier's case study reports a 34% shorter finishing cycle, but the robot suited only about 15% of the work.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

AI and automation used: Semi-autonomous drywall finishing robot using a vision system and laser scanning (Canvas).

Implemented: 2018–2022. Grade: band D, Task support, Claimed only.

Headline result, as reported: Robot finished drywall at Newark Civic Center with a 34% cut in cycle time, but fitted only about 15% of the work, by Webcor's account (2021)

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 3 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

Webcor. US general contractor that self-performs trades including drywall, and a union contractor, per ENR. Canvas block: 4. Operations and process. Also 5. People and skills.

Business challenge

The challenge. Drywall finishing is repetitive and physically demanding, and Webcor's vice president of strategic innovation says it has hardly changed in 30 to 50 years. Skilled labour is hard to find, and work at height adds risk.

How it was addressed. Webcor piloted Canvas, a robotic arm on a 17-foot scissor lift that sprays joint compound and sands walls to a Level 5 finish, run by workers on site. The robot uses a

Who implemented it

Canvas (Equipment or robot maker): Supplied the robot and trained partner contractors to run it.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: T9 AI in physical systems. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Canvas, Canvas Finishing System.

Where it was built in: A robotic arm on a 17-foot scissor lift, run by workers on site; it scans the room and an operator on a tablet sets where to spray and the thickness. No building model is loaded in advance.

What changed

Before: tapers mix, spray and sand by hand, often at height. After, on suitable walls: the robot sprays and sands while workers stay at ground level and do final touch-ups. At Newark it suited only about 15% of the work. [1] [2] [3]

What it cost

Not reported

What it saved

Newark Civic Center, per the Canvas case study relayed by Webcor and Construction Dive: 34% shorter cycle time for a Level 5 finish and 99.9% dust recapture. Webcor's vice president said it delivered higher quality at the same cost. Labour or cost savings: Not reported. [1] [2] [3]

Governance and control

Workers operate the robot from a tablet and humans touch up its work. Safety assessment and accountable owner: Not reported.

S2 · Accountable owner · Not reported
Not reported.

A1 · Safe use · Not reported
Not reported.

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
An operator on a tablet controls where the robot sprays and how thick, and workers do final touch-ups, by the supplier's and Webcor's accounts. [3]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Not reported
Not reported.

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
Not reported.

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Not reported
Not reported.

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Level 5 finish quality: Webcor's drywall operations manager said the wall looks magnificent.

– Workers can stay at ground level because the arm reaches heights up to 17 feet.

– Webcor's vice president said it let the firm deliver higher quality at the same cost.

DID NOT

– The robot needs big, high, straight walls: at Newark it could be used for only about 15% of the work.

– It needs onsite power, per ENR.

UNPROVEN

– Cost savings at project level.

– Performance beyond the supplier's case study figures.

Timeline

May 2021 Webcor reports Newark Civic Center results and says it has piloted Canvas for three years [1]

Jan 2022 Webcor named among the first contractors training their own staff to run the Canvas robot [3]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: D, Task support. Proof: Claimed only. Level of change: Task support.

Task support (Level 1, band D). The robot does part of one trade's task on suitable walls; crews and processes stay largely the same.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The robot works on part of the job, and fit with the building is the limit. Webcor's own account that it suited about 15% of a floor is the most useful evidence here. For a larger contractor, the transferable point is to choose work packages that suit the machine and measure results across the whole package as well as the robot's share.

1. Pick work packages that suit the machine before committing.
2. Measure results across the whole job, including the work the robot cannot do.
3. Train your own operators so the skill stays in the crew.

Evidence

Score 1 of 4. Self-reported: the contractor's own article and trade press; figures from the supplier's case study.

Evaluation method. Self-reported company figures: a supplier case study on one project, relayed

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/webcor-canvas-drywall-finishing-robot

[1] Webcor: Drywall robot gets a workout at Newark Civic Center project (May 2021)
https://www.webcor.com/webcor-articles/drywall-robot-gets-a-workout-at-newark-civic-center-project

[2] Construction Dive: Drywall finishing robot saves time, prevents injuries (June 2021)
https://www.constructiondive.com/news/drywall-finishing-robot-saves-time-prevents-injuries/601183/

[3] ENR: More contractors see benefits of drywall finishing robot (January 2022)
https://enr.com/articles/53423-more-contractors-see-benefits-of-drywall-finishing-robot

Webcor website: https://www.webcor.com

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