

Facilities Management Software

Making technology work for you

By JONATHAN TYLER

Hotel and Tourism operators, due to the very nature of their industry, continue to strive for excellence in facility standards, customer service and to maintain their competitive advantage. Jonathan Tyler, Managing Director of Service Works Global, outlines the business benefits of FM software in maximising the contribution made by building managers toward overall profitability, and maintaining that competitive edge.

While the Hotel and Tourism sector continues to grow at a rapid rate, competition between operators remains high and all stakeholders face increased pressure on profits. Building owners are looking to maximise their returns, while operators must maintain the quality of buildings and services to ensure occupancy rates meet target expectations.

These demands impact directly on building managers and engineers, who are constantly challenged to reduce operational costs, maximise room availability through effective maintenance procedures, ensure compliance with statutory requirements and deliver sound capital expenditure and refurbishment programmes.

More and more building managers are turning to computer-aided facilities management (CAFM) systems for help. This is because FM software will have a direct and immediate impact on operational efficiency, service quality and reliability, and assist in with legal and compliancy obligations.

With the role of the Building Manager now being so diverse, software has become an increasingly valuable tool in supporting the management of resources and activities. It provides effective and efficient tracking, auditing, control, budgeting, forecasting, scheduling and management of assets, services and materials.

While the quality and features of CAFM systems available in Australia vary greatly, most experienced software providers, including my own, will spend time with you to understand your requirements in detail before making recommendations about implementation options.

Asset Management

Better management of assets, including analyse of information relating to reliability, servicing and repair, has a significant effect on a property's profitability. Good CAFM software will monitor equipment performance and will highlight the most cost-effective method of maintaining an asset; annual maintenance, call-out, or complete replacement. Utilising this information, the software can calculate lifecycle costs, produce detailed reports and track warranty expiry dates.

Furthermore, an integrated materials / spares module can produce financial cost savings in the management of the inventory, so that the correct amount of essential spares are held and valuable cash is not tied up in over-stocking. Early disposal of obsolete stock also reduces stock holding costs.

Monitoring Contractor Performance

Improved control over sub-contractor performance is another instance where cost savings can be achieved. Systems can monitor contractor performance against their contractual



obligations and even offer an inbuilt escalation facility that can be used to prompt a contractor, invoke penalty clauses, and make appropriate calculations.

When the maintenance contract is due for renewal, having detailed performance information readily available ensures that best value is achieved for outsourced contract renewal. For time and materials contracts, electronic information gives the capability to compare in advance the rates and call-out charges of different contractors. It is also possible to use the system to determine the most effective maintenance method, as well as the most cost efficient contractor.

Systems can also automatically reconcile the job back to the contractors invoice, so that any discrepancies can be quickly identified and rejected. Furthermore, CAFM software can be used to ensure that the correct charges are applied for call out, mileage and labour. Better information results in more accurate job costing.

Maintenance Scheduling

A CAFM system can be used to implement an effective planned preventative maintenance (PPM) schedule, which can:

- Extend the life of assets;
- Maintain the legal compliance of essential safety measure systems such as fire protection; and,
- Improve efficiency of core systems such as heating, ventilation, and air conditioning.

By computerising the PPM schedule, it is often possible to reduce the amount of expenditure on planned maintenance and to optimise maintenance intervals, resulting in a more accurate plan. When PPM information is held within an electronic diarised system it is possible to co-ordinate reactive events with planned maintenance events, so that contractors can complete both planned and reactive jobs in one visit.

Centralisation and Control

Centralisation of activities, such as help desk calls, work order processing and distribution, budget management and SLA monitoring, can result in a marked reduction in administration costs, while the resulting central repository of knowledge offers the building manager improved budgetary control and accurate forecasting of building services.

Good CAFM systems use technology that will provide automated contractor selection and notification, which generates additional savings through improved efficiency and responsiveness. Work orders can be sent via e-mail or over the Web.

New systems typically operate on a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) connected to a central server via a standard GPRS mobile phone connection. My own company offers a version of our software for PocketPC devices, which enjoys the added advantage of being always on, without the need for the user to connect to the Web. The result is that on-site field staff can access data and log jobs in real time and on-site.

Centralisation also means there should be no duplication of jobs. The correct contractor is invariably sent to the right job, while the facility or building manager has the ability to monitor busy periods and plan accordingly. The net result is a more responsive and efficient maintenance service.

Legal Compliance

It goes without saying that the penalties for non-compliance with statutory obligations for health and safety can be massive. Building owners and manager have a direct responsibility to their tenants and guests to ensure risk such as asbestos and the effective maintenance of fire equipment, are reported, monitored and managed according to national or regional guidelines.

CAFM software is ideal for implementing a rigorous health and safety test schedule, so that the environment complies with legislation and that regular risk assessments are carried out and recorded. A select few CAFM software systems, including our own, provide fully integrated and auditable risk management tools for recording, measuring and monitoring asbestos and related risks.

Integration with Property Management

Such examples may demonstrate some of the ways in which CAFM software can be used to improve the management of the

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building services and contribute to a property's bottom line, but that's only half the story. Premium CAFM software integrate services and property / bookings management systems that create a more effective and comprehensive enterprise-wide solution. This kind of technology is proving invaluable because it gives hotel and serviced apartment operators the power take centralised control of all aspects of their property portfolio – large or small.

The underlying principle at work here is that the money spent on building management typically represents only a relatively small proportion of the overall operating budget, but poorly managed building services have a disproportionate impact on overall profitability. In the Hotel and Tourism sector, experience shows it makes no sense to cut corners and ignore the business benefits of using software to improve the quality and reliability of a building, its equipment and fittings, and most importantly, to maintain that competitive edge. ■

About Service Works Global

Service Works Global is a leading provider of facilities and property management software, consultancy and support, with offices in Melbourne (T: 03 9836 7880), and London. QFM, its flagship facilities and building management application, is used to manage over 10,000 properties worldwide. Visit www.swg.com or email info@swg.com.

