



meeting room

ROOM BOOKING SOFTWARE MEETS FM DEMANDS

Office space is an expensive commodity. Along with salaries, occupancy costs are typically one of the largest outgoings for many organisations. Meeting and conference rooms, equipped with state-of-the-art technology and expensive office furniture, are costly resources, yet a large majority of businesses do not possess a clear understanding of how their shared space is being utilised. Whilst most businesses occupy more space than they need for the size of their workforce, the typical office continues to encounter day-to-day issues of double booked meeting and conference rooms.

Office workers across multiple sectors will identify with the frustrations of having to host impromptu meetings in informal areas, because all meeting areas were booked, only to walk past an empty room, which had been reserved as part of a long-lapsed block booking. Managers are accustomed to hearing staff complaining that they are unable to find an available room in which to meet with clients. Even worse, a significant proportion of organisations faced with a lack of resource availability within their own offices are forced to rely on the use of external facilities, incurring additional costs for the business.

Clearly this has a significant impact on operational efficiency and, more importantly, the bottom line. As organisations become acutely aware of the need to look at every aspect of their facilities budget, it is vital that they are able to leverage one of their largest assets, the office space that they occupy, by eliminating the underuse and mismanagement of shared meeting spaces.

Modern Workplace Technology

So how can companies improve their utilisation rates? Supporting an evolving workforce with changing business requirements is a challenge for facility managers. They must have an accurate understanding of current meeting room utilisation to allow them to anticipate future needs. Facilities departments need to be able to

ensure that shared spaces are used cost-effectively and that when not in use, meeting rooms are closed down to support energy efficiency strategies. Without the correct tools in place, this task becomes virtually impossible.

This is where room booking technology comes into play. Room booking tools provide an intuitive, accessible means for organisations to enable staff to book, cancel or reschedule meeting or conference room facilities and resources. The software allows organisations to take a tighter grip on the management of meeting room facilities and reduce underuse. Outlook integration also helps people organise attendance at meetings.

Additional services, such as catering and audiovisual equipment, can be reserved, with associated costs being automatically invoiced to the relevant department. In the event of a meeting being cancelled, attendees are notified, the space is freed up for others to use and all associated services are cancelled, eliminating the common problem and often overlooked cost of unwanted catering.

In a large organisation, this can deliver significant operational savings, as Rob Stone, General Manager of Service Works Australia explains: "One of our large international clients was incurring annual costs of over \$65,000 for unused catering, as a result of meeting organisers failing to notify the Catering or Operations teams. The implementation of our room bookings software, QFM, instantly



eliminated this unnecessary expense, because in the event of a meeting being cancelled, the system automatically notifies the relevant parties, resulting in any associated catering or other services being cancelled.”

Automatic cross-charging and invoicing functionality and in-built reporting tools inherent in room booking software such as QFM enable businesses to accurately report on and analyse meeting room usage and associated departmental costs, which in turn supports strategic decisions on whether to maintain, expand, change or divest specific meeting spaces.

Self Service

Many organisations have already embraced room booking technology and are starting to move away from central helpdesks to “self service” room booking solutions, whereby the room booking system is available to staff via their corporate intranet or over the web. Hierarchies can be set, allowing restrictions to be flexibly imposed based upon staff seniority or geographic location.

Rob Stone explains, “Technology can transform the way offices manage their shared space. Modern web-based room bookings tools are highly accessible; any employee with the appropriate authority can readily access the system via a web portal or intranet. Because the system is so accessible, staff are encouraged to use it, and the outcome is a significant increase in meeting room utilisation. Service Works’ customers typically report a 30% increase in meeting room utilisation as a result of implementing room booking software.”

Integration

Looking at the wider picture for facility managers, eradicating the duplication of information can deliver significant operational efficiencies. An integrated room booking and CAFM (Computer Aided Facilities Management) system provides facility managers with full visibility of any outstanding maintenance tasks, allowing the booking of meeting rooms to be restricted in the event of maintenance being required. This can also apply to fixed or floating equipment relating to a booking, for example ensuring that a broken projector cannot be reserved for a meeting until repairs are complete.

A further level of convergence may be achieved by linking room booking software with electronic signage technology. Meeting details including times, meeting hosts and guests are displayed on signage tools located outside meeting rooms, allowing individual employees to view when rooms are available and leaving a professional

impression for visitors. Should a meeting finish early, employees can “check out” of the meeting room via the touch screen, leaving the room free for others. Most touch screen devices also offer the capacity to book available rooms in situ.

Many software vendors additionally offer a range of integrated booking management tools, such as car parking and visitor management solutions, allowing organisations to extend the capacity of the system from a room booking tool to an operation-wide resource booking solution. For large corporate offices, the benefits of an integrated booking system are tangible; they deliver a streamlined and professional visitor experience, whilst supporting strict corporate health, safety and security policies.



Supporting Energy Efficiency

Room booking software can also play a key role in corporate energy efficiency strategies. It is becoming increasingly commonplace for booking management software to be linked with third party building management systems (BMS) to leverage significant cost and energy savings. Information from the room booking tool is fed into the BMS, which automatically identifies when meeting rooms are being used. Via triggers and alarms within the BMS, heating, AV and lighting are automatically switched off when meeting rooms are empty, helping organisations to minimise

energy usage and reduce utilities costs.

Looking ahead

The past 18 months have seen businesses examine costs more closely than ever before. Whilst Australia has largely avoided the economic crises that have befallen other countries, no-one can accurately predict where the future will take us. Business leaders are relying on technology to provide a snapshot of how businesses are performing today and drive future plans. Meeting room booking software is no exception.

As Rob Stone concludes: “Offices must be able to anticipate changing operational needs and provide an environment that delivers both functionally and financially for the organisation. Our clients have typically seen an increase in their meeting room utilisation rates from around 60% to over 80% as a result of implementing QFM. It has enabled them to accurately identify how their buildings can be used more effectively, equipping them with the necessary information to make positive changes. Technology creates a fantastic opportunity to demonstrate the strategic role of the workplace.”