



Mindful of the future

FMs are inundated with advice on how to choose the right CAFM system for their organisation. How to get the most out of the system they do have. Issues of installation, training, maintenance and a hundred other things. FMJ looks at the future of CAFM, with technology developing so rapidly, what will facilities managers of 10 years time have to deal with?

The technology, software and gadgets available to FMs has evolved almost beyond recognition since the first tentative attempts to embrace them. Mobile devices, the cloud and even the internet have revolutionised the way FMs go about their jobs.

But with technology advancing as fast as it is, is there a danger that technology might not actually be able to keep up with itself? In short, do CAFM systems now have a much shorter shelf life?

Gary Watkins, CEO of FM software expert Service Works Group doesn't think so. "The revolution in mobile technology has transformed the way in which we operate on a daily basis – both at home and work." He says "We expect to be able to interact with systems and receive up to the minute information on the move. This trend is reflected in FM and, coupled with rise of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), has spearheaded the rise in mobile CAFM apps. These offer facilities managers vastly improved levels of flexibility and control in terms of the tasks they can manage on a day to day basis. Using a tablet or smart phone, a facilities manager can log or report on a job, at any time, from any location, and can be alerted to

issues whilst on the move – dramatically improving productivity. They can view real-time reports or KPI performance at the touch of a button to drive service levels.

Cloud technology is being embraced by facilities managers, allowing web based, portal driven access to CAFM software, ensuring universal system accessibility and providing a highly scalable solution that can grow in line with their business.

In turn, CAFM providers are continuing to develop their solutions to offer cross platform, integrated functionality for facilities, property and space management, ensuring that the software evolves with the demands of 21st century businesses."

Ben Lerner, planet operations director at Qube Global Software agrees. "It's important to choose a CAFM system based on modern technologies from a provider that works with its clients to constantly develop its software in line with the latest technological advancements. I would argue this is primarily a service provider differentiator – it's about choosing a supplier which consistently adapts and updates, makes good use of emerging technologies and

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acts on longer term trends.”

All well and good, but is CAFM agile enough to support the business of the future?

“A good CAFM system is scalable, configurable and easily adapted to meet every changing requirement,” Lerner explains. “At Qube Global Software, the business processes and consultancy services undertaken by our in house market experts ensure that the evolving business needs of our clients are always met.”

“Driven by cloud technology, the Software as a Service (SaaS) model has seen rapid adoption in recent years,” Watkins adds. “This provides a highly agile solution which allows businesses to outsource the management of their FM software and benefit from rapid implementation with no capital outlay.

“Also with sustainability likely to remain a key concern for businesses of the future, CAFM offers the agility to support smart building management. CAFM will continue to enable the workplace to become more joined up and automated, whilst reducing energy consumption.”

Nick Masters, sales consultant at Topdesk also backs this apparently universal view. “Facilities management is based on a core set of processes that are unlikely to change. The technology itself, on the other hand, is ever changing and in order to reflect this updates to current systems will be needed, but CAFM will certainly be relevant.”

“Topdesk is always working diligently to combine new technology advancements with feedback from customers and industry thought leaders, guaranteeing that the software is consistently able to cater to the needs of facilities managers of the present – as well as the future.”

THE STATUS QUO

So if industry experts are completely confident of CAFM’s future, where do they stand on the existing issues with the

systems? How and when will these be resolved? Who should own CAFM in an organisation, the client or the service provider?

“For the client, CAFM provides the ability to monitor service delivery levels in real-time, to improve the performance of contractors, optimise service quality and increase cost efficiency,” Watkins says. “For the service provider, it allows them to manage personnel and tasks, and to assign resource based upon work schedules and operatives’ skills in order to maintain high quality service levels for customers. The ability to submit and review quotations for work online streamlines administration for the service provider and improves budgetary control for the client by enabling them to select the most cost effective quote. It is therefore imperative that both parties take ownership and play an active role in the management of FM software, in order to deliver maximum benefit for all stakeholders.”

Alright, but who actually knows and understands CAFM best? Is it FMs? Procurement? IT?

“Ultimately FMs will know best what they want from a CAFM system but all have important roles to play,” Lerner explains. “For example, IT needs to be fully on board to ensure the solution meets overall business objectives. Ultimately, it will be IT and other team leaders who have the wider sight of an organisation’s commercial and strategic outlook and it requires collaboration among various teams to ensure that the business systems in place are the most effective for the company’s ultimate growth objectives.”

Jon Clark, sales manager at FSI, developers of the Concept Evolution web-CAFM solution, also has plenty of interest to say on where CAFM might be headed.

“I think that organisations that already have a CAFM system in place realise the benefits of constantly backing and improving their system. Training people in the correct use of the system, the most effective ways of managing and using them.

“Proper training, specifically designed for an organisation can be the difference between a system that is properly used and one which just goes through the motions. It is easy to differentiate between organisations that constantly strive to improve and get the best out of their software and those that simply “use” them.

“People are also no longer just seeing their CAFM system as some giant database for storing masses of data. FMs are learning to really get the intelligent information and solutions that these systems are able to deliver. They are constantly improving their businesses by using CAFM to its true potential.”

THE POTENTIAL

But what is its true potential? In the daily life of an FM, is CAFM that much more than just an asset management and maintenance system? The answer, according to Clark at least, is an emphatic yes.

“CAFM software does far, far more than simply record things and produce lists. When used correctly it can provide vital information that allows you to make the right decisions for your organisation. It can help drive down operational costs and evaluate the performances of teams, units and areas. The increase in connectivity provided through apps, mobile devices and the cloud mean these benefits can be felt by far more people than just the resident FM.”

Ben Lerner is equally sure about CAFM’s future role within FM, but stresses that it needs to maintain its versatility. “Every organisation has vastly different requirements – the key to a good system is that it can be adapted and configured easily to meet any of their environments.

“Adaptations can be in the form of system configurations, deployment methods (such as Cloud or on premise) and/or pricing structures such as SaaS or a licence fee. Ultimately, the capability to adapt is down to a strong system and implementation staff with considerable expertise and experience in all areas of the market.”

IRREPLACEABLE?

But is CAFM truly irreplaceable? Couldn’t the uses and roles described above be fulfilled elsewhere?

“CAFM provides essential, real time insight into performance in a way that traditional paper reporting is unable to do, Gary Watkins says. “Dashboard reporting allows FMs to gain an up to the minute snapshot of their team’s activity and monitor performance in line with SLA’s to meet the demands of their customers. It allows them to compare KPIs for one building, site or region to another, to drive business performance.

“CAFM software enables facilities managers to plan budgets for lifecycle costing, equipment replacement and refurbishments. It provides the ability to optimise energy consumption, sustainability and space management, helping FMs to understand how often facilities are used and identify the optimum workspace solutions, such as dedicated versus hot desks.”

So there you have it, if there was any doubt in your mind that CAFM was here to stay for many more years to come, dispel it right know. Computer aided facilities management systems might not be the fresh, hip technology anymore, but it is certainly willing and able to take advantage of the latest developments to improve its use to facilities managers within all organisations. **FMJ**

