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7 Ways Facilities Managers Can Become More Strategic

By LORA MAYS

According to Gartner, managing the facilities life cycle is second only to people as the largest expense item in enterprises. With facilities and asset management consuming the bulk of their non-payroll expenses, it's no surprise that organizations typically view facilities management solely as a cost center. But, facilities management teams still can play a more strategic role in the success of any business.

Today, organizations are increasingly focused on reducing waste—of both revenues and natural resources—and often establish goals around corporate and social responsibility. At the same time, today's more advanced facilities management software, including integrated workplace management systems (IWMS) and computer-aided facilities management (CAFM) systems, offer opportunities to deliver significant time, cost, and energy savings that align with and support these goals.

Strategic Opportunities

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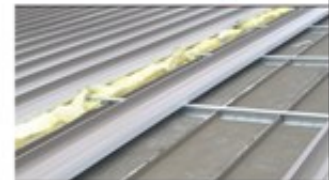
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tracking asset inspections and maintenance in spreadsheets, the daily operations of typical facilities management teams offer vast opportunities to increase efficiencies. Automating many of these types of tasks through a single system can quickly reduce the hours spent on manual processes. With time savings gained from new operational efficiencies, facilities managers can repurpose employees for higher value tasks that ultimately lead to cost savings.

Another consideration: Buildings consume up to 40 percent of the world's electricity, much of which is inefficiently utilized or even wasted. Many companies recognize this and are attempting to reduce costs and become more socially responsible by reducing energy waste. Besides the inherent cost savings, this "green" approach has far-reaching benefits, including stronger community relations, and even an improved ability to attract and retain employees. In fact, a

2012 study by Net Impact and Rutgers University showed that 35 percent of the college students in the study's survey said they would take a 15 percent pay cut to work for a company committed to corporate social responsibility (CSR).

While it may seem unusual to think of facilities management as playing a strategic role, it no longer has to. Following are seven ways that your facilities management team can use modern tools and approaches to save time, decrease costs, and support sustainable, energy-efficient practices—effectively elevating your team's role from a mere cost center to a driver of corporate success.

7 Ways to Save Time, Costs, and Energy

1. Move to the cloud – Managing facilities using on-premise systems requires internal IT hardware, software, and support, which translates into more costs and more assets and people to manage. Today, an increasing number of facilities and asset management software solutions are available in the "cloud" as Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions. The SaaS model offers two key advantages:

- The software vendor manages the software and upgrades;
- The software can be accessed anytime, anywhere via the Internet.

Moving to a cloud-based system takes you out of the business of managing software, allowing you to focus on managing facilities more efficiently and effectively, and giving you the ability to communicate directly and securely with your vendors and customers through a single, centralized system.

2. Embrace customer self-service – Whether a light bulb needs changing or a chiller has gone down, manually handling service requests is time consuming. It often requires multiple full-time employees or even dedicated call centers to take and record phone requests, research issues, and update tenants or employees on the status of service requests.

Providing an online self-service portal allows tenants or occupants to enter their own service requests, view the status of their existing requests, and receive automated confirmation and status messages. This approach has the following benefits:

Allows you to respond more quickly to maintenance requests, which helps to improve overall customer satisfaction;

Reduces the amount of time spent

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managing service requests, saving time and costs, and giving your team more time to find and address issues before your customers do;

Avoids prolonged periods for facilities and asset maintenance issues to go unaddressed, saving time, money, and (especially in the case of electricity-seeping assets) energy.

3. Automate your work order process – From dispatching work orders via phone or paper, to entering labor hours on time cards, manually processing jobs is inefficient, wastes paper, and adds no real value to the role of facilities management.

Using a facilities management system, you can automatically dispatch jobs from your customer self-resources. Processing your work orders through an automated system has the added benefit of capturing work order data that can be used to look for trends that may help you to discover maintenance needs before your customers do.

The same system can then deliver process steps to engineers to ensure work is done consistently and efficiently, and allow the field team to provide updates directly into the system. As work is

completed, engineers can enter their hours directly into the system using appropriate, pre-configured billing and payroll codes. This cuts down on paper usage, and allows managers to quickly review and validate hours, and accounting departments to quickly pay workers and bill customers.

4. Integrate your work order processing and billing – Manually managing work orders means that from start to finish, data from every job must be entered by a person — often into multiple systems, such as the work order system and the accounting system. This is time consuming and may result in errors such as inaccurate charges to tenants or occupants.

Capturing details of a project in a single facilities management system that integrates with your accounting system not only eliminates the need to enter information more than once, it also ensures that each work order and its associated costs are entered into the accounting and billing systems as work orders are completed. This gives you and your accounting team more accurate visibility into costs as they happen, and helps to ensure

that you do not miss billing opportunities with your customers.

5. Move beyond spreadsheets for preventive maintenance and repair vs. replace decisions – When it comes to the ongoing care of your facilities and assets, tracking inspection records, planned maintenance, and other scheduled activities in spreadsheets is time consuming and cumbersome. Yet, properly maintaining your assets is one of the best ways to reduce energy seepage.

Moving your preventive maintenance data and processes into an automated system helps to ensure that equipment is inspected and maintained on a regular, precise schedule with consistent process steps — no matter who does the work — which ultimately extends the life of your assets, leading to decreased reactive work orders, lower asset failure rates, and increased cost and energy savings. Sophisticated systems allow you to schedule maintenance based on specific dates, number of days since last inspection, or asset usage, and send your team alerts as planned maintenance approaches.

In addition to preventive maintenance, tracking asset repair history, priority of

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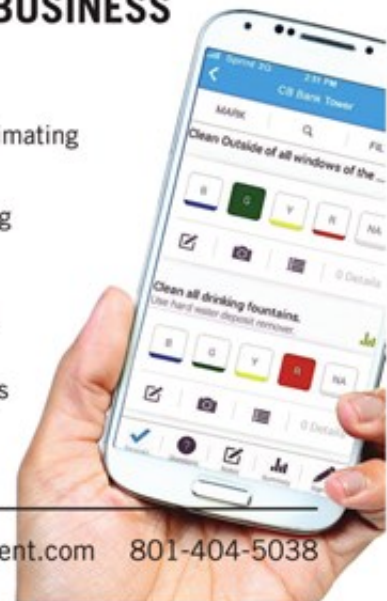
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each repair, and estimated costs associated with repairs and replacement is too critical to cost and energy savings to juggle through spreadsheets. Moving asset information into a single system that includes location, cost history, warranty information, and other vital asset documentation allows you to access information about assets more efficiently, and make more informed repair-versus-replace decisions.

6. Connect with your vendors – When your vendors are not directly linked with your work order system, your team can waste a great deal of time managing purchase orders, issuing work orders, and communicating back and forth with vendors. In addition, it can be difficult to collect customer feedback about vendors after work is completed.

But, working with vendors can be as seamless as working with your own staff. Your facilities management system should permit you to set up vendors as part of your resource pool, automatically issue work orders and billing, and allow vendors to securely enter updates about their work orders directly into the system. It also should let you automatically send

satisfaction surveys to customers after each vendor job is completed to help inform your decision about whether to continue using a vendor.

7. Access your data, and use it – Housing your data and processes in multiple files and systems makes it difficult and time-consuming to get a complete view of your assets and activities. This limits your ability to analyze trends and make informed decisions. And, when it comes down to it, you can't effectively manage what you can't measure.

One of the most important aspects of moving data and processes into a facilities management system is the ability to access data about all of your activities and assets from one system, giving you the accurate, efficient reporting that helps drive your decisions. This type of reporting allows you to watch for key indicators of problems, such as an increase in work orders and work backlogs that may indicate that a particular building might have problems that are overloading staffers, or an increase in energy usage that may indicate potential asset maintenance needs.

Your facilities management system should allow you to see those key indica-

tors in a summary view and then easily drill down into your data to uncover the source of the problem and determine the best course of action to resolve it quickly.

Where to go from Here?

Implementing the types of time, cost, and energy saving measures suggested in this paper is a huge step toward contributing to business goals. As you implement or expand your use of facilities management software, be sure to take advantage of having all of your data in one system: Not only can you use the information for continuous improvements, you also can use it to demonstrate time, cost, and energy savings from your team that align with and support business goals.

Build these ideas into your ongoing plans, and you'll be well on your way to demonstrating how facilities management can play a more strategic role in corporate success. **BSM**

Lora Mays is a product marketing manager at Accruent, which provides real estate and facilities management solutions to more than 4,000 customers in 120 countries.

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