The Future of Computer Aided Facilities Management Software

Facilities Management departments today are faced with an ongoing challenge to provide the same high levels of facilities support but with reduced budgets. In order to meet this challenge and the ever changing needs of users within the FM community, CAFM systems need incorporate the very latest technology in order to provide maximum efficiency.

The IFMA describes Facilities Management as "A profession that encompasses multiple disciplines to ensure functionality of the built environment by integrating **people, place, process and technology**." Currently the majority of existing CAFM systems only manage the physical location (place) and processes via technology. However, in order to fully fit the definition, software providers will need to start putting **people** first.

Consumers are becoming more technically aware in their day-to-day lives and are beginning to expect the same intuitive technology in their working environment. They want convenience and expect more choices to make tasks easier by being able to interact directly with the built environment. This means that future CAFM systems need to be fully bespoke, highly flexible and focused on the needs of the user rather than just the building infrastructure.

Integration

Integrated systems offer greater efficiency with cross-functional data processing and sharing. Integration increases reporting accuracy, task management control and system maintenance efficiency.

Stand-alone software systems restrict users' ability to access a centralised view of all essential data. Simplified cross-referencing of related information allows for improved efficiency and greater reporting accuracy by having an integrated view of company operations. Integrated data allows live status updates fed by the most comprehensive and up-to-date information.

Mobile

Mobile technology gives individuals the ability to work flexibly and remotely. With the prevalence of larger multi-site hospitals, mobile is becoming an essential tool for live reporting and management information updates. Mobile usage is going to continue to grow with organisations increasingly employing FM contractors who require flexibility and direct reporting accuracy. Mobile works in conjunction with 'self-service' help-desks, where users can raise their own maintenance tasks and track ongoing task status. It provides complete flexibility for users to work in a way that fits in with their working requirements and departmental SLA's.

Cloud

Cloud computing has already become an essential part of the way in which users interact with software, with the majority of specialist business and public software applications being available through SaaS (Software as a Service), Cloud based contracts.

Cloud computing has widened the scope of technology available to users and has changed the way people work and where they work. System access via the cloud enables fast application access and maintenance with the ability to access information at any location. It speeds up implementation as software providers are able to quickly access applications for faster upgrades and error resolution without any unnecessary delays or the need for on-site visits.

Cloud computing offers complete flexibility of use including automatic updates, better collaboration, communication and document control. Not only this, hardware costs and the need for physical space are also reduced.

Smart Technology

FM systems need to generate detailed, reliable business intelligence to ensure that buildings are correctly maintained and that assets are monitored to ensure maximum performance. With the advance of Smart Technology, FM systems of the future will need to adapt to be able to interact directly with buildings and assets, allowing proactive maintenance. Integrated business Intelligence tools provide invaluable, live information that can be used to improve overall customer experience and enable better informed management decision making.

Business intelligence tools that work in conjunction with active systems are key to successful CAFM software systems. Most organisations historical monitoring data can be manipulated and used to compare performance of traditional reactive and planned maintenance schedules and costs. Such comparisons can then be used to create standard asset profiles for remote monitoring.

Smart Technology need to expand outside of centralised systems to the physical building including assets and working spaces. Assets added to a system would be able to define their own planned maintenance schedules and raise reactive and planned tasks based on the condition of the asset and known lifecycle incidents. This kind of automation would not only greatly enhance efficiency but reduce overall asset maintenance costs.

It is possible that In the future, CAFM systems will be replaced by Service Delivery Platforms, an emerging trend in FM sectors globally. Service delivery platforms put the customer experience at the forefront and look to solve real problems. Using system intelligence, these platforms would be able to suggest maintenance regimes for new assets for example, based on Business Intelligence from similar assets, enabling automatic addition to the asset register.

The focus has to be on providing the most cost effective customer focused facilities management service at the lowest possible cost. By adapting a service centred approach, CAFM providers will be better equipped to provide adaptable, intuitive systems that will meet the needs of FM departments now and into the future.