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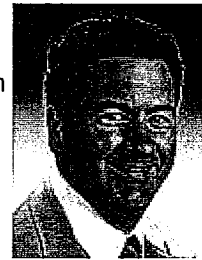
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Zen And The Art Of Facility Maintenance, Part Two Four Simple Suggestions To Simplify And Modernize Facilities

By William Hibbard PE, MBA

The facility management industry has experienced an explosion of best practices that have improved operation efficiency, reduced cost of operations, and changed the way facility managers perform their daily activities. Presented here is a list of the most influential "best practices" identified over the past year.



Computerized Maintenance Management Systems (CMMS)

The continuous evolution of wireless communication systems from Palm Pilots to Web-based software makes it difficult for a facility manager to remain in front of the wave of new technology. However, these tools can make a substantial difference to the operations of any facility management program.

A few facts recently included as part of the International Facility Management Association's (IFMA) Operations and Maintenance Benchmark Research Report only strengthen this point. As part of the typical maintenance practices performed, facility managers said that 38% continue to require their on site customers to fill out and submit work order requests on paper. While 70% use a central call center to receive work order requests, only 68% of those are set up to receive work orders electronically.

Web accessed work order systems also provide tracking and surveying for customer satisfaction. Customers can input their requests and track the status of their orders. Simplifying the communication of work order requests while continuously moving towards a paperless system is the first step towards a streamlined program.

The implementation of a paperless work order system to replace a paper work order system is the most recent innovation to the CMMS augmented program. A paperless system economizes the work order process with electronic dispatching, timekeeping, record keeping, job plans, and up-to-date equipment history. Savings are achieved by reducing the administrative time required for time sheet maintenance, work order generation, and work order assignments. It also allows field technicians to plan their assignments easily and combine assignments by location or work type, thus reducing job preparation and travel time. Best practice number one: simplify work order request communication systems. Automate and electronically track and record every work order request.

Capital Renewal And Asset Management Systems

Combining capital renewal and asset management into a single task is identified

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as an influential best practice. The initial step in the implementation of a capital renewal and asset management program is to build a comprehensive project list of capital investments for the site. The projects can then be estimated, categorized, and prioritized.

The second step is to rationalize the bottom up project list with the top down life cycle cost forecast for the particular asset. The current ages of the equipment or building component and their replacement costs can be developed and input. Once the bottom up project list and the top down life cycle forecasts are available, the system can easily model different capital investment scenarios. Based on input descriptions, these programs will develop an associated cost estimate for each project.

By selecting various projects, the facility executive can develop an annual capital budget for the site and will have the ability to prioritize projects on an on going basis right from the personal computer. Best practice number two: develop capital plans for building envelope and equipment systems based on life cycle cost information.

Procurement Of Goods And Services

By now, most facility management providers would agree that by bundling the needs of their clients to procure commonly used goods and services, they will greatly improve their buying power by leveraging costs based on economies of scale. Many organizations are slowly coming to realize two very important aspects of the procurement process. First, reverse auctioning is neither efficient nor an effective method to procure services.

The Army Corps of Engineers recently issued a report to Congress concluding that reverse auctions do not save time and typically result in higher costs, because the scope of work to obtain services was not clearly defined. Second, it is possible to maximize buying power for goods at the national level while concentrating procurement of services at the regional level.

Consumables such as lamps, air filters, and paper products, whose quality can be specified easily, are ideal for procurement at the national level. However, services such as janitorial, landscaping, snow removal, and HVAC repair tend to be owned and operated by regional suppliers. For this reason, the strength of a buyer in a particular region of the country is most desirable for the procurement of various services. Best practice number three: maximize leverage for the procurement of goods at the national level and services at the regional level.

Run Your Facility As A Business

In today's global economy, every facet of an organization's business activity is scrutinized, especially areas that are considered overhead (such as facility maintenance). In many companies, the costs associated with building maintenance are combined with manufacturing and production. In order to manage maintenance expense items, a separate ledger consisting of only those items related to building maintenance should be included.

Over the years, facility maintenance services have been considered a necessary evil in the overall business operation. Only recently have these services been recognized as a vital business activity; if managed properly, they can significantly impact an organization's bottom line. Best practice number four: separate the cost accounting for maintenance activities from core business activities and manage them as a business.

By adopting this year's best practices, a facility manager will position the firm for future cost savings. In fact, many professional facility maintenance suppliers boast immediate savings of a dollar or more per square foot based on a plan to implement the items suggested in this article. While each facility has its own

operational complexities, the common denominator for facility managers is knowing that the programs and systems implemented in each building are the best in the business.

Hibbard is director of industrial facility management for Grubb & Ellis Management Services. If you know a new best practice for the new year, send your ideas to William.Hibbard@Grubb-Ellis.com.

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