

EAM Software on the Web: Architected or Enabled?

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Technology trends are often hard to understand partly because technology vendors spend millions of marketing dollars touting their version of the trend as the best. The current interest in EAM software designed to leverage the Web is no exception. Many software vendors claim their application is either Web-architected or Web-enabled, but what does that mean? Why is it important to you?

Web-enabled

Web-enabled software comes in many forms. Most of it, however, is software that has been restructured to be launched from within a Web browser. Any client/server application can be launched in a browser using Citrix, Windows Terminal Services or a similar utility. The problem with this solution is that all it does is move the client-side management tasks to an application server. It's still client/server technology; the server is just carrying more of the load. Old headaches that might have been part of the client/server application only move, they do not disappear.

Some applications claim to be Web-based, but still require the installation of software on any PC expected to run the application. This is another form of client/server. When reviewing the technical-requirement sections of any vendor's literature, look for client-side storage requirements other than a browser. If you find any, take a closer look under the hood. Even if the application runs in a browser, you (or your IT staff) will still likely be stuck managing the software. You also take on responsibility for upgrades, patches and testing/re-certification in your environment. It's like painting the Golden Gate Bridge - it never ends. Those ongoing support costs never seem to make their way into software vendors' ROI calculations either.

Web-architected

"Web-architected" products run completely on the Internet and need only a browser on the client device. They do not contain leftover or ported client/server code. Furthermore, Web-architected applications are designed to work in the "browser world." In other words, it's not enough to just have the back-end work performed across the Web. You need a new front-end (or user interface) as well. For example, can you imagine navigating the Internet without a powerful search engine? If your EAM/CMMS solution is Web-based (i.e. designed to leverage the power of the Internet), it should be no different.

If your asset-management solution needs new back-end technology and a new user interface, the only way to get it is to start over - from scratch. This means you're looking at an entirely new application. And if you are not looking at a completely new asset-management product today, you soon will be. It's just a matter of time.

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The Internet is where most of your next applications will run, for the right reasons: cost and performance.

One of the greatest benefits to implementing a fully Web-architected application is reduced upfront costs. With Web-architected software, you don't have to pay six figures for software you never really own, or ask your IT department to purchase, support, and continually manage server(s), when all you want is the information it provides. You pay only for the service of receiving that information. You can sign up and start using an EAM/CMMS tool now, with no large investment in hardware and software – it's a service. All you need is a browser and a connection to the Internet, and you are ready to start.

The Internet changes everything

The Internet changes the way we purchase, use and support software. It opens up access to partners, colleagues and stakeholders around the world. It doesn't matter where they're located or the language they speak. You can access an Internet-based system from home, on the road – even using Palm-powered cell phones or tablet PCs. If it has a browser and an Internet connection, you should be able to use it.

Web-architected software that is hosted allows you to increase performance, reduce downtime and make your upgrades painless by removing the CMMS/EAM management responsibility from your internal IT support staff. Those tasks are the responsibility of the vendor, who employs professionals to do that, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This frees your staff to focus on the tasks you've employed them to perform, improving their performance and productivity. There are no vacations, no excuses, no other projects with higher priority to get in the way between you and the newest release of the software. You just use it, you don't have to maintain it. This is the definition of a hosted solution.

Whether you choose a Web-architected or a Web-enabled solution, you're stepping into a new world of software. Make sure it's one that offers you all the advantages the Internet should offer.

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