

More Wrench Time, Less Downtime

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The latest in preventive maintenance scheduling software and computerized maintenance management software can help manufacturers make more informed decisions when it comes to maintenance and stocking of replacement parts.

Preventive maintenance (PM) automation has been around for years, but today manufactures are taking note and making use of computerized maintenance management software (CMMS) to help them better track their maintenance efforts. Scheduling jobs; assigning personnel; and tracking inventory, costs, downtime, and required future actions can all be managed with today's CMMS. A comprehensive software package able to maintain a database of information about an organization's maintenance operation, CMMS gives manufacturers advanced functionality capabilities and the ability to utilize CMMS as an analysis tool when making business decisions. No longer the complex, large investment programs of the past, today, mid-market CMMS solutions are available for every scale of manufacturer.

"Today a much larger percentage of organizations use a CMMS program of some sort or another, even if it's only a simple spreadsheet," says Paul Lachance, President and CTO of Smartware Group, the maker of Bigfoot CMMS web-based maintenance software. "What we have witnessed over the last few years is that preventive maintenance is going past the simple automation of, say, a monthly reminder." Today, advanced CMMS functionality includes the ability to base PM on a calendar, meter reading, or a combination of the two. The ability to read data from meters – such as widgets produced, hours run, temperature, or mileage – to more intelligently remind maintenance professionals when to perform PM is a major benefit of CMMS in manufacturing facilities today.

"There are many, many ways" for a CMMS package to help a manufacturer make good business decisions, says Lachance. "Beyond the typical operational improvements made through good PM and work order management, the data created through CMMS operations produces wonderful data and analysis to aid in strong business decisions: repair versus replace, asset longevity analysis, and it identifies good equipment vendors from poor." Basing a PM schedule on meter readings versus a calendar schedule also allows manufacturers to make more efficient use of their time, and removes the risk of too frequent – or infrequent – PM while maximizing machinery uptime. PM reminders can include detailed instructions, diagrams, and documentation for maintenance technicians, and these reminders can be routed to mobile devices for technicians moving around a facility to have at hand.

Preventing A CMMS Failure

For manufacturers not yet utilizing a CMMS system beyond a basic spreadsheet, Lachance stresses that an organization “should really think through their maintenance operations goals” before investing in software. “If maintenance operations are not strong to begin with, CMMS won’t fix it.” He points out that it is critical for maintenance best practices to be addressed, and then a CMMS program matched to support them.

To choose a CMMS that best fits an organization, users should first audit existing maintenance practices in the facility, either independently or through an external consultant who can help with this process. This survey should examine a variety of factors, including the company and maintenance department structure, existing manual systems, current problem areas, the existing unplanned downtime or breakdown reporting system, and expectations for an automated maintenance program. After looking at the existing maintenance system, it’s time to decide what the organization will need from the software before looking at available CMMS packages and requesting demonstration copies.

“Try to find a CMMS partner with a flexible system that can match the needs of the organization,” he adds, “Find a system that will work at the ‘troop level,’ meaning a CMMS with a clean, easy-to-follow user interface, but that also incorporates the modern functionality necessary to grow with maintenance operations over time.” And for a CMMS program to be successful, it must be able to be implemented by everyone within an organization, from the corporate office to the technician on the shop floor. “Too often the professionals who will use the system every day are not included in the search process, which can result in implementation failures and inefficiencies.” Lachance says, “We believe the system must work well for all levels of users.”

As many as 70 percent of CMMS programs fail after implementation, most often due to a system not meeting an organization’s needs. This can be prevented by thoroughly assessing organizational needs and wants for maintenance tracking software, and by working with the software vendor to be sure the CMMS can do exactly what the organization will need it to, both now and in the future. “Speaking strictly for Smartware Group and Bigfoot CMMS users, our experience is not even close to this statistic,” says Lachance. He says that, in his opinion, failed implementations stem from several possible areas, including choosing the CMMS based only on corporate needs, expecting a CMMS to solve operational problems, and assuming a CMMS program will be up and running quickly and easily without any assistance. “This is where the hard work begins, at least at first,” Lachance says. “Go through training, involve the team, and really plan out the process.

Selecting maintenance software that will best fit the organizations is just the first step—next is training so the return on a CMMS investment can be seen as quickly as possible. “Organizations should expect training in a number of different ways,” Lachance says. Training can take the form of basic “how do I use the system” webinars, video libraries, customer support, and help files. Virtual and onsite consulting services are also available from many CMMS providers, to help with

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implementation, maintenance reorganizations, or custom development. On site training programs can be completed in as little as two days, sending manufacturers quickly on their way toward a streamlined maintenance program. "Often the barriers to successful implementation can be easily overcome with training, consulting, and more time and effort spent by users," Lachance says.

Even at its most basic, a streamlined maintenance program can produce significant results for a manufacturer, saving both time and money. "There are many ways to measure return on maintenance software investment," explains Lachance. Manufacturers who add CMMS to their maintenance programs can see improved labor efficiency and people power, reduced overtime, reduced downtime, better production capabilities, improved asset reliability and efficiency, and reduced energy consumption through better, more efficiently run equipment. Some CMMS providers also offer a complete ROI calculator to help organizations determine their expected return on a maintenance software investment. CMMS features, such as an asset lifecycle analysis tool, "can aid you in making strong business decisions," Lachance adds, "by identifying good assets from poor assets using cost, repair, and time factors."

Whatever the goals of CMMS implementation are in an organization, one of the main benefits to be gained from maintenance management software is the encouragement it brings to maintenance workers to focus on good maintenance and preventive maintenance practices. While not able to solve maintenance operations problems, Lachance says CMMS "will only make them go quicker!"

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