

CMMS: A Laser Focus

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Like many software solutions, CMMS has changed for the better and is worth another look if your maintenance department is due for a facelift.

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Before the world began clamoring for “big data,” there were industrial companies who pioneered via systems like CMMS or EAM in order to better structure their maintenance programs. Having an opportunity to make truly informed decisions due to better tracking of maintenance procedures, asset usage, breakdown costs, and efficiency of resources meant a competitive advantage, and many manufacturers found the benefits outweighed the initial investments.

The beauty of it is that, today, the need for CMMS has not diminished an iota, yet the availability of improved technology at a lower price point means the business case for CMMS is better than ever.

“ROI is what CMMS is all about,” says Rona Palmer, marketing director for eMaint, provider of completely web-based SaaS (software-as-a-service) CMMS. “A CMMS enables a laser focus on the drivers behind the cost of operations and provides actionable insights that have immediate impact.”

Harshad Shah, president of CMMS provider Eagle Technology, Inc. agrees. “Between the money that is saved on a reduced or more efficient labor force, and the money that is saved preventing machine breakage, manufacturers are recouping their costs in about a year.” In addition, explains Shah, “their equipment will last longer than ever before, which means residual savings are realized for years.”

For many manufacturers, the ROI comes from the system’s ability, at its most basic level, to keep them better organized. “Maintenance managers are measured by the extent to which they help their companies meet customer expectations, save money, and assure a safe workplace. That means extending the life of their company’s assets, reducing downtime, minimizing inventory costs, and complying with regulations,” says Palmer. “To achieve these goals, they need to make smart decisions, support them with data, and document their results. That’s virtually impossible without a CMMS that can be tailored to a company’s needs.”

According to the National Institute of Building Sciences, the system should provide for integrated processes giving the manager control over the maintenance of all facilities and maintainable equipment from acquisition to disposal. The system should also:

- Address all resources involved.

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- Maintain maintenance inventory.
- Record and maintain work history.
- Include work tasks and frequencies.
- Accommodate all methods of work accomplishment.
- Effectively interface and communicate with related and supporting systems ranging from work generation through work performance and evaluation.
- Support each customer's mission.
- Ensure communication with each customer.
- Provide feedback information for analysis.
- Reduce costs through effective maintenance planning.

From a practical standpoint, these features can create the kinds of efficiencies that both improve operations and protect the manufacturer from dangerous and costly downtime. Says Shah, "When equipment and inventory are catalogued in a database, it allows a one-stop glance at the business's assets. Warranty dates can quickly be found, owner's manuals can be electronically attached to the record, and inventory items can be located quickly."

Labor

As manufacturers continue to struggle to compete based on labor costs, being able to manage their labor force more effectively can create major long term benefits. "Employees and their labor rates can be entered into the system, and then they can be assigned to work orders by their craft or department," explains Shah. In addition, labor scheduling can be viewed on a chart to assist supervisors in shifting resources where needed to make the most out of every day. This quick response to real time data is where modern CMMS can really provide a benefit.

An additional yield as it relates to labor, says Palmer, is that "implementation transforms maintenance programs and managers from perceived overhead expenses into critical contributors to profitability." In short: the focus can be transferred to the ability for maintenance to keep equipment running longer and more effectively, thus saving the company money through their efforts.

Functionality In Real-Time

Earlier this year, David Berger, Director of Western Management Consultants, discussed some key mistakes buyers make in the CMMS purchase process in his article "Ten Pitfalls To Avoid When Selecting A CMMS/EAM" (www.mbtmag.com - January, 2013). According to Berger, one big mistake is viewing a CMMS as "not much more than an electronic data depository."

Berger stressed that modern systems offer so much more functionality on a real-time basis, and that businesses shouldn't undermine the effectiveness of this access by using CMMS as simply an archive used for producing reports on an ad hoc basis.

One of the ways users can really take advantage of the newer, more dynamic features of a CMMS is to review the available deployment options. Once cost

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prohibitive for some smaller manufacturers, software solutions have become available as vendors turn to web-based platforms like SaaS. Since SaaS eliminates the need for locally hosted infrastructure and allows for more pay-as-you-go type availability, users can reap the benefits without all of the initial up-front costs. According to eMaint, they were one of the pioneers when, in 1999, they released a SaaS model via its X3 CMMS. “In 2010, nearly 85 percent of new customers selected our SaaS solutions, whereas 15 percent of new sales were for a locally hosted version,” says Palmer. “In 2013, that’s dropped to less than one percent.” eMaint attributes the boom in popularity to the lack of required capital for hardware and software licenses. In addition, “there is less burden on overworked IT departments, and thus no delays in implementation; software updates and data backups are automatic. It’s hard to argue with those kinds of benefits.”

Besides web-based deployments, manufacturers should also look into the available mobile applications, as maintenance supervisors spend more and more time making quick decisions on the fly. Says Shah, “Mobility is a big factor in the industrial environment, as it is everywhere nowadays. Technicians are no longer tied to their desks entering in or closing out work orders. They can do so right from their portable phones or tablets while on the plant floor.” This option, explains Shah, saves the technician time in going back to his or her office after every repair to document the job. In addition, the technician can receive alerts and notifications of new work wherever they are – at any time of the day

Essentially, a maintenance supervisor is only as effective as his or her ability to gain access to resources — and we're not just talking hand tools anymore. For manufacturers looking to integrate some more structure and documentation into their existing maintenance program, CMMS is an old dog with some new tricks. Perhaps it’s time to give it another look.

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