Question of the Month: Tracking my space sounds simple. Do I really need CAFM? Because it sounds complicated.

May 31, 2012 - Owners Developers & Managers

Due to the many misconceptions in today's Computer-Aided Facilities Management ("CAFM") market, facilities managers are frequently paralyzed from changing their current space/move/asset management processes, despite existing flaws and elevated potential for errors. These misconceptions include the notions that all CAFM products are outrageously expensive; that they will take 6-12 months to implement (optimistically!); and that the need for such expansive and exhaustive technology in my organization is just plain unnecessary. There are however solutions on the market that rebut all of these fallacies. So where do you begin?

The best advice I can give to navigate the landscape of CAFM offerings is to know your project requirements prior to starting the search process. I've talked to many facilities managers and personally have lived through implementations that take years due to ill-defined and expansive project requirements. Gathering all the data, customizing the system and testing the numerous data feeds dictated that the project schedule move at snail's pace. Unfortunately, this scenario is far too common. But this doesn't have to be the case! Understanding your project requirements (need-to-have vs. nice-to-have) makes all the difference.

The first step in honing your requirements is to understand the data you currently track and monitor. There is most likely a business process established to collect and update this data. This is the time to examine your current processes. Perhaps you are tracking information - out of habit - that is no longer vital to your operations. Is it really worth rolling it into a new CAFM system?

The next step is to determine the important and relevant information that you do not currently track, but that would be reasonable to maintain, would benefit your department/company by tracking and would be actionable.

Once you've established your data requirements, the most important step comes next. Take a very hard look at where that information comes from. Which departments maintain it? How would you gain access to it? What would the update process look like to keep this data current? Do you have the time and manpower required to do so? Is data security an issue that can be overcome? Only if it is determined that the information is readily accessible and a routine process can be implemented to update the data, is it acceptable to move forward. The point is that it is a futile effort to track any data that is not maintained; it will be out-of-date and useless in weeks. Any system is only as good as the data it houses (or, more colloquially, "garbage in... garbage out")!

With the project requirements set, it is time to take on the CAFM market. My hope is that going through the process of determining real needs and understanding data feeds brings you to the understanding that oftentimes, less is more. Whether your space portfolio is 100,000 s/f or 1 million s/f, keeping it simple ensures a successful CAFM implementation.

As we market our CAFM offering, FoxFMS, we use the phrase "exhaustive simplicity." We believe

that a straightforward tool is truly a more valuable tool for most organizations. By way of example, our most recent client required a fast-paced implementation as they grew dangerously close to capacity within their existing space. The simplicity of our tool allowed for a quick turnaround implementation (2 weeks) and the client was able to work within the environment with minimal training (2 hours). Don't let "simplicity" fool you. The tool provides robust graphical and data reporting capabilities and is configurable to meet a wide variety of needs. But the intuitive user experience and SaaS model prove effective for fast implementations and allow for users to be fully functional in the system in a relative blink of an eye.

So forget everything you think you know about CAFM, analyze your current process, understand your data sources and their integrity and define your project requirements. There is a system out there that is right for you, and now you should be ready to go find it.

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