

Facilities Focus

CAFM Systems And You – The Informed Buyer

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We have all made large purchases in our lifetime. I do not just mean a large outlay of cash, but a less tangible purchase that involves trust, reliability or security. This could be anything from a home, to an education for your child. Your decision can affect you and those around you for years to come. Selecting the appropriate CAFM System can be one of these long-term decisions that you may need to make to enhance your business processes.

CAFM (Computer Aided Facilities Management) systems are software programs (with some hardware), designed to help link internal systems, corporate procedures, diagnostics of facility performance, and people together into one efficient structure—a very complex and potentially expensive structure. Our company discovered this when researching what the CAFM market had to offer. We needed to understand our objectives before we could decide which product would best suit our requirements. When researching CAFM products we feel it is important to consider a few common issues.

The number one question to ask is whether the system meets your company's goals. You will want to consider more than just the specific software, but also weigh the means with which the software handles work management, physical asset management and resource management. In addition, don't forget to consider the customer service you can expect to experience in the future. Look for longevity in a company and do not be afraid to ask for references. Other areas of significance are product implementation, training and post-implementation support, as well as yearly maintenance and licensing fees. Finally, be conscious of the incremental costs involved in meeting all of your facility needs.

Can the system meet your internal communication needs? Reporting is a critical function of a CAFM system. You may have the very best facility management methods in place, but unless your system can provide reliable and accurate information, you will never be able to document or communicate your success to management. Most systems will produce summary and graphic reports. Do your homework to ensure that the product you choose will deliver what you are expecting.

How well does the system interface? You will want a system that streamlines your business, not one that makes life more complex. Direct interface between building environmental diagnostic and monitoring systems, CAD, and asset management are a part of every day facility operations and should not be ignored. Can the system pull the various pieces and parts together and generate work orders and reporting tools seamlessly? Compatibility with Microsoft Windows systems is generally a safe choice. Specifically, look for compatibility with Microsoft Visual Basic and Microsoft Access.

In our search, we considered all of the above issues. We documented our findings by creating a simple Microsoft Excel matrix, cross-referencing our desires with the different products. It was a uniquely effective tool for considering the positives and negatives of each system. We even subjectively rated each product's packaging, quality of literature and customer service during the research phase. These issues may not be dividing factors, but could tip the scale between two similarly matched products.

In implementing a new CAFM System, it is important to understand your problems, have reasonable expectations of products and make a committed effort to the solution. Without working through these steps, the product will never be able to meet your needs. If you are considering a system, then you have already discovered your problem areas. Thorough research will help you understand your options, and engaging your FM staff and other resources in the implementation will assist in a successful start-up. The key, as with investing in an automobile, home, or private school, is to make an educated, informed decision.

Tell us what you think. Send feedback/comments/suggestions to: David Huber at dhuber@comarchs.com or Sara Cowherd at scowherd@comarchs.com.
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