

AND AS IF BY MAGIC...



Several experts believe that the FM industry under-utilises technology. But what do they suggest FMs do to get updated?



Life was so much better when Apple and BlackBerry were just fruits, an anonymous person says on the Internet. Notice the contradiction? While we decry the inexorable march of technology, we can't resist using it to do so. This is revealing – it tells us quite clearly that technology is here to stay, and we'd best exploit it or it will end up subsuming us.

"Any professional FM scanning the pages of the design press might be forgiven for thinking their needs had been completely overlooked during the development of the sleek new products on display," says John Fogarty, director of special projects at workplace storage specialist Bisley. "This is certainly not the case as far as Bisley's Be furnishing programme is concerned."

Roland Dreesden, MD of Reflex, says there are many ways FMs can take advantage of today's technology advancements to manage their systems

more effectively. "A lot of today's projectors are networked and can be powered on and off centrally, saving money and preserving the lamps. Lamp life and service intervals can be monitored, allowing preventive action to be implemented at the appropriate time, thus minimising any downtime."

Taken a stage further, Dreesden notes, centralised room monitoring schedules the AV equipment to be turned on or off as well as the lighting, temperature control and blinds too. As well as saving energy and costs, this prolongs the life of the equipment he adds. And these types of systems can be integrated into the Building Management System (BMS).

"Additionally, fault diagnosis and sometimes rectification can be handled remotely by the FM from their office. Where the nature of the fault demands a site visit, the ability to pre-diagnose ensures the FM can be correctly equipped and so resolve

the problem in one visit. IP webcams allow the FM team to actually see problems from their desktop, and when combined with an intercom, they can speak directly to the user. In circumstances where the FM needs to involve their AV integrator to solve an issue, they should check whether faults can be logged via online systems making the process quick and efficient."

VINCI Facilities' MD, Tony Raikes, says if one was looking at gadgets promoted in weekend colour supplements and business magazines it would be easy to say there are many examples of under-utilised technologies. But, he adds, the difficulty is that we focus on systems and technology that deliver immediate results – almost always oriented towards benchmarking performance or organising schedules and projects.

"If we are to add value to what we do as a profession and industry then FM needs to

look at how we use emerging technology to help us share ideas, collaborate and increase productivity. To really benefit from technology we need to learn from the 16-30-year-olds in our workforce – maybe move away from a formal, corporate way of working and maximise youthful enthusiasm and skills to make better use of what is already available.”

Raikes points out younger professionals are driving at the front-edge of customer service where application and cost aren't always compatible with use. “As a business we need to strike the right balance, maybe going as far as breaking down traditional IT and HR barriers along the way.”

Noel Clancy, CEO of Shepherd FM, says the FM industry has invested in technology

but has stayed focused on using technology to help improve performance by its people, deliver better service to customers and drive efficiencies. As such, service providers such as Shepherd FM and particularly the bigger players, have only bought into the ‘approved’ systems designed for the service sector.

“We're slower to embrace the systems driving how individuals operate – for example making the most of mobile technology,” Clancy says. “Instead of responding to technology – often driven by 16-24 year-olds and the design community – the FM industry and profession should be driving change and working hard to stay ahead of the technology trends.”

If the workplace demands of customers

are shifting, the industry needs to ask how it best uses technology to meet, then exceed the expectations of these same end-users, Clancy points out. “Right now we're making our employees lives' easier by integrating desktop applications and creating mobile apps to allow them to work better on the move. We're looking at some ideas coming from Mobile Congress World such as FonePads, PadFones, new tablets and even smart watches and see what can be adapted to how we operate.”

Technology and specifically sharing information and ideas can, Clancy says, speed up service delivery. “It is also revolutionising the workplace. But it has to be done right – we cannot be carried away with technology for the sake of it. It needs to

AUDIOVISUAL

While pressures on FMs are often relentless, their jobs are facilitated by AV innovation

FMs are 'AVing it!

By DAVID STRYDOM

Audiovisual (AV) equipment often adds an important technological element to a FM's job. But what are the benefits to FMs of using AV technologies? “Generally, a good integrated AV system can help FMs by providing a reliable, stable product, which means callbacks and system problems should be minimised,” says Nigel Roberts, marketing manager for Aver.

“Let's take video conferencing for example. The facts are if a video conferencing system is easy to operate, it will be used profitably by the whole company. It's surprising how many companies install high specification, expensive video conferencing systems, then don't use them because they're too complex and

need an expert to control them, everytime they are used. Sometimes simple but expandable systems (future proofing is of course an important consideration) offer the benefits but with much improved usability.”

Roberts points out that one should bear in mind, specifically with regard to video conferencing, that using the system to its full extent and integrating with Skype means remote workers needn't regularly visit head office – saving costs and ensuring their time is better used.

“Travelling costs can be greatly reduced, particularly if your company has overseas branches, by using video conferencing effectively. Modern systems are much more cost-effective; some start from as

little as £3,500 for a complete system and are reliable compared to older models, meaning less stress and anxiety for overworked FMs and low maintenance costs to boot!”

Gemma Platt, product marketing manager for Casio says while data collation and organisational technology platforms are essential for making a FM's workplace role easier, AV technologies are equally important yet under-utilised.

“For jobs that demand a broad remit of expertise, such as FM, using the right technology becomes integral to business efficiency and saving money, resources and energy. Whether it's top range projectors to help carry out multimedia staff training, high quality AV screens to convey interdepartmental messages around large-scale organisations or teleconferencing equipment, comprehensive use of AV is largely overlooked.”

Roland Dreesden, MD of Reflex, says the company has identified three areas where

AV technologies can support FMs in their day-to-day jobs. First is control – the efficient deployment of AV allows control over the whole of your facility. For example, Dreesden says, the ability to centrally control the booking of meeting rooms and then remotely prepare them for use. Another example would be by ensuring the lighting or audio efficiency throughout your facility is maximised by automatically scheduling the needs of different areas of the building.

Second is knowledge and planning – today's systems provide a host of information that allows you to plan servicing routines in a way that minimises disruption to the business. Diagnostic information is readily available, allowing you to know in advance which facilities are operational and where service or repair works are needed.

Then there's satisfying corporate objectives. “Today's systems allow companies to be efficient in smaller spaces by taking a less traditional approach to space,” says Dreesden. “They support a

add something in terms of strategic value, service quality and the bottom line. But we need to be braver. Today and tomorrow the concern might be employing social media to enhance business performance; twenty years ago the issue was the benefits and longevity of e-mail. Technology nowadays is all about collaboration and collaboration boosts performance and ultimately delivers better customer service.”

Christian Berenger, business development director at Auto Time Solutions says that in an industry in which service providers are constantly battling against tight margins, effective management of workers' time is critical to a facility provider's overall success. Yet, despite this, time and attendance systems continue to be overlooked.

“The latest time and attendance systems provide comprehensive analytical tools which can optimise a service provider's overall performance, by accurately monitoring the attendance of deployed staff, and helping to safeguard the wellbeing of remote workers. Contractors have a duty of care to limit the risks that lone workers are exposed to in their working roles. The latest time and attendance systems can assist with compliance to health and safety regulations by providing meaningful real-time attendance data so managers can confirm when staff have started and finished their shifts.”

Berenger says that, with the latest systems, remote workers can verify their attendance in various ways such as mobile phones, landline phones, the internet or

biometric hand-punch terminals that can be centrally managed, providing managers with complete visibility of their workforce.

“In the event workers fail to turn up on site, contractors are alerted via email or SMS alerts so they can address unauthorised absences at the earliest opportunity. By responding quickly to staff absences, contractors can deliver an enhanced service to clients by ensuring productivity levels are maintained at all times.”

In addition to providing service providers with the tools to safeguard remote workers, through direct integration with scheduling functions, managers can accurately plan staff time to fulfill contract agreements. “By making better use of their resources, service providers can operate more effectively within

move away from individual workspaces to more universal ones. For example, fully self-contained meeting systems such as Reflex EasyMeeting, can be moved from room to room, negating the need for numerous meeting spaces. Video conferencing systems that work direct from users' desktops – or even from their homes via mobile devices – mean dedicated VC suites are unnecessary.”

Gemma Fabian, marketing manager at Electrosonic says that as companies grow, they frequently find their colleagues, suppliers and customers are spread across different offices, countries and even continents. “This separation of people can make communication and building strong relationships difficult,” she says. “The majority of large, global organisations have already embraced both video and audio, but it is no longer viable to run ‘closed’ video networks. Information workers need the tools to allow them to communicate naturally with anyone, anywhere, using any device.



“Using Unified Communications platforms and technologies, FMs are able to ensure distributed teams stay connected and working towards a common goal without travelling. These technologies have become business critical and hence can cause problems when they go wrong. To keep downtime to a minimum Facilities Managers are increasingly using remote monitoring technology to continuously monitor their AV and IT systems and devices. This gives FM's the ability to detect and fix faults quickly with minimal disruption to the business. Initial investments

in all these technologies can be expensive, organisations like Electrosonic, a global AV systems integrator, can help organisations invest in the right technology based on their current usage and existing technology in the most cost effective way possible.”

Mike Brooman, principal consultant at Avolvit says FMs should be considering AV technology for multiple applications. “It can enhance the appearance of a building, it can help deliver important messaging in an engaging way and it can facilitate better meetings, collaboration and communication between

locations for the building's users,” he says.

“The focus for FMs should be how technology integrates in to the spaces in which it is used. This should include how the technology is used and controlled, making it easy for end users to engage with it through well designed interfaces as well as keeping reliability and robustness front of mind. Where digital signage and messaging is concerned, content is king. Ensure that any deployment starts with content and engagement with marketing to make sure the end result is consistent with the look and feel of the organisation.”

tight margins and proactively manage their labour costs.”

The facilities management sector is not exploiting new technology as much as it could, says Gary Watkins, MD of FM software supplier Service Works Group. He cites the ‘bring your own device’ trend: “Many other sectors are discussing the benefits of BYOD, referring to employees who bring their own computing devices such as PDAs and tablets to work for use on the corporate network. This is something that’s not widely used in the FM profession to date, but could bring a wide range of benefits at relatively little cost.”

Whether provided by the company or the individual, Watkins says tablet devices can provide operatives with functions that could significantly improve work productivity and time management. Harnessing their connectivity capabilities, operatives can do anything from troubleshooting problems with experts through video-calling applications or viewing how-to videos online, to scanning QR codes to access an assets data or service history. “With a built-in FM Software system attached to it, operatives could complete jobs from start to finish from a completely remote location,” says Watkins.



ORGANISATIONS aren't getting as much out of their FM systems as they might

He also suggests organisations aren't always getting as much out of their FM systems as they might: “Using FM software intelligently and to its fullest capacity can provide a plethora of meaningful information for businesses. For example, a room booking system can be used to monitor ‘no-shows’, identifying how much companies could save if a more stringent regime was in place. The contractor performance management element of an FM software

system can run shadow maintenance contracts against live contracts so that an existing contract can be compared to an alternative contractor.”

Is buying more technology the answer? The increasing complexity of facilities across all the disciplines coupled to the legislation and governance drives the use and reliance of technology says Gordon Petrie of Relecom. “In parallel with those trends the workplace has become quite different over the past 10-20 years and key factors such as reduced budgets and resources have

Digital video manager ‘helps with security’

Honeywell has announced an updated version of its digital closed-circuit TV surveillance system, Digital Video Manager (DVM). The latest release, DVM R500, has a redesigned user interface, smart diagnostics and forensic search capabilities, and is said to improve integration with access control and other security technologies.

The user interface is the most visible change to DVM R500. The updated design follows established multimedia interface principles, with navigation that, the company says, helps boost productivity and reduce security event response times, as well as training costs.

These changes, says Honeywell, are augmented by smart diagnostics modules that analyse system operations to help security operators quickly process activity reports, run system diagnostics, and check system performance and status. “This is one

of the most dynamic, user-friendly systems I’ve seen,” said Ken Yildiran, security officer for the Museum of Old and New Art, a DVM customer in Hobart, Australia. “The analysis and reporting that would normally take four to five hours is now measured in minutes, allowing our operators to focus on other critical duties.”

New recording and playback capabilities, combined with the improved interface, can help security personnel pinpoint potential threats and react before they become incidents. By providing various time-coordinated views, the same tools can reduce forensic investigation time after an event. These features include synchronised and instant playback of multiple cameras, motion searching that detects movement in a selected area and tags it for review, and timeline scrubbing to locate critical incidents and footage.

Honeywell says DVM R500 helps

decrease lifecycle costs by leveraging global open security standards such as ONVIF to enhance system interoperability. This enables organisations to use the latest security cameras and equipment while protecting past technology investments.

DVM R500 is a component of Honeywell Enterprise Buildings Integrator (EBI), a building management system that ties aspects of a security solution together, including video, access control and intrusion detection.

“To stay ahead of the increasing threats impacting businesses and organisations, security personnel need advanced, yet cost-effective technology to protect their assets and promote safety,” said Paul Orzeske, president of Honeywell Building Solutions. “DVM R500 helps users to identify and address would-be issues before they cause problems or damage – all while increasing ease of use and operational efficiency.”

only increased that reliance on labour saving options.”

Technology companies by definition are continually striving to develop their solutions with ever-increasing innovation, which is a mix of demand driven by customer requirements, and new features initiated by the suppliers themselves, says Petrie.

“The danger with constant striving to capitalise on the new can mean focus is diverted from extracting the maximum value from existing investments. One obvious starting point to consider is any CAFM system or even systems in operation. The scope and scale this type of software offers is significant but can be negated by some quite simple oversights.”

Petrie points out that some areas worth considering include the most basic element which can impact the value gained which is the population of asset data when the initial installation takes place. Where the responsibility for that activity lies is the first consideration. If that is resolved the focus then becomes the individual and collective responsibility to maintain it.

“The next consideration is training and matching skill sets. The reason that becomes a challenge is twofold. Firstly the initial training is typically delivered by the supplier but as individuals change roles often the next training is delivered by the existing user and the consistency will vary which means the scope of features used and the competence will reduce.”

The impact on the business is an increase in manual intervention, which increases cost, resource and ultimately accuracy. “This example is to highlight that analysis of existing investment and an assessment of where minimum investment on ensuring the existing technology is being used to maximum effect is likely reduce costs and deliver improvements quicker.”

Finally, there’s Building Management Systems (BMS). “If you look at the four main principles – controlling, monitoring, optimising and reporting, you’d expect them to be first on the shopping list of every FM in the country,” says iSite. “This is especially so given that in recent years the evolution of the web and wireless technology, combined with increased competition and the reduction in

EXPERT VIEWS

By DAVID STRYDOM

WHAT TECHNOLOGIES ARE UNDERUTILISED?

ROLAND DRESDEN REFLEX

“Many projectors are networked and can be powered on and off centrally, saving money and preserving the lamps. Lamp life and service intervals can be monitored, allowing preventive action to be implemented at the appropriate time, thus minimising downtime. Taken further, centralised room monitoring schedules AV equipment to be turned on or off as well as the lighting, temperature control and blinds.”



TONY RAIKES VINCI FACILITIES

“If we’re to add value to what we do as a profession and industry then FM needs to look at how we use emerging technology to help us share ideas, collaborate and increase productivity. To really benefit from technology we need to learn from the 16-30-year-olds in our workforce - maybe move from a formal, corporate way of working and maximise youthful enthusiasm and skills.”



CHRISTIAN BERENGER AUTO TIME SOLUTIONS

“In an industry in which service providers are constantly battling against tight margins, effective management of workers’ time is critical to a facility provider’s overall success. Yet, despite this, time and attendance systems continue to be overlooked. The latest time and attendance systems provide comprehensive analytical tools which can optimise a service provider’s overall performance, by accurately monitoring the attendance of deployed staff.”



cost, has seen the installation, influence and control of such solutions is no longer in the class of the elite spenders.

“Traditionally BMS has focused primarily around the optimisation of resource consumption but going forward they have real potential to be a major player in two of the biggest areas of our industry – the green agenda and BIM. Forward-looking BMS systems will help FMs control utilisation of natural resources – energy, water, emissions, helping provide real data and intelligence to benchmark, model future trends and drive further optimisation.”

iSite points out that integration of BMS into BIM data is much hyped but yet to prove itself in the FM sector. “The integration will be an essential lynchpin to providing one source of meaningful data around property and assets, where organisations can model real-estate to deliver lifetime value and not just to meet this year’s needs.”

It’s clear that, despite the wide array of responses covering technology in the FM sector, it would take several large books to

properly cover the subject. The important factor is the message FMs should take away from the overall situation – more technology is crucial, and it’s no longer an option.

Some experts have suggested that technology – in the form of software dashboards for building management – might even end up making FMs redundant, but this isn’t likely. Technology may make an FM’s life easier, and may even allow him or her to reduce the number of people in a FM department, but FMs are a crucial part of any company, regardless of whether they’re in-house or contract workers.

Finally, it’s pertinent to note that FMs themselves are keen to hear, read about and experience more technology. They realise that it will only help them do a better job, and they’re keen to exploit as many innovations as they can. With this in mind, companies should be encouraged to help their FMs out by providing as much technological support as possible. Financial times may be hard, but in the long term skimping on technology will prove to be costly.