

Transforming FM with mobile technology



Gary Watkins.

The considerable rewards the facilities management profession can reap from the use of mobile technology are revealed by GARY WATKINS, MD of Service Works Group.

The rapid revolution of mobile technology has played a dramatic role in the way we operate on a daily basis – both at work and in our personal lives. Smart devices, such as tablets, smartphones and PDAs, have shaped the way in which we interact with one other; providing instant access to an infinite range of news and social channels.

More functional applications (apps) are also available, offering users numerous practical benefits to owning a mobile device, whether it's monitoring daily budgets, banking, well-being or the ability to access work emails or complete tasks while on the move.

With mobile technology now a key enabler in the way in which we can communicate, individuals are now able to work flexibly and remotely, approaching work in a new, more fluid manner, which fits their own requirements as well as that of the business.

Furthermore, the introduction of cloud technology and the convergence of voice and data communications now offer businesses and employees the ability to work remotely or 'in the cloud', rather than in the office.

According to a recent YouGov survey, employees are embracing mobile technologies. An average of 40 percent of respondents globally said their employees were using personal devices for work, and 50 percent of respondents whose staff can use their own devices are achieving measurable productivity and efficiency gains of up to 30 percent.

CHANGING TECHNOLOGIES

The most significant development in FM software over the last 10 years has been the rise of apps that run inside web browsers, or similar interfaces. These, alongside mobile applications, offer facilities managers far greater flexibility in the work that they can carry out on a day-to-day basis – vastly improving productivity and service levels.

Cloud computing, which is essentially the supply of IT infrastructure and software over the internet, has also been widely adopted. Businesses of every size are welcoming the flexibility and benefiting from reduced costs, increased productivity and speed to market.

The web, cloud and mobile technologies complement each other. A facilities manager can log or report on a job anywhere and can be alerted to issues while on the move.

The facilities and field-service industries in particular are benefiting from cloud/mobile solutions. Whether the priority is meeting service level agreements (SLAs), minimising driving time between calls, or securing first-time fixes, the software can calculate the ideal route, identify the best technician to send and ensure the parts are available – all in real time.

THE IMPACT FOR FACILITIES MANAGERS

Although the FM sector has been relatively slow to adapt, organisations are now starting to recognise the opportunity that mobile technology can deliver.

For facilities managers or field-service engineers, there is a great deal of functionality that can significantly improve work productivity and time management – from logging and closing down jobs, through to the ability to scan and read QR codes to track and manage asset data for greater performance insight.

Many organisations are integrating mobile devices with FM software. This offers rapid rollout as well as cost-effective implementation, shorter training times and greater resilience and flexibility. It also delivers greater productivity and operational cost reductions.

Aligning a mobile FM solution with the cloud also offers facilities managers a far greater level of flexibility in the way they interact with the software. The cloud is agile and works remotely as well as on premises, it speeds up application deployment and enables the FM software providers to fine-tune, maintain and upgrade the software centrally, meaning all adjustments and improvements are felt immediately.

Moving to a truly mobile solution for a facilities professional means much more than efficient work scheduling or streamlined task logging; it ensures that facilities managers can work more cost-effectively and efficiently.

THE BENEFITS

- logging, receiving and closing jobs in real time
- taking photos of asset condition and uploading to an FM database in real time
- capturing signatures to confirm job sign-off
- providing notification to the help desk for replacement parts
- effectively managing workforce allocation, tracking and accountability using GPS
- using QR codes to scan and manage asset data, its service and performance history
- up-skilling staff through online collaboration, giving them the ability to confer live, on-site with experts via video, increasing the opportunity to secure a first-time fix, and
- viewing online reports on the move.

All of which means that the facilities management profession can reap considerable rewards from the use of mobile technology – enabling a more effective and efficient way of managing work on the move, and delivering far-reaching operational improvements, as well as supporting strategic decision-making. ●

This article is based on a new guide from Service Works Group, Mobile Technology: A Global Facilities Management Trend. To receive a complimentary copy email info@swg.com or call 03 8676 0380.