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I spent several days last month participating in the Plant Engineering and Management sector of the National Manufacturing Week conference and trade show in Chicago. I liked the new show layout with enterprise resource planning software, automation software and systems, enterprise asset management software, and plant equipment and systems in the same hall. However, I didn't get to see much because developers of maintenance information systems were much more aggressive and successful this year in their bids for my attention. Most of their discussion revolved around features associated with the Internet or Web.

A common theme was the Web browser interface that benefits ordinary users by providing an interface similar to what they use at home to surf the Web. They can easily enter a work request or access information without training. Power users such as planners would continue to use the standard interface with a full range of features. Also new was the online approach to CMMS in which the software resides on the supplier's server and the user operates the system via the Internet.

As far as the conference was concerned, attendance seemed low, at least in the sessions I attended. Good information was presented on managing equipment reliability and maintenance, but few people were there to receive it--a situation that makes a good case for business-to-business publications such as Maintenance Technology.

Perhaps the most significant event was an ad hoc meeting that included several professional societies: The Society for Maintenance & Reliability Professionals, the Association of Facilities Engineers, the Institute of Industrial Engineers, and the Plant

Engineering and Maintenance division of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. Represented officially by officers or staff, or unofficially by regular members, they met to discuss the common objective of boosting the image of the equipment reliability, maintenance, and asset management profession.

The consensus: the profession's image needs bolstering to bring it up to the level of its contribution to the bottom line. The resolution: the image can be improved, and the group wants to meet again in the fall to develop an agenda to that end. The next step: better communications among the constituents. The need: input from practitioners about what is needed.

Where do we go from here? Is the committee's goal worth pursuing? **MT**