

Last year at this time I did a piece on the directions of the CMMS market in general and I feel somewhat vindicated that, indeed, the presence of the Web has reached even further into the business of maintenance management systems.

The question I get asked often from managers, however, is "what is next?" While usually this is in the context of them attempting to pick a CMMS, understanding some of the changes in the market is important if you plan any direction shifts with a CMMS. There are several key areas where the CMMS marketplace will be impacted. These are: "The influence of all this "e" stuff" "The push for integration" "The consolidation of the CMMS market."

I'll address each one of these and why it's important to you.

Influence of all this "e" stuff

You can't turn on a TV without eCommerce, eTrading, eMarketing, e-everything exploding in your eyes and ears. The truth is that the Web will stop being an "e" thing in the coming year. Rather than being something different and new, it is going to simply be THE way business is done.

CMMSs already have started integrating Web interfaces and some vendors have made their data accessible on your side of the firewall via a Web browser. This is nothing—the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Integration efforts are already underway with some companies to tie in suppliers and vendors via the Web and CMMS. The latest big thing: ASP (application service provider) offerings of a CMMS. Here's the future—you log onto the Web at any time from any location to check work order status, to close out work orders, or to double check your team's schedule for the coming day. Customers of your services will be submitting work requests online, and from anywhere they can log on with a Web browser.

Push for integration

Integrating other systems and hardware into a CMMS is far from new and innovative in and of itself. This dates back to the glory days of the first barcode system integrations. This new wave of systems and hardware integrations has been slow in coming, but its presence is starting to emerge.

First, you have the integration to hardware. How will this impact you? In many ways, and some of these are already starting to enter the market. Your HVAC system will cut work orders when it goes down, and issue preventive maintenance work orders when its performance drops. When a production line goes down, work orders will go out automatically complete with the appropriate job plans to fix it and assigned to the people certified on the repairs. Condition monitoring systems will be more evolved into your CMMS so anything monitorable in your facility will be tied to the CMMS.

On the software side, ERP integration efforts are going to continue to the point where it will be harder to distinguish the CMMS as separate software. In the back office, CMMS integrations (thanks to open systems architecture) are going to be tied to your purchasing, accounting, accounts payable, and asset management systems. The age of the maintenance department being a hidden operation that functions on its own is coming to an end&it will move to the forefront of systems technology. The days of maintenance getting hand-me-down PCs are ending because the technological firepower provided there will feed numerous systems in the organization and be a means of reducing costs rather than being mere overhead.

Consolidation of the CMMS market

Simply put, the CMMS market two years ago was 248 vendors. That number has dropped due to consolidations in the market. This trend will continue into this year. Already there have been several mergers in the industry among some of the larger systems. Soon smaller players, unable to keep up with technology changes, will sell their client bases to more powerful companies that possess the technology to succeed. Within a few years, there will be 3-10 players in this industry, perhaps even fewer. The days of the mom-and-pop operations cranking out a FoxPro system and entering the market are more fond memory than practical reality.

I'm asked often into what form the CMMS will evolve, and the truth is it has plateaued as a product. New software innovations will not drive changes in the software. Remember, these are work management tracking systems. Work does not change that dramatically. Once we reached the point where we had scheduling, PMs, etc., there was little room left for the CMMS to grow into organically. What is left is CMMS's emerging into the Web (and all that that implies) and the hope that one day, work orders can be closed verbally rather than typing. **MT**