

The Impact of the Internet on Maintenance Departments

Written by Blaine Pardoe, Enterprise Management Systems
Monday, 01 February 1999 18:55

"So, should I be on the Internet?" This is becoming a more common question to those of us involved with consulting on maintenance operations. People tend to look at us as if we have crystal balls and can predict the future, when in reality we are only now starting to see the impact of this technology on maintenance organizations. Given the technology, the trends, and the direction of CMMS and other software, there are a few areas where the Internet may start to have some impact on how work is done.

The Internet, to most people, is a combination of a graffiti-painted wall and the Yellow Pages. There's a lot of talk about the Internet and how it's going to change our lives, but as maintenance professionals, everyone is curious about what that really means. And, while consultants are often vague about those answers, I'm going to lay it on the line.

From a realistic standpoint, here's where the impact of the Internet is going to be on maintenance operations in the next few years. My pundits and peers will most likely take shots at this list, but I've tried to stay away from "pie in the sky" thoughts and keep this realistic. I've listed them in order of their immediate impact on maintenance departments

Ordering of parts and materials

This exists already with a number of vendors having on-line ordering capability. The days of the shelf of catalogs and long minutes on the phone to order a part are disappearing. Already with some of the maintenance vendors that are out there you can check the availability of stock, shipping times, etc. You can even track shipments with various freight companies to ensure that the motor is on the way and when it will arrive. The biggest hurdle is interfacing your purchasing department with the vendors so that approvals can happen quickly.

Availability of manuals and maintenance procedures

Some equipment manufacturers are already starting to put their manuals online as well as the recommended maintenance procedures, and the trend is likely to increase. These are much easier to deal with than attempting to update them by hand in a binder that is also used to prop up the coffeepot.

E-mail and discussion forums with peers

Most people are shocked that e-mail would appear so far down on this list, but in terms of actual changes in a maintenance worker's or manager's everyday life, contact with peers in the outside world is limited. Where it will start is for getting technical support from a vendor. Soon, services like www.dejanews.com will start hosting forums for maintenance

The Impact of the Internet on Maintenance Departments

Written by Blaine Pardoe, Enterprise Management Systems
Monday, 01 February 1999 18:55

managers so that they can share tips, techniques, etc., with each other.

Online diagnosis, troubleshooting

Vendors web sites often have an e-mail address for getting help with their equipment that you have installed. What is coming for our industry sometime in the near future is that you are going to be able to plug in your symptoms when the equipment is broken and get a list of procedures online for fixing it. Chances are you will be able to get access to an engineer to walk you through it as you go. These services are going to cost money, but they will be faster than waiting for "Repairguy Bob" to show up and most likely they will be much less expensive.

Web-based CMMS

Given the cost of database systems, servers, and the people needed to support them, it's really just a matter of time before your work orders will have a Web interface. You will most likely not even have to store your own data on-site, and they will be accessible from any PC that has a Web browser. While to some this is a step back to the earlier era of centralized systems, in reality, it's a global solution that is just around the corner.

So what does all of this mean to maintenance professionals? One: there are major training implications for this influx of technology. It's one thing to know that the information is out there, it's another teaching Dave from the fourth-shift HVAC crew how to use a mouse to double-click. Two: managers are going to have to change how they get to the information and distribute it to the workers. **MT**

Blaine Pardoe is a principle in Enterprise Management Systems and a highly regarded expert in the field of technology learning, CMMS implementation, and the maintenance industry. He is the author of the best-selling book, *Cubicle Warfare*, and numerous novels and is a frequent contributor to *Maintenance Technology*.