

Communications: The CMMS Setup In A Maintenance Partnership

Written by Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor
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Maintaining an interactive collaborative partnership with inter- and intra-departmental groups and outside groups is essential if a maintenance department is to be successful in delivering asset reliability and availability at a level suitable to achieve production throughput and quality targets. To achieve this, a maintenance department must understand the difference between "what it manages" and "what it controls."

The maintenance department must work diligently with all of its partners to attain useful data, information, resources, accessibility, permits, etc. to effectively vet work requests and plan and schedule value-added work that will cause the least interruption to the production process. Maintenance, though, only controls its internal processes and relies heavily on its partners to manage the execution of its work. For example, effective barriers to maintenance execution are waiting for parts, waiting for tools, waiting for equipment and waiting for contractors—*all of which are out of the control of the maintenance department*

Understanding our own needs and our partners' needs is all part of managing an effective partner relationship through communication. Arguably, the most important tool used to understand what we control and how we are managing our relationships is the Computerized Maintenance Management System, or the CMMS.

A CMMS is a unique type of software tool that was developed specifically for the maintenance industry in the late 1970s. The pioneer CMMS programs were rudimentary mainframe computer database systems that were text-based and menu-driven; display fields were fixed and presented to the viewer/user in a highly pixilated 'eye burning' green or orange display color. Every program used a proprietary user interface and navigation system that often required weeks of training and continual use to master. Those old enough to remember "the good old days" will not dispute how the CMMS industry has rocketed light years ahead with today's offerings that are both highly sophisticated and complex, yet user friendly to the point of intuitiveness.

Many a company has upgraded its CMMS to the latest and greatest, but few have changed the way they use this software on a daily basis. CMMS programs of the past were no more than basic equipment databases that allowed work and parts to be tracked against identified pieces

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of equipment with basic text reports and completed work listings. Today's offerings have benefited greatly— *and grown*—as a result of the early 1980s IBM Personal Computer (PC) revolution in which software and hardware quickly became standardized and allowed a host of entrepreneurs to develop affordable and flexible software solutions for the maintenance industry.

The latest CMMS programs continue to retain an equipment database at their core, and still track work and parts usage against the listed equipment. They differ from those of the past in that they can be navigated with a simple 'point and shoot' device or touch of the screen. Today's CMMS screen layout and text can be user-customized and changed 'on the fly' without need of a programmer. Programs are graphic-based and allow photographs, videos, drawings and catalogs to be linked on many levels and displayed anywhere in the program—*for example, to the work order, to an inventory part, to an equipment record, to equipment history; work orders can be triggered from voice recognition, a phone, a beeper, a machine alarm, an infrared or radio wave signal, other control software, the Internet or just the plain old keyboard.*

Today's CMMS can interactively gateway with other programs such as manufacturing software, accounting software, HR software, supplier software, etc. The CMMS software reporting system allows any authorized user to pull up any combination of data held or accessed by the CMMS and display or print the easily formatted results, in color, and in seconds; the list goes on.

Ironically, just as automobiles have gained in their sophistication, reliability and user-friendly interfaces, over the same time period, we haven't changed our approach to driving or vehicle maintenance in the slightest! Similarly, many a company has upgraded its CMMS to the latest and greatest, but few have changed the way they use this software on a daily basis, and remarkably we continue to believe the CMMS tool is a panacea for improving the maintenance process.

The true power of the CMMS is derived from its ability to provide management reports. Unfortunately, most CMMS setups are inadequate to deliver the type of input/output reporting to both control and manage maintenance relationships effectively. The true power of the CMMS is derived from its ability to provide management reports. Unfortunately, most CMMS setups—*even today*—are inadequate to deliver the type of input/output reporting to both control and manage maintenance relationships effectively.

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The most successful CMMS implementations are those set up to deliver against a set of goals and targets that measure department and relationship effectiveness. A series of reports are built to feed data into a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) that show how well the department is in control, along with a series of reports that provide feedback to partners showing them how well we have provided to them and how well they have provided to us the services and information required to manage the maintenance operations.

CMMS registers and data filters are set up to deliver the required reports, which then dictate the design of the data collection instruments—*the work request and work order*. When set up to only capture exception data (data that is meaningful), the system is assured to only have meaningful data in storage. But what happens when a PM requests the maintainer to check and record a pressure reading on a daily basis? The work order is closed and the meaningless data is captured in the equipment history each day. If the work order started to record only when the pressure were below 750 psi or above 800 psi, however, the CMMS would be easier to administer and the PM would be more meaningful.

The best CMMS setups are those that deliver exactly what we need to manage and control our maintenance operation. Such setups result from implementing them backwards, knowing up front what we expect from our maintenance operation now and in the near future.

Information is power—and *the CMMS is the most powerful tool in a maintainer's arsenal*. Still, the collection, manipulation and analysis of data can only be meaningful and informative when delivered in a format that the maintainer or maintenance partner can understand. Understanding our own requirements and understanding our business partners' requirements is paramount to implementing and sustaining a successful CMMS software.

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