

Does Your Maintenance Contractor Care For Your Assets?

Written by Dave Rosenthal, P.E., Jacobs Engineering
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Manufacturers have long contracted out various facets of their maintenance work. They do this because contractors can provide value through lower cost structures, better resource control, access to crafts and specialty services and their ability to complete capital projects. This value proposition has not changed significantly over many years.

Owners who contract out maintenance functions usually do so when demand rises for routine and turnaround maintenance. In these cases, contractors help them maintain a leaner in-house workforce—they perform duties directed by the owner's staff in response to work orders and turnaround schedules. They may also perform preventive and predictive activities that support their client's asset-management initiatives.

But today's manufacturing owners are challenged by countless risks, including worker and process safety, rising operating costs and uptime losses. While many have begun to implement strategies to address these challenges, "leaned-out" staffs often struggle to maintain day-to-day operations and find it difficult to address longer-term initiatives meant to improve daily performance. At this point, owners often must decide whether to hire staff personnel or finance a third-party implementation to perform the tasks.

What more can you do for me?

Because many owners already use contractors, an obvious starting place for them to seek new

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value is among this group. They might ask, “What more can you do for me?” Contractors can easily miss the point of this question, though, and in response, suggest only that they expand their scope of work or optimize current services. Owners are, in fact, not usually looking to simply upgrade services, but to expand the leverage of their maintenance contractors in maintaining their assets.

To answer their clients accurately, contractors need a broader perspective of asset care. They should know, for example, that assets need to be managed from design to retirement. They should also know that the deployment of asset management across this life cycle can be integrated with a contractor’s current services. This delivery system should contain practices, tools and methods that optimize total life cycle costs. Ideally, these integrated services should help differentiate a maintenance contractor’s value proposition.

Delivery of a contractor’s integrated services can take many forms. The following tasks are examples of how contractors can support owners’ efforts to maintain their assets.

Leverage maintenance workflow...

The contractor’s work is linked to the owner’s maintenance-execution workflow. For example, history from work-order execution, which is vital to continued improvement of asset-care plans and operating performance, can be supplied by the contractor.

Some owners provide that opportunity through computerized maintenance management software (CMMS) systems to close a work order and input history. The asset register information contained in work orders—*which is rarely accurate*—can be compared against field conditions by the contractor’s personnel and corrections submitted to the owner’s representative.

Defect elimination...

The more “eyes” that monitor equipment, the greater the probability that the earliest signs of failure can be detected and then repaired at a lower cost. Contractor’s field crews should be trained to watch for out-of-place sounds, odors, leaks and vibrations, and report their findings to the owner. An early initiative to troubleshoot the issue will accelerate the owner’s efforts to minimize the mean time to repair and quickly get back on-line.

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Most contractors will have a list of repairable items found by their crews in the field. The list should be prioritized (e.g. safety issues, critical equipment), then submitted to the owner's representative.

Bad-actor control...

Every manufacturing unit has equipment that fails too frequently or accounts for excessive downtime. Owners need to heighten awareness of these assets through focused tasks to remediate the issues they present. Contractors can play an important role if they carry out these tasks, suggest modifications and inform the owners when early signs of failure are apparent.

Asset care...

Owners sometimes view a contractor's work narrowly—to *only include repairs, for example*. However, certain asset types are often the sole responsibility of a contractor to maintain. Contract personnel can be leveraged to execute asset-care tasks such as preventive and predictive tasks for that equipment. This work can cover vibration, oil and thermographic analysis, etc. Performance of these tasks allows the owner's personnel to conduct more specialized work. Contractors can also contribute to the owner's PM optimization efforts by providing feedback on the effectiveness of their assigned PM tasks. Responsibility for lubrication, for example, is always a contentious issue. Owners' personnel are typically assigned these tasks, but conflicting priorities can cause poor lubrication-task compliance. A dedicated individual assigned to perform lube tasks feels more ownership, which results in fewer lubrication failures. A contractor's field personnel can be a good resource for this dedicated individual.

Capital execution...

In contrast to large capital projects where vital maintenance information is provided ahead of startup, small capital work information is generally either lost, thrown out or not part of anyone's responsibility. By becoming involved early in the design phase of small capital work, contractors can provide work-cost and time estimates, as well as provide a quality check prior to the package being issued for construction.

After project completion, contractors should be expected to provide asset serial numbers, owner manuals, specification sheets, OEM preventive maintenance tasks and key settings to owner representatives.

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For them to adequately answer the “what more can you do for me” question, contractors must be familiar/experienced with a range of services that match the broadest needs of their customers. “In-the-box” service enhancements will likely fall short of the true asset-management solutions—*from the start of design to asset retirement*—that today’s manufacturers need to optimize total life cycle costs. **MT**

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