

## What Skills Should I Be Hiring? A Technology Perspective

Written by Blaine Pardoe, Enterprise Management Systems  
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There has been an on-going debate as to which is the horse or driver in the maintenance business--the needs of maintenance or the needs of technology to support that maintenance. The truth is that there is no right answer other than to say that the maintenance business is changing. There is an influx of technology into the industry that is forcing change--not just in how business is done but in the type of people who are stepping into the maintenance arena.

There are those pundits who say that the maintenance industry has dealt with technological change successfully for years and has readily adapted in the past. But what has changed is the pace with which the technological influx has forced itself into the offices of maintenance managers.

Upper management often has dictated technological advances, as have other back-office operations seeking data integration opportunities. The technological tools that are available for the typical maintenance operation are multiplying like rabbits.

In the past, the old corps of maintenance managers turned to cross training as the way to put their fingers in the proverbial dike of technology. It used to be simple: take one maintenance staffer who was proficient with computers and send him off for a one-week class so he could master the new software or tool. It worked & sometimes.

What is changing is the level and degree of expertise and experience that is required to support a more sophisticated suite of integrated software applications. This is not an issue that maintenance managers can prevent with stopgap training. This is going to require the hiring of personnel that have the competencies to allow a maintenance department to readily adapt and assimilate the influx of technologies that affect all aspects of maintenance.

The competencies that are going to become more prevalent in maintenance departments in the next few years are database administration, system implementation, and technology education.

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### Database administration

Data warehousing--the use of a central repository for corporate data--as well as the influx of high-end databases in maintenance applications (Oracle, Sybase, etc.) have created a demand in many maintenance organizations for a database administrator. This is not simply database backup, but keeping maintenance databases optimized--fine-tuned and fully integrated with other applications.

In some organizations this competency is handled by someone in information services or data processing, but in decentralized companies, it often falls to the maintenance department to supply its own personnel. Individuals with this competency may have undergone years of training on the database(s) they know as well as years of experience.

The database engines of today are a far cry from the CMMS that Earl wrote in dBase II on his home computer--and are integrated with far more applications. Moreover, today's database management skills come with a price that is staggering to many maintenance department compensation budgets.

### System implementation

Understanding technology is important; being able to implement it requires a different competency. Individuals possessing these skills have to know and understand the entire scope of the maintenance business.

At the same time they have to have a full understanding of technology and its impact. Their job, on an on-going basis, is to integrate the two. They must understand how to change processes to take advantage of the technology, while at the same time know how to fine-tune the technology to work for the business.

### Technology education

The tools for maintenance work have become more complicated and have a number of prerequisite skills in regards to computers. There is a need to have individuals that possess the skills necessary to educate others on the technology. They have to have a background understanding of maintenance processes, while at the same time be able to translate the technology to the average maintenance worker.

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While the competencies are important, they do not necessarily have to reflect in a staffing model. Some of these skills, particularly those in implementation and education, can be outsourced. The key, obviously, is to get a technology consultant with a background in maintenance operations--which is a narrow field to begin with. A strong database administrator, however, is something that is necessary for the survival of some systems (depending on their complexity) and is a position that is increasingly being served by full-time staff rather than outsourcing. **MT**

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