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We all know that free advice is certainly worth what you pay for it. Your boss, your friends, your co-workers, your spouse, and even your kids are full of all kinds of free advice. You may be surprised to find you can get access to a fairly large group of experts in almost any category on the Internet. The advice is free and usually delivered via e-mail within the same day you ask the question.

Many of these "Ask an Expert" services are nontechnical, yet still provide an interesting array of expert topics. Others offer a wide selection of experts that can relate to questions about lubrication, bearings, CMMS, seals, electricity, boilers, and even plant automation.

Abuzz is an expert advice service operated by *The New York Times*. According to the site, experts are "knowledgeable, intelligent people like you. They're not paid experts, but people who enjoy sharing knowledge for knowledge's sake." We found most of the information nontechnical; however, if you want to know where to locate the best BBQ in Memphis, this is the site for you. Answers usually arrive in a few hours but can take up to 1 day.

We found a real surprise at AllExperts . This site was well organized by topic and included a brief biography and a rating system for each expert. Follow the links to Industry, then to Manufacturing, and you will be presented with categories including plant operations and maintenance. We found CMMS experts, predictive maintenance experts, and more at this site. The detailed profiles will help you target your question to the right expert. You can sign up as an expert if you want to share your knowledge with the rest of the world.

AskMe offers another good site with some industrial, chemical, electrical, and other engineering topics for those seeking more technical information. The site also offers an easy-access archive so you can see previous questions and answers. This site seems like one of the most well established as it claims more than 10 million users. You also can ask a question anonymously at this site; however, you have to check back to see your answer posted at the web site.

The Reliability Center offers a free reliability search service performed by an expert. According to the site "trying to find information on the Internet can be very time consuming and frustrating." All you need is an e-mail address and the item or topic you would like to find on the Internet. They will e-mail answers to you as quickly as possible.

We also found several Internet sites that offered "pay for advice" and "live expert" sites that charged fees for answers. We did not try any of these sites, as they seemed to have a large focus on personal subjects. We recommend trying free expert services before you pay for services at other sites.

The next time you have a question, log on, ask your question, and get ready to learn from an expert. **MT**

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