

Online Maintenance Discussion Forums Offer Peer Advice

Written by Terrence O'Hanlon, ReliabilityWeb.com
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Unless you work in a maintenance department with a multi-location company, you are left to solve many day-to-day maintenance problems on your own, without much outside advice. You may be alone at your plant, but hundreds of other maintenance professionals have probably faced similar issues. Before the Internet, the knowledge and experience required to solve unique problems was locked in single locations, creating islands of expertise in problem solving.

Many maintenance-oriented Web sites offer some sort of message posting board or discussion forum that allows you to post a question, offer advice, or simply join in a lively discussion.

Discussion boards are usually divided into topics to make searching easier. When a person has a question or wants to share an experience, he simply enters information into a text box and then submits it. If the discussion group is not moderated, the message will appear on the Web instantly. If it requires moderation or approval from the administrator, there may be a slight delay. On the most popular message boards, replies, answers, and opinions appear almost instantly as well.

MaintenanceForums.com features three primary topics for discussion including reliability strategies, condition monitoring/PdM, and CMMS. The site does require registration to eliminate spam or commercial postings.

As you find topics you are interested in following, you can set e-mail alerts to notify you when someone posts a new message to that thread. You can get individual topic e-mail alerts in addition to daily or weekly digests of the entire online discussion. If you see a topic you think a friend would enjoy, you can even e-mail the entire thread.

The [Society for Maintenance & Reliability Professionals](#) (SMRP) offers a new discussion board for seven different reliability-related topics.

Snell Infrared offers online message boards for infrared thermographers at www.snellinfrared.com. These boards deal with one single condition monitoring technology but with that type of focus, you can usually find very detailed information. Another

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technology-specific discussion board is available from the [Vibration Institute](#) relating strictly to vibration analysis.

[Root Cause Live](#) is another discussion group with a focus on root cause analysis as does the [Reliability Center](#).

For a broader selection of discussion forums, you can also search [Yahoo Groups](#) and [Google Groups](#) by topic or even by region for a more localized selection. There seems to be a group for just about anything you may be interested in on the Internet.

Many people prefer to “lurk” or simply read messages or discussions. Once you have an idea of how the group works, you should feel free to dive in and offer advice, ask a question, or simply state your opinion. Do not worry that your experience level is not as high as others involved in the group. Most of us still have a lot to learn and your post could make a huge difference to a maintenance professional. **MT**

Internet Tip: Save Web searches

Do you use the Internet for research, then cut and paste the items you find into MS Word or PowerPoint in order to share them with others?

You may want to try [Onfolio](#) to save and organize your Web searches and research into very nice reports you can publish and easily share with others through e-mail, documents, and the Web. The site offers a 30-day free trial.

Internet Tip: Distance Learning on the Web

As travel budgets tighten, maintenance and reliability professionals are finding new technology-based solutions for training and skills improvement.

Three new courses with maintenance and reliability topics are available online. [VibrationSchool.com](#) at [LearnMaintenance.com](#) has launched an Introduction to Vibration Analysis and LearnMaintenance.com at

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www.learnmaintenance.com offers basic maintenance skills training for hydraulics, pneumatics, and rigging. The [University of Toledo](#) is offering a Maintenance Management Certificate program .

Each of these courses uses a blended learning approach with a live instructor to coach students, some hard copy material (books and CD-ROMs), and Web-based information along with weekly assignments and e-mail roundtable discussions. Instructors are available by e-mail to answer specific questions and concerns from students. No travel is required to complete these courses.

These courses allow learning at each student's preferred pace but must be completed within 12 weeks of the initial logon.

Distance learning courses will never replace live training, workshops, or courses; however, they provide a valuable alternative to those methods of learning.