

## Don't Start With Your Customer

Written by Bob Baldwin, Editor  
Monday, 01 March 1999 19:05

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Traditional roles are blurring. Reliability and maintenance has blurred to include equipment asset management, capacity assurance, asset utilization, and availability engineering. Although the fundamentals of the game are still important, some of the rules have changed, and we must adjust our game if we expect to win.

Some winning strategies can be found in books and articles covering the latest business philosophies and techniques. They contain ideas that can be adapted to the world of equipment reliability, maintenance, and asset management.

Some interesting approaches can be found in a book that I have been studying recently. It is called *Blur: the speed of change in the connected economy*, by Stan Davis and Christopher Meyer from Ernst & Young's Center for Business Innovation.

The authors contend that changing business behavior, which they term *Blur*, is driven by three forces: Connectivity, Speed, and the growth of Intangible value. They discuss the issues in the book and outline them on [www.blursite.com](http://www.blursite.com), noting that the line between products and services is blurring (think of consulting companies providing software products and software companies providing consulting services). The authors wrap up with a section on "50 Ways to Blur Your Business." Here are a couple of items that caught my eye:

**6. Manage All Business in Real Time:** Stop making decisions based on what

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happened last week, or even this morning. Get a grip on what's happening at this instant, so the right adjustments can be made without delay. Almost always, this will require planting sensors and other feedback mechanisms throughout your operations...

**27. Don't Start with Your Customer:** The wisdom of the late industrial era was always to start with what the customer needed and backtrack to which products and services those needs called for. That fit when the customer already understood the need and the product & In Blur, the technical change is happening so fast, your product must educate the customer & and the customer must educate you. You can't afford the time delay to put something new in front of the customer. Instead, start with what technology will make possible, codevelop it as fast as you can with the customer, and be flexible and adaptive enough to adjust it according to customer needs as you go. As in software, the first release is your take on things. The customer enters the feedback loop and starts to influence release 2.0 and beyond.

Sounds like a strong case for condition-based maintenance and a call to get started. **MT**

