

Playing Catch Up

Written by Bob Baldwin, Editor
Friday, 01 May 1998 21:37



I love technology. But recently I have been having heretical thoughts that technology may be getting too far ahead of ordinary business practices. However, I kept those thoughts under control as I walked into COMDEX Spring 98 in Chicago's McCormick Place.

The event is the daughter of the premier computer and information technology trade show and conference held each fall in Las Vegas. The exhibits put up by major companies were large, well designed, and expensive, and they showcased some interesting technology.

Among the items that happened to catch my eye were a hybrid CD-ROM/Internet application that could be useful for training and troubleshooting; a low-cost Java application that allows users to view CAD drawings over an intranet or the Internet; an industrial control application running under Windows CE; and a variety of mobile communications solutions running on all sorts of tiny devices. But, overall, these booths didn't seem as exciting as those displaying manufacturing-oriented technologies at the National Manufacturing Week event a month before.

Even though this show was a bit less than I expected, I was still having fun until mid-day when I sat down at a table in the back of the hall to eat a slice of Chicago-style pizza. A young man sitting across from me inquired about my badge. I told him that I represented MAINTENANCE TECHNOLOGY, the magazine of plant equipment maintenance and reliability technology. His response: "Is maintenance so advanced that there would be something of interest at this show?"

I was not surprised that he didn't understand maintenance because most people don't. So I launched into my basic explanation of modern maintenance practice. I was shocked, however, when I found out that he worked for the head of maintenance for a school district. He knew nothing of planning and scheduling, preventive maintenance, or predictive maintenance. He

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was amazed that there was low-cost software for the personal computer that could help manage maintenance. To him, maintenance consisted of answering complaints by dispatching a handyman with a bag of tools. Although my luncheon companion was computer savvy, he was not in a position to use any of the advanced maintenance technologies until his department got its maintenance act together.

Perhaps the real issue is not that technology is getting too far ahead, but whether you know enough about your business that you can take advantage of the technology. Where are you? Leveraging technology or playing catch up? **MT**

Thanks for stopping by,

