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Maintenance pros pulled unwillingly into the world of **Information Technology (or IT)** decades ago will probably now admit that without IT (and an on-call IT expert), most industrial operations could not compete in the 21st century.

Though the benefits of IT-centric solutions were late in coming to maintenance, **today there's probably not a single medium- to large-scale operation whose maintenance teams have not integrated at least some IT-category components.**
Software programs and systems, computers and related hardware, as well as network components,* are all vital parts of today's industrial environment.

The computerized maintenance management system—*CMMS*—is the IT centerpiece of most maintenance organizations.
Though many installed CMMS systems remain underutilized, CMMS has nonetheless revolutionized how maintenance is scheduled, work orders are prepared and accessed and how equipment condition is monitored. To counter complaints that the complexity of CMMS products makes them hard to implement and use (aided in part by a continuous, rapid rise in features and functions), vendors have begun to simplify many options. Web-based CMMS applications, for example, remove the need for on-site hosting and management and, at the same time, give users universal access to their information as well as higher-level options at less cost. Vendors have also made CMMS systems easier for users to customize (rather than require them to operate within set parameters), have improved analytic tools for condition-based maintenance efforts and made on-screen visuals more intuitive.

Simplicity and ease-of-customization are expected to continue in the CMMS sector, as will the incorporation of CMMS functions into larger plant- and company-wide EAM systems like those from SAP. Pricing flexibility will also increase as vendors offer greater purchase options, such as monthly software-as-a-service (SaaS) agreements that include installation, training and support.

Worker access to computers for performing maintenance work is a key part of the IT evolution. Not only are maintenance job carts often PC-equipped today, maintenance teams benefit from other portable versions, such as tablet computers and PDAs, including smartphones. The enterprise digital assistant, probably best-suited for in-plant maintenance work, resembles a rugged smartphone, but is equipped to capture data from barcodes, RFID transmitters and other sources.

As our ability to electronically generate and analyze information grows, paperwork can be reduced, efficiencies improved and communication opportunities expanded. **The trend to produce ever greater amounts of data, however, means that our systems to gather, manage and analyze it must match the pace if the data is to have value.**
While some new software programs can interpret large quantities of data in real time, especially for energy-system management, these could tax the resources of smaller operations. As a result, according to experts, database outsourcing will emerge as a growing, cost-effective solution.
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