Match made in heaven:

How can businesses find a long-term CAFM partner?

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Driving efficiencies, mitigating risk and ensuring service delivery is no mean feat. Effective facilities management means having the right systems in place to give complete visibility of all your assets, costs and risks, to take a proactive approach to facilities management, pre–empt problems and boost productivity. However, how do you choose the right people to partner with?

Oliver Spires, Product Specialist for CAFM Explorer, goes back to basics and discusses the five key points that should be on every facilities managers' checklist.

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Maximising value

Facilities Management is an operational business, with compliance and service delivery being two key drivers prompting companies to invest in a CAFM system. For some, the decision will mean a leap into the unknown and a transition away from manual spreadsheets and paper solutions. Others however, may be further along in their CAFM journey and be looking for a more intelligent integration of modules to replace a legacy system.

Whatever path you find yourself on, it's likely the benefits of a complete CAFM solution have already been acknowledged. The following common themes are often noted in businesses looking for a fresh FM approach:

- The need for accurate, swift data capture for the automation of data processing
- The subsequent ability to reduce human intervention and costs
- The introduction of greater efficiency and improved service to end users and the business itself

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When researching the right product for your business, perhaps one of the most important considerations comes down to cost – but companies should look deeper than this. Making sure you choose a system that offers value for money, means looking beyond initial purchase cost.
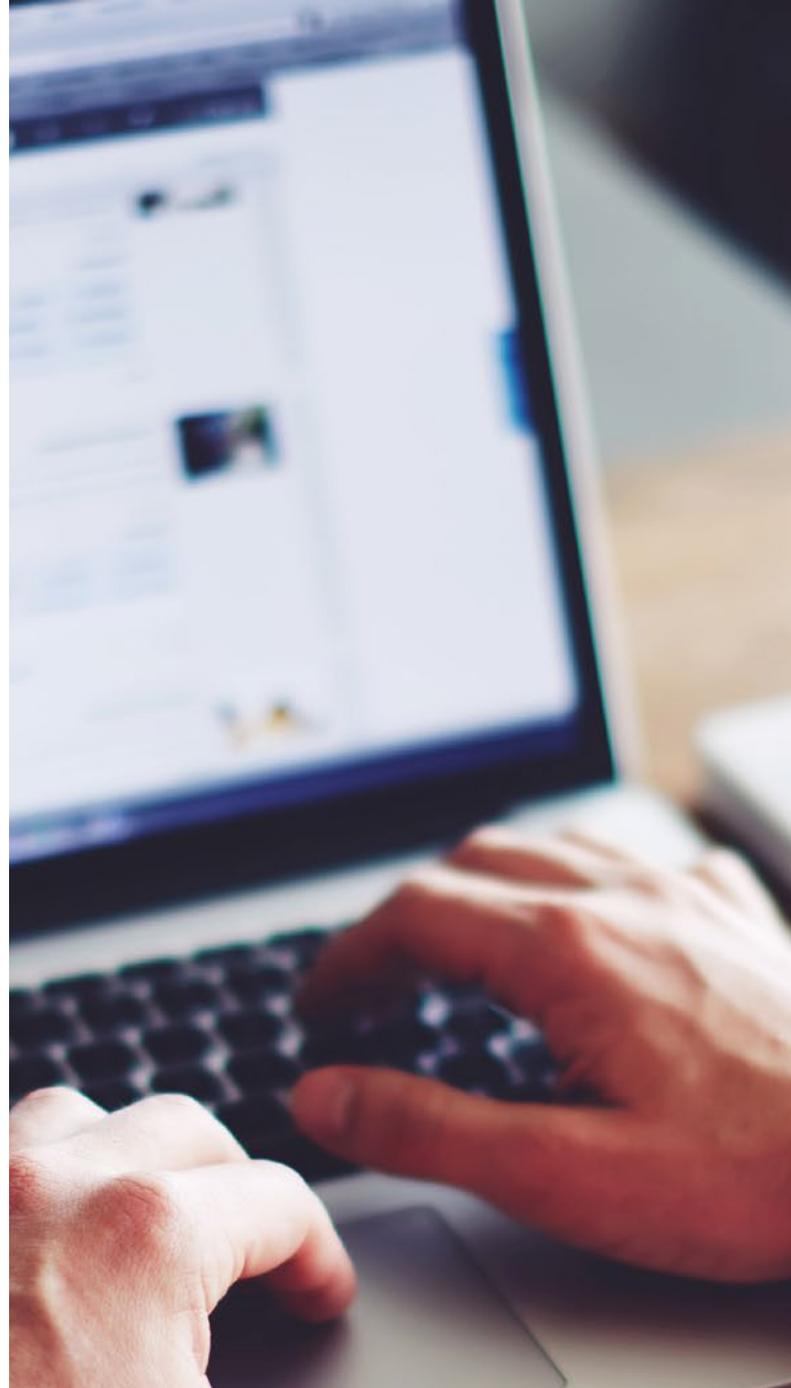
CAFM packages can vary significantly, so it's essential to really scrutinise the long-term cost of the product – not just the initial outlay. Are there limits on the number of assets you can store before you incur charges? Ideally, look for providers who don't charge extra to scale the product, and ensure there are no hidden licence or implementation costs.

Configurability should also be considered – any costs saved during purchase will be quickly negated if teams have to spend a significant amount of time customising it themselves. Investigate whether the time to configure is included in the initial purchase cost and will vendor support be provided to tailor the product to your organisational needs?

Essentially, a great CAFM system is one that can evolve seamlessly in line with the needs of the company. The financial implications of this should be explored thoroughly during selection. After all, the benefits of implementing the right CAFM solution are huge but the costs of implementing the wrong one are also huge.

Trust in the team

Investment in technology can feel like a leap into the unknown for many FMs. That's why it's crucial to surround yourself with good people – people who are experienced and have a long track record in deploying CAFM systems.

You want to partner with a vendor who can help you take a proactive approach to facilities management. Therefore, once you've looked into the actual product, look into the company providing you it. There's nothing more valuable than experience and reputation – find a partner who has the knowledge to help you achieve your FM goals and can offer support and guidance whenever you need it.

Customer service is also key. If you have issues with the software post launch or if you simply need advice on functionality, you need to feel assured that your chosen vendor will always be at the other end of the line. Effective facilities management relies on operations running 24/7 – so should you experience problems with the software, you need to be able to trust that the team can help you overcome them.

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Flexing to need

Facilities Management is extremely diverse – every estate is different, with contrasting challenges and needs. Therefore, versatility is king. That's versatility in the product itself – its ability to be moulded and fit in with your current systems – and versatility in the provider by having sufficient cross-sector experience to offer the right support, at the right time.

Look for providers who have a broad track record across sectors, as this is usually indicative that their product can flex easily to suit a wide variety of industries. It may also be worthwhile going one step further and researching the buildings or projects the CAFM product is active in – from cinemas and sports complexes to universities and managed services providers. Vendors with these types of clients on their books are interesting as it shows both scale and versatility.

Finally, it's important to remember that CAFM solutions can be on-premise or cloud-based. How do you want the tech to run? While doing your research, make sure the vendor can meet your aspirations in these areas

It's good to talk

From experience, a collaborative relationship between provider and customer leads to better outcomes. Your voice should always be important – so it's wise to ask prospective CAFM companies about ongoing product development and whether this is informed by actual customer feedback. Finding a provider that hosts regular user groups or forums can be a real asset and shows a genuine commitment to collaborate.

It's also essential that you talk to your colleagues – the people who will be using the software day-to-day. Getting their buy-in through demonstrations and training is a crucial part of the process and a reputable vendor should be able to support you with this.

Specifically, ask them if they provide relevant materials and a training database where users can practise tasks such as data input to gain system knowledge before the system goes live. How else can they support the training and how long will it last? Cementing buy-in from the wider organisation is pivotal because ultimately, if the system isn't used to best effect, your longer term CAFM objectives will never be met. Ensure your vendor of choice prioritises staff training as much as you do.

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Keeping mobile

While features like a reliable help desk and reporting functionality are crucial, so too is the ability to access these out in the field. Considering how well the product works remotely is essential – even if you don't intend to launch mobile working straightaway.

By being able to grant access to key personnel such as mobile engineers and contractors, means they can manage their own workload, report back on completed tasks and work far more efficiently.

Keeping your business moving is key to achieving your financial and productivity targets and the right CAFM system can be pivotal in realising these goals by mobilising your workforce.

For further information on CAFM Explorer and how it could help your business, please email marketing@idoxgroup.com

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