

The many facets of CAFM: One size does not fit all

Computer-aided facility management systems increase in popularity



INSIDER VIEW

Peter Stein

For many companies, implementing and deploying an enterprise-wide computer-aided facilities management (CAFM) software system — despite the considerable efficiencies and cost-savings it affords across space, personnel, asset, lease and operations management — can seem daunting. Until recently, CAFM systems have primarily been used by companies with hun-

dreds of thousands of square feet of real estate.

This perception of CAFM has kept the benefits of these corporate real estate and facilities management systems from being realized by many potential users. It has also led software developers to create similar but disparate products such as TIFM (total infrastructure facilities management), IWMS (integrated workplace management system) or the lesser-known FIMS (facilities information management system). While the result is an abundance of acronyms in the marketplace, many real estate and facilities professionals are still missing out.

CAFM technology is increasingly important for real estate and facilities departments and applications for other business areas are now being developed. Any company — regardless of size or budget — can benefit from CAFM systems not only for real estate and facilities management, but also for human resources, asset management and operations management.

Understanding of what it can do for your company, which departments will use it and what your company needs it to do. To ensure the effectiveness of CAFM technology, users need to understand the system and ensure the information is up to date, accurate and well-maintained.

Companies that deploy the traditional expensive and complex CAFM systems typically underutilize the software and quickly relegate it to “shelf-ware.” Inexpensive CAFM options exist that have 80 percent to 90 percent of the features required to provide most of the necessary functionality.

For example, two sample companies have different but similar requirements. One is a large company with 750,000 square feet of space that utilizes an enterprise-class CAFM system for chargeback reporting. The other is a smaller company that currently uses PowerPoint to track its people through 90,000 square feet of space.

- Company No. 1: With 750,000 square feet of space under management, it may seem worthwhile for the first company to pay a few thousand dollars per month for software to generate reports that indicate the proper allocation of space to various departments. After all, the information is extremely valuable for proper cost allocations. But the software system also provides the ability to track assets, real estate leases and service requests — robust offerings, but more than this company needs. This company can save 30 percent to 50 percent of the cost of the software per month — thousands of dollars a month — with lower-cost, lesser-featured systems that can meet

the company's basic needs.

- Company No. 2: The second company used PowerPoint drawings and colored pencils to track space and personnel, which was time-consuming and error-prone. However, with extra resources and overtime, it worked well enough to produce the occupancy and planning reports demanded by the CFO — almost. The company is now seeking an inexpensive CAFM product and is investigating various systems.

In both cases, successful CAFM implementation requires processes to collect and maintain accurate, up-to-date facility information. When adequate processes are understood and executed, the best CAFM systems on the market become nothing more than variations of the same database. The trick is to purchase the system that suits your needs.

For every real estate and facility need, from individual relocation projects to strategic real estate planning and on-going facilities management efforts, CAFM software helps companies be more efficient. From the simplest charge-back report to complex space planning scenarios to lease and asset management to full-blown work order systems, customized CAFM systems can provide as little or as much information management as a user requires.

We advise companies considering CAFM and those looking to better utilize their current CAFM system to identify the company's needs, define the features and applications the company will use and choose a system that can grow with the business.

PETER STEIN is manager of process and technology improvement at Fox Relocation Management in Boston. He can be reached at pstein@foxcorp.com.