CAFM as a Better Business Tool

Corporate growth, especially of the fast-track variety, is exciting. However growth can engender frustration about the sums of money going into the Property, Plant and Equipment line items on the corporate balance sheet. Suddenly one owns property, or is obliged to honor a lease, may own or rent furniture or may discover that its computer network is expanding faster than anticipated. Once a company houses itself on more than one floor or in more than one location, even keeping track of where individual employees are housed can become difficult.

One tool that has been developed to answer these concerns is what is known as Computer Aided Facilities Management (CAFM). CAFM uses the power of relational databases and architectural CAD drawings to develop information that can be used to analyze and control facility costs.

Most commonly CAFM programs are used to support an organization’s overhead chargeback process. In fact sixty percent of the people using CAFM software use it for this purpose alone. It allows a facilities staff to quickly and accurately report the measurements of space occupied by departments and groups. Without CAFM this is typically a frustrating job for Facility Managers that involves sitting down with architectural floor plans, an architectural scale and too few different colors of markers and pencils attempting to measure how many square feet each department occupies. This manual process usually includes more than a few late nights and the accuracy of the data is rarely commensurate with the aggravation inherent in the process.

CAFM software can also help organizations keep track of information related to employees, such as location, department phone number, e-mail address, computer jack number and so on. It is also used to maintain depreciation, warranty, insurance and lease information on furniture and equipment. CAFM’s ability to maintain a property lease database and develop analysis methods to compare real estate costs across several properties has been very useful for large organizations. It can greatly ease the difficulties of maintaining financial and accounting control to help prevent facility costs from becoming a fast-growing company’s pet peeve.

Some CAFM packages offer the capability to develop both a visual and tabular representations of the layout of computer cabling. Thus network administrators, security, engineering and IT folks can use CAFM to track changes and troubleshoot problems quickly. Three computers on the North side of the building will not connect to the server? What do the three no-shows have in common? CAFM may reveal the answer.

It requires some forethought to set up a CAFM installation that works well for a company. The people involved have to agree on what sort of information they will want to track in the future to determine how to set up the database. Additionally, some thought should be given to how changes in the information stored in the database – employee moves and new hires for example – will be collected and communicated to the people maintaining the database. Companies that set up CAFM systems do not always stress this vital step. However if neglected it often results in substandard performance through inaccuracies that compromise the effectiveness of the system.

There are a variety of CAFM software programs available and most can be customized to reflect data in ways that make sense in and conform to a company’s existing reporting protocols. Additionally there are professional services firms that can provide implementation and data maintenance on an outsourced basis. Most vendors of CAFM software and systems can provide services that range from setting up the database and training internal employees to manage it, to providing a one-stop source of CAFM installation, tracking and management.

Whichever system, consultancy or vendor a company chooses, it’s a safe bet that, if implemented and maintained properly, CAFM can easily be another example of better living and better business through technology.