

# WHAT role WILL technology HAVE IN FACILITIES MANAGERS' battle TO MAKE BUILDINGS compliant?

Despite its many uses the core benefit of technology is that it's a massive enabler. In the business world it enables a companies to solve a problem or satisfy a need. Mark Purnell, *director* of complyNC, thinks technology has a major role to play in helping FMs meet their compliance challenges.

Perceived wisdom tells us that some challenges represent opportunities, which is a pleasant philosophical throwaway. But in practice, it's nice to be given a helping hand to meet and overcome routine work-related challenges – especially when failure to comply with these challenges can have such devastating consequences.

While FM per se may not yet be at the head of everyone's board agenda, the obligations for wide-ranging operational compliance, and the risks to individuals, businesses and organisations posed by non-compliance, is right at the top of most company's critical list as a non negotiable 'must have'.

FM occupies a singular position in the world of compliance and is remarkable for the breathtakingly diverse and wide-ranging nature of the operational and conformity challenges and obligations, which it faces day in, day out.

Compliance management and mitigation of the associated risks is one of the most significant challenges facing today's facilities managers, their employers and/or their clients – depending on who sits where in the audit trail of culpability.

The good news is that technology can provide FM with the ultimate helping hand, driving optimum levels of service

delivery and performance to help FMs triumph over the compliance challenge. It also has the potential to provide FM with the opportunity to show itself off to fantastic and leading edge effect in the comparative commercial sector showcase.

Compliance directors are now a very regular feature of many contemporary board structures. But such grandiose titles can ultimately be a poisoned chalice for those who are inadequately equipped to deal with the responsibilities and liabilities conferred upon them.

In addition to the continuous imperatives to deliver high quality client services at best cost and sometimes at breakneck speed, facilities managers face a constantly shifting barrage of complex, burdensome and seemingly limitless governances every step of the way which include, among other considerations, the need to conform to British and International Standards, contractual stringencies including SLA's and KPI's, specialist technical legislations and industry Codes of Practice.

To add to the scale of the 'opportunity' posed by this unforgiving FM compliance challenge, one only has to consider the astounding number of matters under regular management and scrutiny within our world: security; hygiene; food

preparation; health & safety; environmental and energy management; mechanical and electrical infrastructures; HR considerations; business continuity – the list goes on. And under each and every main subject heading sits a seemingly infinite assortment of highly explicit obligations certain to tax the capabilities of even the most competent individuals.

It is surely unrealistic to imagine that this all-embracing raft of extraordinarily detailed and regularly changing professional requisites can be dealt with efficiently at an entirely human level. How can an FM, or even an FM team, using the more traditional paper and instruction based tools and practices be expected to keep abreast and on top of all their compliance obligations all the time? And, even if they could, how cost effective would such an army of necessarily all-singing, all-dancing individuals be?

So, enough of the scare mongering. Where's the opportunity? Where's the helping hand?

Technology, if used intelligently, simply and relevantly, undoubtedly has a major role to play in supporting FMs to meet their compliance challenges and to consistently deliver the highest levels of operational quality and conformity across the board. I stress the use of the word 'support'. Technology should never be considered as a substitute for good managers and administrators – good

people – but as a virtual colleague in the battle to overcome all performance challenges and to deliver optimum levels of service quality and value.

Herein lies a further potential challenge, however. From my experience, FM and technology are not always the most comfortable of bedfellows for a number of reasons – some cultural, some practical. While the new and emerging generation of FMs are generally much more naturally technophilic and ready to embrace – or even demand – new and innovative technological systems as fundamental tools in their working lives, the ‘more mature’ generation may, perhaps, be less than enthusiastic on occasion.

There can, of course, be an indolent resistance to technology at all levels of the service and management chain, young and not so young, but greater problems tend to be presented at grass roots operator levels where such advances can be seen as transitory novelties to be superficially tolerated (*or not*), or as Big Brother initiatives to be actively (*and sometimes passively to the same negative effect*) resisted.

Such resistance can be very energetic and determined indeed, and I have direct experience of numerous PDAs (*personal digital assistants*) ending up down toilets or even being microwaved as demonstrations of their clear inadequacy and unacceptability in the operational field. If only the same levels of creative energy were employed in adopting new systemisation as in the invention of 1,001 reasons why they will never ever work.

However, I’m sure that this type of opposition is not unique to FM and is part of the challenge of the human condition and the forces, which can be ranged against the unavoidable but unwelcome transitions to more modern and effective ways of working. The 21st Century equivalent of the, ultimately futile, 19th Century Luddite movement perhaps, although a little less romantic in its modern day “PDA down the toilet” connotations.

Couple this propensity to less than enthusiastic willingness to embrace new technologies with the complexity and un-user-friendliness of a number of widespread FM software systems and the challenge becomes even tougher. How many

times does one hear that “you need a degree in astrophysics to use it” or similar in relation to CAFM technology at intended user level?

The characteristic criticism seems to be that many CAFM products are not only prohibitively and disproportionately expensive (*both in their initial cost and more creatively in the significant indispensable ‘extras’ which only become apparent post-purchase*) but also that they seem to do umpteen superfluous things that you don’t want, while not delivering satisfactorily the things that you do want. The classic experience is one of disappointment with CAFM’s incapacity to deliver on its sales pitch promises leading to a deep scepticism of technology solutions.

So, what’s the answer to the conundrum? Simplicity is, to my mind, the absolute key. Don’t over-engineer these technology systems to satisfy the egos of the techie development teams, but design them instead around the entirely practical and relevant needs and pressures of FM and those who are intended to use them, at every level, every day.

At the risk of being shot down by the compliance gurus, and at a very simplistic level, compliance is all about consistently and precisely following each and every essential process in the correct order and managing all tasks undertaken, both planned and reactive, in strict accordance with these pre-ordained pathways which, when merged together, facilitate compliance with a British Standard or an SLA or a Technical Specification.

These critical processes – the do’s and don’ts of compliance – can all be defined in logical order in an uncomplicated, readily comprehensible range of

software applications, which guide the users smoothly through the maze of conformity governances and prompts them, through the electronic medium (emails, texts etc), when any mandatory activity or tick box is in danger of being compromised. Such task management systems are already in everyday use in many business sectors and have the complete versatility to meet the demands of operational FM compliance.

However, this is only if they are applied simply and relevantly to dovetail precisely with the genuine needs of every level of facilities management and service delivery. Not as works of technological brilliance, which look whizzy but are a million miles away from the realities of sharp-end FM delivery.

As elements of each compliance requirement inevitably alter and evolve over time, these changes can be simply and seamlessly incorporated within the updated technology systems ‘on the hoof’ so that FM’s are always battling from the front foot with the very best and most current tools to hand.

In summary, I am certain that technology has a major role to play in helping FMs address and overcome the complex critical challenges, which compliance represents in their working lives on so many varying fronts. Technology also provides FM with the opportunity to be seen as a star player in the broader commercial world and as an innovator in this increasingly important area of business life.

