



If you're in FM
you need to
be on i-FM

Comment

Up from the Ashes of Recession

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No well managed business can risk standing still for too long. Stagnation can all too easily lead to extinction.

The more progressive companies operating at the cutting edge - regularly refreshing or reinventing their strategies, services and products - are generally the most attractive, successful and profitable. Think Apple. Think Dyson. Companies sticking with the same, tired models or who indulge in meaningless faux initiatives are yesterday's news and can (and maybe should) fall by the wayside. Think Woolworths. Just think.

The recent global recession has weeded out many of the weakest and least competently managed businesses. Some will seek to blame the downturn for their demise, but the reality is that the recession has merely exposed their commercial frailties and accelerated the inevitable. It's an aggressive and ruthless commercial world out there where only the fittest deserve to survive, and ineptitude - and complacency - can be very swiftly and permanently punished. Those left standing are probably as well positioned as they may ever be to take advantage of the opportunities which will be presented by a new wave of business optimism and the irresistible force of the re-emergence of the world's economies into the light. We are starting to see tentative signs of a renewed appetite for investment in the property and capital project markets by ultimate clients who are similarly only able to risk treading water for a finite period before being overtaken by their more adventurous and forward-thinking competitors.

So, now is the time to start thinking. How should FM businesses best prepare and position themselves to take the maximum creative advantage of a more buoyant financial climate?

It is desperately difficult to offer genuine innovation and differentiation in the highly competitive and, let's be honest, pretty formulaic world of facilities and property management. But maybe we shouldn't overcomplicate what is essentially a straightforward proposition. I once asked the Director of Property and Facilities at a FTSE 100 company what he would hope for as a true differentiator in his FM service 'partners'. His response was that, in the event that these partners constantly delivered their services to the agreed cost, to compliant standards and in accordance with the defined programme, then this would represent an invaluable differentiator in a sector where the existence or combination of such fundamental qualities is not necessarily the common experience.

So, the best way for FM businesses to thrive is to set out their commercial stalls to do the simple things consistently well and to only deliver customer services of the highest possible levels of compliance, quality and value without needing to be micro-managed by clients or external regulatory bodies.

Technology, if used intelligently and relevantly, can represent a major commercial differentiator and can facilitate far superior ways of delivering FM services and managing property assets. I'm not talking about the generic software in a box which has typified the CAFM marketplace to date, much of which is based on old technology and is over-engineered, impractical and downright clunky. But new, simple to use and smarter systems designed specifically to meet the grass-root demands and challenges of everyday FM and aligned to the real-world requirements of all those involved in the service management and delivery chain.

Technology has the most phenomenal capabilities and it's evolving at breakneck speed on an almost daily basis. It can revolutionise working practices and enable innumerable efficiencies for those who are able to harness its true power to optimum effect. Property and FM can be a bit reluctant to embrace change at times, but why should it be any different from all the other business sectors in exploiting the fullest potential that technology represents, and for it to flourish and be better appreciated as a direct result?

The trick is to make technology work for FM, rather than drive FM to work backwards to accommodate what the CAFM market has offered to date. We're facing pretty extraordinary and exciting times, and the emerging post-recession generation of FM people and businesses should be grasping the enormous opportunities presented by technology with both hands to craft a healthier future for themselves.

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