

Computer Aided Facilities Management (CAFM) evolved in the late 1980s and has become an essential business tool, relied on by many Facilities and Estates departments. CAFM Solutions offer distinct benefits in the management of day-to-day operations and performance monitoring. With its reach now extending to Hospitality, IT departments and beyond, the role of CAFM becomes a much more prominent business solution and raises the profile and value of Facilities and Estates departments.

# CAFM Technology



Naturally, original development platforms came with limitations. Since early CAFM incarnations, CAFM user sophistication and advances in Information Technology have both contributed towards product development and guided the direction of CAFM Solutions. Today, this drive has led development towards fully web-based management solutions, opening the door to a global interface which no longer relies on individual PC deployment. In-turn, web-based solutions help to relieve the strain placed on IT departments, often incurred by individual PC support.

Although the idea of a completely web-based solution is an invaluable operational method for many users, web technologies continue to face issues surrounding security, performance and functionality. With the introduction of platforms such as Microsoft Windows Presentation Foundation (WPF), CAFM Software vendors, such as Tabs FM Ltd, have begun to develop a long term solution to address these technical requirements. With intelligent systems architecture, systems suppliers can now support deployment as either web-based or PC based applications, depending on desired environment. Both options are able to share a single data source, without the loss of system functionality or performance. Technology can now support advanced system capabilities via a single development platform that is suitable for Web browsers or PC's.

Pending the completion of this conversion to a 'one-application-for-all' solution, there is an alternative CAFM deployment method which is often underestimated yet commonly used to overcome

issues with mobile working. A Hosted Desktop solution is essentially a virtual PC/Server that is accessible through either a Web browser or standard Windows Desktop (RDP) connection. Applications you would normally install on your local PC can also be installed and operated using exactly the same methods, except in a virtual environment. Through replicated servers, Hosted Desktop solutions offer instant disaster recovery schemes to ensure that minimum system downtime is experienced in the event of technical meltdown!

Advances in mobile software development technology, have also helped to support the direction of CAFM systems. Mobile CAFM applications provide engineers with the tool to receive and respond to maintenance tasks (including signature and image capture), whilst out in the field. With the introduction of Pocket PC Satellite Navigation systems, RFID/Barcode scanning, coupled with low cost 'Push-to-Talk' communication/location software, the benefits of incorporating mobile CAFM technology as part of an overall solution are easily identifiable.

So, what does this all mean for the CAFM users? Essentially, the introduction of new software and hardware technology offers end users greater flexibility and opens doors to new possibilities for Facilities Management. The flexibility of a Web or PC based application, along with the introduction of a Hosted Desktop or Citrix environment ensure that there is a technical CAFM solution to suit your business requirements.

The latest mobile CAFM technology provide efficient processes and enhances performance and service levels. This is achieved by data captured via the mobile device being instantly transferred back to the central database, supporting analysis through new CAFM tools such as Digital Dashboards. Digital Dashboards provide managers or clients with access to live data, presented graphically, which can be 'drilled-through' and evaluated to monitor individual performance or service performance in accordance with outlined Service Level Agreements (SLAs) or Key Performance Indicators (KPI's).



As James Ellis, Operations Manager of Tabs FM, comments: "CAFM systems are continuing to evolve by anticipating market trends and developing functionality to meet the demands of the marketplace. The advances in technology, including Hosted Desktop Solutions and the latest mobile offerings, have all played a significant role in the products and services that are now on offer. As a supplier, I welcome the challenges laid down by industrial and commercial end users and strive for excellence when delivering a solution that is not just technically advanced, but most importantly fully functional." ✨

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