

The Personalization of Business Management Systems for Today's Global Enterprise

Modern facility management systems must be organic extensions of your production platform

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Abstract: In a global marketplace where content creators and distributors are increasingly challenged to produce a wide variety of formats, business and content management processes are more important than ever. While many companies focus on the individual pieces of the content creation and distribution cycles, very little attention is paid to the business systems driving them. Today, a successful company needs to effectively merge the business management process with the automation process to create a holistic management and operational strategy for the entire enterprise.

Not all that long ago, a media business could thrive while making employees bend to the will of their IT systems, and the idea of servicing a worldwide clientele was patently absurd. Then the global explosion of formats and distribution channels set the previous paradigm on its ear. In many cases, however, business systems have continued to just chug along; blissfully unaware of the radically different market conditions their users confronted.

Businesses can little afford the inefficiencies inherent in these legacy systems. Facility management systems must be organic extensions of the production platform, and they must conform to the global marketplace, as well as to the personalized needs of individual users.

Historically, facility management solutions were monolithic systems unable to meld easily with the needs of individual users, adapt to a global marketplace or modify core workflows on an as needed basis. They focused on a legacy business model filled with appointment-based schedules and permanent staff management. Linear approaches to automated billing rates, the lack of interface to other systems in the enterprise, and the inability to create an integrated network of all participants in the supply chain left these dated systems unable

to cope with today's challenges and completely inappropriate as platforms for change.

Beware the buggy whip

Essentially, those traditional systems equate to well-intentioned buggy whips in the space age. The introduction of ad hoc management practices, the velocity of metadata, and the downward pressure placed on pricing have made redundant data entry and inefficient workflows more than an inconvenience. They are a potential death knell for a business of any size.

The dawn of the open system

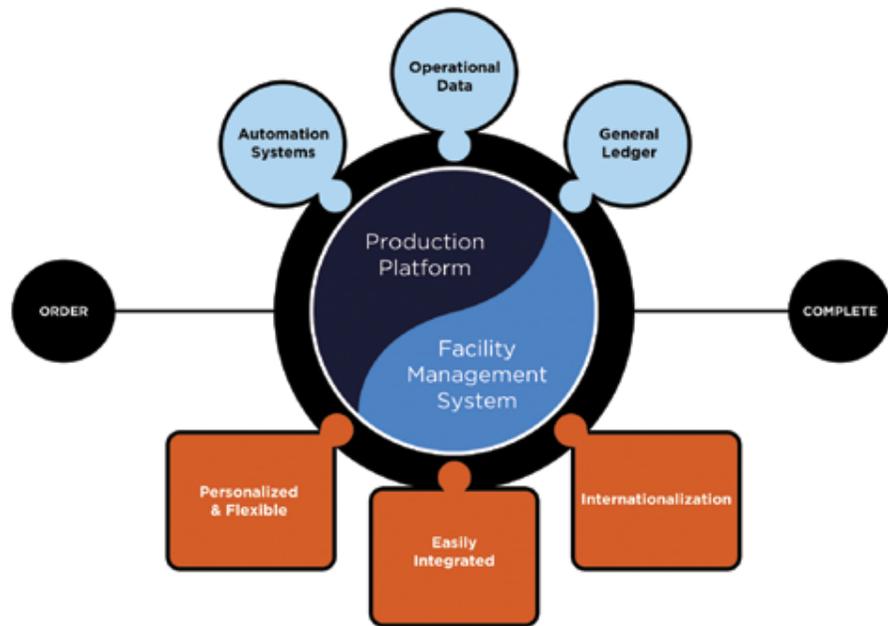
I've been to dozens of technical conferences over the years, and I'm always surprised to find order management left out of any serious discussion of overall automation. At the end of the day, somebody has to request the content being consumed, do they not? Doesn't it make sense to begin the automation process with the actual order? You'd be amazed at the error rate introduced by human mistakes in the translation process of order to workflow. I believe the reason for this omission isn't a lack of understanding, but rather exhaustion brought on by watching traditional business systems try to operate in the current world with yesterday's technology. With so many other challenges to address, wading into the quagmire of management software no doubt seemed a poor use of valuable time.

Now with (semi-)solid interface protocols and componentized design, new facility management systems are on the market and well positioned to meet today's challenges without impeding the ability to adapt to rapid change. There are several keys to a modern system.

First is personalization. The functions of a system at large, as well as an individual user, are now easily tailored to need. This is made possible by system design based around a development platform where the interfaces are modifiable extensions of the platform itself. A successful system will easily create separate user interfaces for administrative staff, operational crews, management and file management. These interfaces can be modified without going back to the vendor and can now walk a user through the process outlined by management in a logical and elegant manner, as opposed to training staff how to work around a system's shortcomings.

Secondly, interfaces to all systems in a company's workflow are even more important. To achieve seamless integration, APIs cannot be bolted on to legacy systems. Systems must have a componentized architecture and use automated workflows to trigger data movement and transformation functions. For instance, a vendor may use an internal workflow engine as part of its core offering. In this case, triggering events are created and launch workflows populated

Three Keys to a Modern Facility Management System



with data payloads through a translation phase, where data is converted to the target format. By using this model, integrations are not singularities but ongoing, configurable features of a platform.

Thirdly, internationalization is a key component of a modern Facility Management System. Multilingual and multi-currency features are great starts. Federation of schedules, master data, asset repositories, orders information and purchase order information is key to today's business world.

The true path of data is no longer inside a system or even across a platform. Data paths now flow amongst systems. A purchase order in one system can set up a work order in another. The movement of an asset in one storage system is now radiated to multiple business systems. This structure allows the supply chain to evolve from something a manufacturer runs to a matrix of systems all participants in the ecosystem leverage. To do this successfully,

taxonomy maps, multilingual user interfaces and on the fly currency conversion are required.

Conclusion

With ever shrinking margins and the continuing commoditization of technology, a strong production platform is mandatory to manage the sheer velocity of content. Tighter budgets demand that businesses wring efficiencies out of every system at their disposal, and the days of looking at a facility management system as simply the "house calculator" are long gone. While systems traditionally played a key role in converting operational details into General Ledger Transactions, their mandate has greatly expanded.

Hopefully our article armed you with the right questions to consider as you evaluate whether you have a buggy whip in your hand or if you're hitching a ride with Henry Ford. ■



Greg Dolan directs Xytech's operational, sales and marketing organizations worldwide. He joined Xytech after a decade at another firm, where he successfully introduced a suite of software products for the media services, broadcast, and video transmission industries. He has held other senior positions; including CIO of New York Media Group and Manager of Budget Systems for Sedgwick James.