

# Repairs & Maintenance

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## Make a Positive First Impression

### Tips for managing seasonal exterior maintenance

Everyone has heard the old adage: You only get one chance to make a first impression. Giving that firm handshake and looking someone in the eye is the start of a relationship.

In the restaurant business, the “firm handshake” is a properly maintained exterior. It’s the one thing that people see—even driving by—before they ever set foot in the restaurant or taste the food. When people see a run-down building, or a poorly lit parking lot, they may develop a negative feeling about a business.

In the digital age, a restaurant might not even get the benefit of the doubt when it comes to this “virtual handshake.” After a few negative Yelp or OpenTable reviews about the shoddy state of a facility, down go the scores and the foot traffic.

In this way, ensuring that exterior assets, such as signs, lighting, walkways, parking lots and landscaping, are in good condition is as important as maintaining an impeccable kitchen. Staying ahead of maintenance—especially in the face of changing seasons—is a way to drive not only business but also efficiency and cost savings.

For chain, quick-service and franchise restaurants, there are many moving pieces. Keeping track of vendors and work orders, especially for once-a-year jobs, can be a challenge. Centralized facility management software can help facility managers get ahead of exterior maintenance needs.

Let’s take a look at three ways facility managers can proactively manage seasonal exterior maintenance:

### Schedule Preventive Maintenance

Facility managers know the importance of preventive maintenance, but keeping up with scheduled maintenance can be a challenge. The squeaky wheel get the grease, right? With repairs and routine

upkeep on top of normal business operations, preventive maintenance can fall to the wayside. For exterior work, in particular, much of it can be “hidden” from the routine work of employees, e.g., roofing, siding and lighting, which is only properly evaluated at night.

For the exterior of the building (building envelope and property), create a master list of assets and outline the required maintenance measures. Identify internal or external resources (vendors or contractors) that could handle work orders.

With exterior maintenance, seasonality must be taken into consideration. You don't want to schedule a roof replacement in the middle of a snowy winter, a gutter cleaning when leaves are still falling or a parking lot resurfacing at the height of the busy season. In managing properties across geographies, seasonality has to be taken into account as you start to be more proactive with your preventive schedule.

There are business benefits for staying on top of preventive maintenance beyond maintaining a safe, operational facility. Consistent preventive maintenance minimizes the expense of emergency repairs and supports business uptime. This saves money in the long run. Additionally, smart businesses have learned to negotiate set rates for preventive maintenance and repair services, known as not-to-exceed (NTE) pricing, which will help keep costs under control as well as expedite invoicing and payment.

### Creating a Trusted Contractor Network

Managing multiple properties is a challenge, especially if the properties are in diverse locations. Facility management teams don't necessarily have the benefit of local knowledge, so building a trusted, reliable contractor network is essential.

In the restaurant business, there are special considerations as well—primarily, performing work during quiet periods (before or after normal business hours, or during off days). Not all vendors are flexible and reliable for this type of work.

Having one place where vendor information is kept increases visibility—and can uncover cost-savings opportunities. For example, let's say all the franchise restaurants in a 20-mile radius require fall clean-ups. Historically, each franchise hired a local landscaper to do the job. Knowing this type of work needs to be done at several properties, the facility manager can go out to bid with a multi-property work order and realize considerable cost savings.

Building out this trusted contractor network takes time, coordination and open, two-way communication between the business and the contractors. However, having a vetted list of vendors that you can turn to each season for property maintenance issues can be a strategic asset for effective facility management.

### Dig Deeper for Analytical Insights

As you continue on your quest for cost savings and increased efficiency in exterior maintenance, the next step is analysis. Over time, facility managers can uncover patterns and trends within their own maintenance records.

Many restaurant facility management teams are employing facility management software to gain visibility into their operations and drive costs down. These are the types of insights to look for:

- Smarter scheduling: What time of year are exterior assets breaking down/ needing maintenance?
- Disproportionate spend: Which exterior assets are disproportionately using up repair and maintenance effort/spend?
- Cost/benefit analysis: Would getting a new asset be cheaper in the long run than repairing?

Without visibility into historic spend, facility managers are at a disadvantage when it comes to finding efficiency. Leveraging data can help identify ways to more effectively manage seasonal exterior maintenance.

### Final Thoughts

When it comes down to it, facility management is about staying one step ahead of the inevitable. It's about being prepared. When done well, it's proactive and it's strategic. Of course, there will be the unforeseen, but the changing of the seasons is predictable. And so is all the exterior maintenance that comes along with that—from power washing the outdoor patio to snowplowing to window cleaning.

Getting a strong handle on seasonal exterior maintenance is a first step toward a more forward-thinking facility management strategy. Creating a preventive maintenance schedule, developing your vendor network, and enabling analytics can reveal opportunities to drive down costs and promote a safe, productive business year in and year out.

Tom Buiocchi is the President and CEO of ServiceChannel. He joined ServiceChannel as an Executive Director in 2014. Buiocchi has more than 30 years of experience leading growth companies in both technology and energy services, and has a bachelor of science in electrical engineering from Union College and an MBA from Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management.

