Emerging Trends

Jeff Dover

Managing DATA

Exploring the role of digital information in the restaurant of the future

For the next several issues, my articles will focus on emerging trends in our industry. I will partner with a different vendor member for each article to gain insight on what they see happening in the future. These articles are geared to help restaurant facility professionals with their responsibilities of protecting their company assets and adding more value to their position within the organization. For my first article, I chose Entouch due to their proximity to our headquarters in Dallas. Please feel free to reach out to me with your ideas or if you would be interested in contributing to an emerging trend article at jeff@rfmaonline.com or call (912) 805-0905, ext. 3.

The responsibilities of a restaurant facility professional have dramatically increased over the past decade. Most facility managers are now responsible for preventive maintenance, R&M projects, unit remodels, security, landscaping, energy and asset management, and more. How do they find time for it all?

In reality, it's almost impossible to stay on top of every priority; however, there is hope. I had a great meeting with the folks from Entouch Smart Building Solutions to understand their vision for the future of our industry. There is a huge opportunity for facility professionals to tackle their priorities by leveraging data. The digitalization of information has exploded; it's time for restaurant facility professionals to make good use of it.

There are numerous areas in which data can be analyzed, such as:

• Energy management. Real-time energy usage for electric, gas and water, and energy reporting by store, region and state.

• CMMS data on equipment repair histories, asset management, book values and more.

• Food safety data, temperatures, holding times, etc.

• Equipment performance, temperatures, energy usage, on/off times, run times, etc.

A Smarter Restaurant

There will come a time when artificial intelligence or machine learning will enable facility managers to proactively manage their stores. Systems will be able to present facility managers with opportunities to make repairs to equipment before they fail by properly monitoring different equipment metrics. For example, an equipment monitoring system may notice unusual run times or high pressures, which may signal an impending breakdown. A facility manager will avoid dealing with a complete failure because the AI system will have already generated a work request to the local service provider, who will then dispatch a service technician to make proactive changes and/or repairs before it becomes an emergency. This will save time and R&M dollars and increase the useful life of each piece of equipment.

Energy Intelligence

Another benefit will be proactive energy management. Most of our restaurant members work to save utility dollars, but who has the time to review electric and gas invoices and historical store usages and look into problems? The data is there; it just needs to be analyzed properly and presented in a readable fashion.

Again, AI can take over by examining the huge amount of available data and providing exception reports on high-impact items, which can be followed up by store operations, facility managers or other personnel. Items like time clocks or programmable in-store thermostats can be eliminated. Today, how many thermostats are being used correctly? Once power goes out and the battery back-up dies, who reprograms them? Is it done properly?

An AI system does this automatically. It can control lighting, equipment on and off times, run times, and many other equipment functions. For instance, during slow periods of the day, equipment can be automatically turned off or have its run time reduced. Additionally, by analyzing equipment performance, the system can make minor adjustments to reduce the overall kilowatt demand, which normally accounts up to 50 percent of the monthly bill. The system can slowly "shed" various pieces of equipment without sacrificing comfort, safety, or food prep and handling performance.

Connected Kitchens

Our industry will have "connected kitchens" in which all equipment functions are monitored together. Digitizing and analyzing the data from food prep and holding equipment will maximize overall food safety and minimize costs. We all know what one food safety problem can do to a brand. It makes economic sense to concentrate an AI system to take care of this issue. Manual food safety temperature checking and reporting will no longer be necessary. It will be done electronically and can be sent via the internet to the local health department, which may reduce on-site visits from inspectors.

Even preventive maintenance services, which are the lifeblood of restaurant maintenance, will be systematically analyzed using equipment performance metrics. The regular periods of required maintenance service may be adjusted accordingly to maximize efficiency, protect the equipment and prolong its life. Again, this should save companies greatly in service costs, as work will be initiated automatically by the system.

The future is approaching fast, and facility professionals need to be on the front line of change. To ensure your continued value to your organization, you must evolve the way in which you take care of your responsibilities. The old, reactive way of doing business must change to being proactive. The value of the facilities position will increase by utilizing, analyzing and acting on all the data that is available in an efficient, economical manner. It may seem like science fiction, but it's not. Consider reaching out to our RFMA members to get a glimpse into the future of facilities. You don't want to be left behind.

I'm always looking for feedback. Feel free to contact me at (972) 805-0905, ext. 3, or email jeff@rfmaonline.com. Special thanks to Entouch Smart Building Solutions for providing valuable input for this article.

Jeff Dover's facilities career started in 1985. He has been employed by several major chains (Ponderosa, Steak & Ale, Bennigan's, TGI Friday's, Fuddruckers and recently Five Guys Burgers and Fries). His technical education enabled him to take the lead as energy manager, facilities manager and director of facilities at the various brands.