

All-in-one... and one for all

A totally integrated system across the business will not only enhance your service management operations, but will also deliver vital extra revenue-earning opportunities, says Simon Spriggs of Exel Computer Systems

Suggest to Simon Spriggs that an ERP system is all a manufacturer needs to keep a tight handle on what is happening within the business and you are not likely to see his head nodding in agreement.

Rather, Exel Computer Systems' account manager, field service, will tell you that the only sensible way to achieve total integration – of internal and external management information across an entire organisation, embracing finance/accounting, manufacturing, sales and service, customer relationship management, etc – is to have an all-in-one system that gives you a 360-degree view of your customer, and each and every engagement with them.

"If you have that, anyone within the business will be able to see what orders their customers have placed, their account details and purchases, and everything else to do with those customers – and all of this instantaneously, as soon as they pick up the phone," he points out. "When you have this level of customer knowledge at your fingertips – ie, the complete visibility that a fully integrated system delivers – then that opens up so many great opportunities for manufacturers."

Certainly, the right ERP system will do a brilliant job for you when it comes to account management, he acknowledges. "But service management can often be treated as the poor relation in this scenario and that is not a good situation for manufacturers to find themselves in, especially at a time when sales are under pressure and service revenues can go a long way to making up for any shortfalls."

An all-in-one system allows service engineers real-time access to jobs, schedules and mobile data, with any changes relayed directly to the management system, ensuring company-wide mobile data and office-based information are unified throughout. "But it will also go way beyond that," says Spriggs. "It will tell those same service engineers, and anyone else, whether there have been issues with machinery, such as frequent breakdowns. This may provide an opportunity to target that customer for a new machine, on the basis that it would be far more cost effective than paying for numerous visits from an engineer, along with the repeated downtime as production gets halted. Manufacturers can really jump on board with service management, in this regard."

An integrated, real-time system – such as Exel's Eagle Field Service Management solution – delivers other benefits to the service engineer out on the road. These can include drawings, diagrams or video of customer equipment, in order to facilitate repairs, with the confidence that what is being accessed is the latest, most up-to-date version. Users can also, for example, view vehicle stock levels, re-ordering quantities defined by vehicle and part number. When parts fall below their minimum level, a request for replenishment is automatically sent to the appropriate user/department; alternatively the system can be configured to place the order with the supplier automatically.

"We also provide an assisted scheduler to optimise the engineer's day, taking into account the geographical location of jobs, distances, estimated travel time, parts availability, etc, so the right person is always selected for the task. The idea is to demystify the process, so it isn't handled by one person with specialist knowledge, but by any user – from shopfloor to MD."

By getting this exactly right, states Spriggs, you not only maximise service efficiency and revenues, but also create long-term relationships with happy customers. "With a fully integrated system, manufacturers get to know every aspect of their customers' operations – the age, condition and service histories of every piece of plant and machinery, for example – which means they can respond to their service and sales requirements instantly."

"Previously, companies had to link standalone mobile workforce management solutions to their ERP systems and this led to all of the well-known issues inherent in integrating disparate systems," Spriggs concludes.

"Now, they can have a single, fully integrated solution covering all requirements, whether for field service, ERP, CRM or the mobile salesforce. This gives substantial peace of mind in knowing that an upgrade to an element will not affect the integration between all other elements, while ensuring a single supplier is responsible for, and has expertise in, the solution as a whole." ■



Simon Spriggs:
integrated service management will pay dividends for manufacturers

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