



PROFESSIONAL
RETAIL STORE
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TECHNOLOGY TUTOR: PART 4

Optimize facilities management with remote connectivity tools.

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Editor's Note: This article is the fourth in a four-part series on software technology by Data-Basics. Part 1, which covered service request interface (SRI) software, can be found on page 90 of Professional Retail Store Maintenance, April 2004. Part 2, which covered

call centers, can be found on page 42 of Professional Retail Store Maintenance's 2004 Buyer's Guide. Part 3, which dealt with retail maintenance systems, appeared on page 20 of Professional Retail Store Maintenance, September 2004.

Effective communication between stores, facility management departments and service providers is a must in today's competitive retail environment. The quicker a maintenance problem is resolved,

the less impact it has on operations and, potentially, on the customer's experience. This optimal time and performance efficiency can only be attained if the corporate facility manager is exchanging store maintenance information with the service provider network in real time. By utilizing well established and cutting-edge technologies, facility managers can achieve unprecedented efficiency and control over the work order management process.

BRIDGING OLD AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

The primary goal is to use technology to efficiently transmit a service or maintenance request to a service provider (either a subcontractor or employed technician) and receive real-time updates on the status of that work order. With the right software, the initial work notification can be automatically transmitted via fax, e-mail or pager. However, once the notification has been sent, what means exist for the service provider to acknowledge receipt, provide updates and keep the facility manager in the loop? A combination of old and new

connectivity tools should be employed: Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and wireless handheld devices/PDAs. As service providers operate on different levels of technical infrastructure, a retailer's maintenance software must be able to accommodate both IVR and wireless technologies in the update process.

INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE (IVR)

IVR systems allow one of the oldest networks on earth — telephone landlines — to be utilized as the foundation for service providers. Using any touch-tone phone, a service provider can acknowledge receipt of a work order, check in/out at the job site and change status in real time. A solid system will allow voice messages describing the performed work to be recorded and automatically routed to the facility manager via an e-mail attachment. While easy to use, IVR's major disadvantage lays in the limited amount of information users can retrieve from the system. Initial IVR startup costs include the installation of additional phone lines as well as the IVR software and server. Ongoing costs are modest, typically



consisting of monthly phone charges and software license fees. Unlike wireless, there is no need to budget for lost or damaged devices.

WIRELESS HANDHELD DEVICES OR PDAS

Recent advancements in wireless technology have made connecting mobile computing devices to corporate systems a viable undertaking from both a technological and financial standpoint. Through the convergence of several mobile technologies into a single device, a service provider can now receive a message when a work request is sent, acknowledge receipt, check in/out of the store, provide detailed active status updates,

record labor and material usages and capture store manager signatures. Many manufacturers incorporate cell phone, PDA, e-mail, paging and high-speed data transfer into a single, easy-to-carry device. While initially more expensive to deploy than IVR, the additional information uploaded with every work order increases accuracy and saves data entry time later in the billing/payables process. Return-on-investment is usually achieved in less than 1 year on most wireless PDA implementations.

For most retailers who use a mix of company-employed and subcontracted service providers, both solutions should be incorporated into a retail maintenance software system.

The information collected not only keeps the facility manager up-to-date on the status of all open work requests but also allows for unprecedented vendor performance analysis and customer service. **PRSM**

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