

From Pursuit to Renewal:

Six Digital Capabilities Critical to Winning, Retaining Business

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Two building service contractors are vying for a multi-million-dollar, multi-facility contract to provide integrated facilities management (IFM) for a high-profile commercial real estate company, the type of contract that could turn the next few years into outstanding ones for the winning bidder.

The two competitors stack up similarly in most key categories — cost, capabilities, national footprint, self-performed services, service quality and so on. But there's one glaring difference the CRE company cannot overlook. During initial facility walk-downs and assessments, execs at the firm notice that the representative for one of the vendors, Company A, uses a tablet computer to effortlessly document the buildings' assets and condition in detail, pausing briefly at certain moments along the way to capture data points and take photos. During similar walk-downs and site assessments, Company's Z's representative isn't nearly as focused or organized. When he's not furiously jotting notes or flipping through pages in a bulky binder, he's fumbling with his smart phone to hurriedly snap images, which he'll have to sync later as he transcribes his notes into a digital file.

When the bids come back, it's clear to the CRE execs that Company A has a much better handle not only on what's inside the buildings, but also what it will take to maintain those assets to the real estate firm's standards. As they learn during further discussions, the same mobile-enabled digital app that Company A used to document facility assets and conditions during the walk-downs and site assessments also is used for a variety of performance validation, including quality assurance, proactive maintenance identification, end-of-shift reports and any kind of audit or inspection needed to deliver high-quality IFM services. The platform also hosts real-time advanced analytics available for the firm to review anytime, including photo reports.

Company Z, with no such all-encompassing mobile and web app, still relies on a patchwork of reporting and quality-control systems, some digitized and others paper-based.

The choice in this case is obvious: Company A lands the contract — and over the next few years continues to win even more of the CRE firm's business, including a lucrative renewal on their first piece of business.

Hypothetical as this scenario is, it illustrates the advantage that digital facility management tools can provide in a highly competitive, margin-driven business. As the consulting firm Deloitte explains in a 2018 report, "Real estate services of the future must evolve from building and systems management to the integrated management of spaces for users. In this new model, the manager becomes a performance manager with highly productive employees supported by advanced technology and analytic tools."

In such a model, "data is the new gold," says Deloitte. Real estate service vendors "can use insights from their data to help their actual customers, the real estate owners. In fact, besides its ability to increase customer satisfaction, lower turnover rates, and reduce cost, a capacity for structured data analysis can help to position providers as a strategic partner in optimizing and stabilizing returns."

Becoming that kind of partner requires the right blend of digital capabilities — capabilities that extend from pursuit to fulfillment to renewal. Here are a handful that building service management companies are finding particularly useful:

- 1.** The ability to create and maintain dynamic digital catalogs of space types, rooms and assets within buildings, a capability that proves invaluable for bidding/scoping projects, for SLA compliance, and more.
- 2.** Mobile reporting for service validation. Building service contractors are arming employees with mobile apps that enable them to quickly and accurately complete site audits, end-of-shift reports,

QA inspections and the like. They can then feed findings from those tasks back to a central digital platform to develop powerful business insights that allow for proactive training opportunities. The vendor then can verify and validate that they are delivering as promised and staying within the scope of SLAs, a great way to wow clients. Not only do these reporting capabilities give vendors and their clients a level of omniscience — the visibility to be everywhere and see everything in their facilities — they provide a single source of truth about conditions within and across locations.

3. That single source of truth can be augmented with mobile photo management tools that enable a vendor, via images taken by frontline employees, to verify a service or task was performed as specified, or to document the condition of an asset or space. With a central archive of images that are indexed, date-, time- and geo-stamped, both vendors and customers gain new levels of visibility into what's happening inside their buildings.

4. Advanced analytics. With a platform capable not only of collecting, analyzing, and visualizing data from site audits, QA inspections, etc., to drive meaningful business insights and action, a vendor can provide clients with a detailed, revealing picture of conditions at their facilities, even automating reporting and segmenting it by audience or issue type. This intel can spot trends, remedy issues, drive process improvement and generally deliver a better experience to the end-user's employees.

5. The ability to package analytics with images and reporting data into monthly or quarterly business reviews and reports that identify bigger-picture trends in vendor execution/performance, asset performance, space and resource usage and more — the kinds of documentation, both high-level and granular, that prove invaluable come renewal time. A single platform (or an integration of platforms) with the right digital tools can make these reports and the data within them highly visual and digestible.

6. Fast issue mitigation and resolution. When site supervisors and other members of your on-site teams have a mobile auditing app with standardized missions, intuitive benchmarks, and real-time communications tools, they become your eyes and ears on the ground. Their ability to document conditions and to identify and relay building issues to the right partners quickly ensures vendors and their clients can be proactive and address potential issues before they escalate. That same app can integrate with work order ticket systems.

Becoming a vendor of choice and maintaining a firm hold on customer relationships in today's building services business requires companies like yours "to reinvent their value proposition and make it crystal-clear to the customers they serve," posts Deloitte. The reinvention starts with digital capabilities like these.

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