

Essential nature of FM in raising business activity levels



The latest *PFM* special feature to assist FMs and service providers in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic looks at options to consider and help clients to increase business activities

This is the fifth *PFM* special feature published to support our readers in dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 virus, with increasingly more facilities reopening and seeing increased levels of activity at the time of going to press.

The situation continues to be regarded as unprecedented and, although resulting in many negative outcomes, has also included some highlights and improvements for both society in general and the FM sector in particular. In the reopening of facilities, FMs and service partners have been central in ensuring this is done in the most effective manner and has seen appreciation of their efforts resulting from all levels within the business.

In order to assist readers in progressing their essential activities, we asked industry experts for their thoughts on the best way to deliver continuity within the workplace during the ongoing requirements of the Covid-19 pandemic.

FSI business strategy director Paul Bullard says corporations across the world are

beginning to revamp their facilities for a return of the workforce.

"However, as we have recently seen in Leicester this could still be a very reactive situation. Maintenance activities required for a property in the "mothballed" state can be very different from those in place when it is occupied.

"Similarly, different tasks are required to decommission and subsequently recommission a facility," he continues. "It is therefore imperative that FMs are supported by software that allows flexibility in moving from one maintenance regime to another with the flick of a switch.

"Having this in place means that businesses may adapt to new situations immediately without having to spend time and effort re-designing their maintenance activities or re-configuring their CAFM systems," he continues.

The pandemic has brought about a significant change in the way FM is perceived within an organisation. Workplaces now look for visibility of FM activity as a huge factor

in convincing staff their offices are a safe environment to return to.

Cleaning services, for example, traditionally an out of hours function, are now seeing modified shift patterns to provide a very different level of service.

"Key to the raising of the FM profile is making apps and systems available to the end-users that encourage engagement and collaboration with the FM team. Changes affecting the workplace can be easily communicated as well as providing tools that make new services accessible," says Mr Bullard.

Planon solution product marketer Geert-Jan Blon says developing a successful workplace re-entry strategy is far more complex than just adjusting floor plans and room capacity and involves many adjacent processes. Plans need to be practical, flexible, compliant and reliable.

"In addition, employees, visitors and service providers need to have confidence

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in the measures put in place before they are willing to re-enter the work environment. Conversations with our customers reveal that by specifically addressing processes like access, visitor, space and workplace, cleaning and meeting management in their outbreak contingency plans, organisations can demonstrate they are doing their utmost to create a safe and healthy work environment for all workplace users,” he continues.

For successful execution it is key that the intended measures and solutions can be realised quickly, are easy to use and not seen as intimidating.

Using business automation can alleviate this task. It supports those responsible for workplace management in organising processes that play a pivotal role in providing a safe, healthy and compliant work environment, as well as allowing easy use via friendly mobile solutions, helping people feel confident to re-enter the workplace.

“While we sincerely hope not to have to deal with another pandemic in our lifetimes, the actions we take and plans we put in place now should be robust and flexible enough to ensure preparedness for the future,” says Mr Blon.

Since the start of the pandemic, people around the world have been advised about the best hygiene practices, triggering a surge in the sale and use of cleaning products and hand sanitisers. However, these instructions rarely come with advice about responsible

use – or the consequence of misuse, according to InnuScience.

A recent Bloomberg Law report said “businesses across the US have begun intensive Covid-19 disinfection regimes that may be exposing workers and consumers to chemicals that are largely untested for human health”. It says this is “alarming health and environmental safety experts” because disinfectants can be harmful to cleaning workers and building users.

Health risks include neurological, dermatological, and reproductive problems as well as an array of respiratory ailments.

Other experts agree, including InnuScience vice president of scientific affairs Steve Teasdale: “Systematic overuse of disinfectants is common and has grown worse due to the pandemic. What we need is ‘justified disinfection’ to address this problem,” he says.

His company defines justified disinfection as “the principle that effective cleaning using high-quality detergents across non-critical touch surfaces is as effective, if not more effective, than the widespread, systematic use or abusive use of disinfectants”.

Engie managing director corporate Craig Butt says businesses have spent many years removing physical barriers in workplaces to support collaboration and productivity, whilst increasing occupancy levels through concepts like hot-desking.

“However, in the post-Covid world, these workplaces are being challenged by new restrictions and practices. To support this

cultural shift, a new type of workplace is emerging, which we call ‘Workspace 2’.

“The priority is to protect health and well-being. The FM response has been to rebuild some of the barriers that businesses had spent time removing,” he continues.

“While these physical changes are necessary, our view is that we should not lose sight of the fundamental purpose of the workplace, which is to support collaboration and productivity by providing a great experience for employees and customers.

“As we adjust to new realities, we should take the opportunity to remove barriers in new ways. At one level, this involves measures like reducing occupancy levels and adopting shift patterns, but it can be taken further through smart technologies, such as ‘smartphone-as-a-pass’, touch

free building access, remote monitoring and other technologies that build more flexibility into the way we organise our work and our workplaces.

“By automating aspects of workplace management, adopting Covid-compliant maintenance, cleaning, security and catering processes, and using technology to facilitate flexible working, businesses will be better prepared to adapt to any future outbreaks,” Mr Butt concludes.

IWFM director of insight Chris Moriarty says: “As more workers return to the office, businesses must consider that the past few months have seen a considerable and perhaps permanent shift in our working practices. Our research suggests many are not keen to return to their pre-lockdown working routines, with the number of employees not wanting to return to the office nearly doubling since the start of April.”

Businesses must ensure that office versus remote working is not seen as a binary choice. Employers support staff in working effectively in whichever work setting they choose, he continues. Options to work remotely or return to the corporate space in a flexible manner should be considered.

“Our research shows that almost 75% of workers want more flexible working options when they return to the corporate work environment. With 43% of employees concerned about having to revert to a costly commute, it’s also important to recognise the financial pressure commuting places on many workers,” says Mr Moriarty. ■