



TODAY'S FACILITY MANAGER
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Help Wanted

More facility managers are turning to outsourcing to increase time and cost efficiency.

By Jillian Ruffino with GreenWood, Inc.

The ability of communication technology to cut across distances and connect people quickly and easily is changing the way many facilities operate. Face to face meetings are becoming increasingly rare.

It is no longer necessary, or even desirable, to make employment decisions based on proximity. Companies do not need workers headquartered in a specific building to complete a task. If there is a more cost efficient and knowledgeable service provider, it is often a wiser decision to have an external entity complete an internal job. This is known as outsourcing.

The world is getting smaller, and now is an exciting time for facilities to take advantage of outsourcing in order to run more cost and time efficient facilities.

Outsourcing

Outsourcing is an evolving practice for facility managers. The most commonly outsourced services, according to James A. Hopkins, director, marketing and sales for Greenville, SC-based GreenWood, Inc., are janitorial, landscaping, security, and general services such as maintenance, repair, and renovation.

“There are progressive movements to bundle commonly outsourced services to a single outsourcing provider,” explains Hopkins. “This provider would manage while performing most of the work, with a relatively minor amount of subcontracting of specialty tasks.”

Another trend involves pay for performance contracts with service providers. Bob Woolley is the director of technical quality management for Lee Technologies, a service provider based out of Fairfax, VA, that helps facilities protect technology infrastructure. He claims, “More and more organizations are realizing that the cost of downtime for their mission critical applications is best served by outsourcing to companies that specialize in the people, processes, and systems that are needed to maintain high availability.” Woolley also suggests that these types of contracts ensure service providers’ efforts match the needs of the organization; outsourcing is not warranted if the work is unsatisfactory.

Facility managers are more frequently choosing to outsource services previously completed by in-house teams. Woolley believes that this is due, in part, to the fact that outsourcing allows facility managers to customize the work force to the specific requirements of their facilities. Essentially, they can shop around until they find the appropriate team for a given task.

“In today’s rapidly changing business environment, these options provide greater flexibility and faster response times to meet specific challenges,” says Woolley.

It can also be an efficient choice. Hopkins explains, “Truly progressive companies continue to look in depth at how they can aggressively improve their overall operations and be more lean. Outsourcing has become a more acceptable method to achieve these objectives.”

Before signing any contracts, facility managers should inspect service providers thoroughly and ensure the potential provider has a clear understanding of the organization’s objectives. The nature of the facility must also be carefully considered.

Philadelphia, PA-based ARAMARK provides a host of services, including facilities management. The company’s executive vice president, Joseph J. Tinney, Jr., offers this advice: “Facility managers must have a comprehensive set of clearly defined goals to help determine whether an outsourced relationship is advisable. If a facility does not have these elements well defined, he or she can usually find a service provider willing to lay the groundwork, which could become the base for a strong

Also, having a clear sense of an organization’s shortcomings, Woolley asserts, is just as important as understanding its strong points. He says, “For instance, a company that does not have robust maintenance management systems and processes in place should align itself with a vendor that brings this capability to the table.”

It is also advisable to gather the metrics that will be essential to making a good business case and, eventually, the right decision. These metrics will normally include the cost of maintenance in relation to operating output, operating cost, and replacement asset value.

Finally, as Tinney points out, the very nature of an organization should be considered. “Organizational fit is important. Facility managers must be sure the organization they partner with shares their values and goals.” □

Published by TFM Today’s Facility Manager, a Group C Communications publication.

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