

## Coping with multiple sites

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**Managers generally seek to centralize efforts in order to better use resources and maintain control. When faced with similar tasks scattered across multiple entities the natural tendency is to try to incorporate them into a single effort. The belief is that an economy of scale will result in a better return on investment by concentrating on a unified approach. So it is only natural that many organizations with multiple facilities or plants seek to centralize their CMMS/EAM needs under one master plan.**

There are a lot of good reasons why a company with two or more sites should consider tackling its CMMS/EAM needs with one solution. By combining all its needs under one acquisition effort, a company can increase its purchasing leverage with CMMS/EAM vendors. By standardizing on one package, it can save on IT support costs. CMMS/EAM standardization can also promote visibility and collaboration across multiple plants.

This doesn't mean that centralization is right for every organization faced with supporting multiple sites. Different operation types and sizes may make it impossible to standardize on a single CMMS/EAM package. Each plant or facility may be unique enough to warrant its own stand-alone solution.

Another impediment to centralization is the role that maintenance plays in the corporate world. Maintenance is a decentralized function. It directly serves the plant. It tends to view itself and is viewed by others as a local operation.

Its insular outlook isn't conducive to a solution that comes from the "outside." Collaboration between plants isn't something that comes naturally. Letting each site choose its own CMMS/EAM package is frequently the path of least resistance.

However, taking a centralized approach in implementing a CMMS/EAM solution across multiple sites provides some distinct advantages. These benefits can be divided into two basic categories: deployment and collaboration. Companies pursuing a centralized approach to their CMMS/EAM needs tend to focus on the former.

### Deployment

Deployment is usually viewed from an information technology (IT) perspective. It starts with software acquisition. Large corporations are used to pooling purchases in order to increase their bargaining power with vendors. Most are definitely not afraid to combine the CMMS/EAM needs of multiple sites to obtain a better price from software vendors. But the potential IT savings aren't limited to getting the best license fee.

Deploying CMMS/EAM packages across a far-flung enterprise requires IT hardware, system software, and IT personnel. A CMMS/EAM solution can require a lot of IT resources in the form of servers, desktop PCs, database packages, system software, communications, and networking. These resources cost money to buy, maintain, and administer. Standardizing on a single CMMS/EAM package provides an opportunity to share these resources.

The amount of savings is dependent on each solution's system architecture and available corporate IT resources. Some solutions allow expensive hardware and system software to be shared across multiple sites. But even for those solutions requiring separate servers and database software at each site, systems administration can be done remotely, saving expensive IT salaries.

Deployment savings aren't restricted to IT resources. Selecting and implementing a CMMS/EAM requires maintenance personnel. If each site pursues its own system fate, there probably is a lot of duplicate effort. Pooling these efforts into one centralized approach can save a lot of time. These savings aren't restricted to selection. A single implementation team, whether comprised of internal personnel or outside consultants, can be more efficient in a multisite rollout as the team gains experience with each implementation.

## Collaboration

Collaboration is usually not at the forefront of centralized CMMS/EAM implementations. Deployment is typically the driving force. But collaboration can provide significant cost savings. Collaboration involves the sharing of information across sites. This information can be inventory, tools, assets, procedures, documents, and expertise.

Collaboration starts with visibility. This is the ability to simultaneously see what is available or happening at all sites. Visibility must be easy to use and secure to be effective. Users at one site should be able to quickly find information at other facilities. Once the information is found, a means must be provided to share the information across systems.

Maintenance stores inventory is a good example of the potential advantages that collaboration offers to multiple facilities. Centralizing information and providing a collaborative view can allow a corporation to reduce overall inventory levels. A plant can turn to another facility as a secondary or tertiary safety stock source. Collaboration allows one site to locate a needed part at another plant and request a transfer.

Collaboration isn't restricted to physical items such as spare parts, tools, and serialized assets. Maintenance departments develop substantial knowledge inventories of maintenance, overhaul, and safety procedures. Rather than each site reinventing the wheel, a collaborative CMMS/EAM solution allows valuable information to flow freely among plants.

## New tools and approaches

The traditional approaches to handling multisite CMMS/EAM implementations were dependent on the size of the operation and the packages selected. Larger implementations with a high number of users per site were the most promising candidates for a centralized solution. These efforts tended to focus on remotely sharing IT personnel and operations analysts across sites. For example, a company might rely on a centralized database administrator to maintain remote CMMS/EAM installations utilizing an Oracle database.

But this approach doesn't necessarily provide the service level that can be provided by local support personnel. Despite a plethora of remote systems administration software, supporting locally installed applications isn't easy. This is especially true for "fat client" solutions that require large amounts of application software to be installed on each user's desktop PC. Also, traditional multisite implementations usually took a tentative approach to collaboration, primarily focusing on ERP integration and custom reports.

However, new system architectures and tools have dramatically increased the available options for organizations seeking to support multisite CMMS/EAM implementations. Thin-client and web-centric architectures make it possible to move application software off the desktop to centralized servers. These architectures make it possible for corporations to either lease software from third-party application service providers (ASPs) or run these applications on their own centrally managed intranet. Terminal servers and remote communication software make it possible to centralize support functions for more traditional system architectures.

CMMS/EAM vendors are beginning to respond to the needs of multisite organizations. Some packages now support site or plant code logic that make it possible to run multiple operations on the same database instance. Others offer data warehousing modules that make it possible to share information across sites. While it is still not widespread, multisite collaboration is starting to make an appearance in the CMMS/EAM world.

New functionality and tools may make a centralized approach more attractive to multisite organizations. But it won't definitively answer the question of which is the best approach — centralized or decentralized. That question must be answered by each organization grappling with the CMMS/EAM needs of multiple facilities or plants. It is easy to confuse centralization with best practices. This isn't necessarily always the case. Sometimes letting each site fend for itself may be the right course. But for others, centralization and collaboration can pay big dividends