



# SPACE CONTROL

Julian Griffith explains how space-planning software can help you keep tabs on room bookings, encourage more efficient hot-desking and reduce energy waste

**In the effort to support major changes in the way that we work today**, a new type of office environment is emerging. Mobile technologies, social issues around flexible working and a need to reduce energy use and maximise the use of space are consistently reported as the drivers for change.

The nine-to-five one-desk-per-employee office model is becoming less relevant for today's mobile workforce, working within a 24/7 global economy. Ubiquitous connectivity makes it easier to conduct business outside the office, yet teams still need to come together to collaborate effectively, and people need to feel part of the culture of the business.

Human beings are social animals, so face-to-face contact and collaboration is essential. As functions within an organisation become more interrelated, short-term assignments become more prevalent and meeting facilities become vital; shared spaces are increasingly essential for an effective organisation and are a way of harnessing those opportunities to use space in a different way.

The net result of this is that space-planning software is fast becoming a key part of the FM arsenal to drive efficiencies and create a more dynamic working environment. A complete system can offer an automated and centralised booking service that enables employees to directly and equitably sign-up for office space and other resources such as laptops and projectors – either remotely or on site.

If integrated effectively, workplace-scheduling software eliminates the need for a central reservation team, freeing them up to provide higher-value services, while

enabling end users to make 'self-service' bookings with minimum disruption.

It also allows for booking and cross-charging for facilities and services such as catering, videoconferencing and audiovisual equipment. But perhaps the most powerful benefit is in the data provided to property and FM teams to help them evaluate the amount and type of space that is required for the business as it changes.

This alignment of supply and demand is at the core of optimising real estate portfolios in terms of their cost to the business, with flexible reporting an important tool for knowing how the space is being used. For example, if usage reports indicate that a particular conference room is overused while another one is rarely used, the organisation can determine the causes for this discrepancy and make the necessary adjustments. In fact, this type of data can be used to determine whether some spaces are required at all.

People must feel comfortable using a new system if the organisation is to move to a process that requires each person to take responsibility for their own needs. That means it must be simple, with the system accessible via the internet or from mobile

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*Opposite page: No more poring over floorplans – space-planning software enables office space and resources to be allocated fairly and efficiently*

devices. Interfaces with existing systems such as Outlook and Lotus Notes are also an essential component in successfully integrating a change so that the impact of the change on the employee is minimised.

Going live with this type of project also necessitates creating guidelines as an essential step in the process. These help the organisation to manage the use of shared space and set expectations among employees. Some organisations, for example, limit the use of authorised space or make certain spaces available by special request. This can all be integrated into the software, but in effect the same rules apply, whether a paper-based booking system or software is the enabler. Most systems should provide for limits on how long bookings can be, how many concurrent bookings can be made, and limits on recurrence patterns into the future.

## **SUSTAINABILITY BENEFITS**

In today's green-conscious world, efficiently managing shared space has another significant benefit – monitoring and minimising energy use. According to a report from the respected US FM industry association, the APPA, a large university in North America called SUNY Buffalo was able to prove that each degree of overheating in winter or overcooling in summer in campus buildings resulted in \$100,000 of excess energy use per year. Heating, cooling or lighting unused space are major causes of wasted energy. By using workplace-scheduling software, an organisation can optimise the amount of energy used in its building.

This works by creating an interface with

*A powerful benefit is in the data provided to property and FM teams*

## Each user can have an energy account which keeps track of their individual carbon footprint



### CASE STUDY

The Open University – the UK's only university dedicated to distance learning – has significantly improved its management of shared resources by utilising scheduling software. One of the drivers for selecting an automated scheduling system was to alleviate the issues related to its previous paper-based system, which was unreliable, slow and prone to errors. By integrating the software into its current enterprise portal it has provided every one of its 270 staff members with access to the reservation system from their own workstation. Each employee can then easily search for available resources that match their specific requirements and book them using a 'self-service' module.

Following the implementation of the resource scheduling system, Douglas Blane, deputy IT coordinator at the university, commented that everyone found the system very easy to use, so adoption of new processes was not an issue. The administration department is more efficient and time has been freed up to concentrate on more essential work. Blane estimates that direct responsibility and control of shared resources by individual staff members has grown by around 90 per cent. Double bookings have been completely eliminated as manual reservations are excluded from the process.

the building management system (BMS) and allowing the scheduling software to 'tell' the BMS when a space is booked, so it can moderate key services in line with space usage. Shared meeting spaces, for example, can be automatically set at the right temperature and lit only when they are in use. Administrators can also 'hibernate' certain space, making it unavailable for bookings until other areas are occupied. This is effective with shared-desk policies, where it can be more energy efficient to group staff together.

Some of the advanced space scheduling software enables the FM to do this by building, floor or even zones. In this way heating, cooling and lighting is only provided to the occupied blocks of space rather than semi-occupied areas. By tying together booking behaviour with a user's booking account, the booking process can be personalised, with room or desk areas set at temperature and lighting levels that match user preferences.

Furthermore, each user can also have an energy account, which keeps track of their individual carbon footprint based on the type of space they book. So, booking large meeting rooms and frequent desk bookings would result in a high carbon footprint, while maximising flexible working and using videoconferencing for meetings might be factors which reduce a personal carbon footprint.

Some in the industry are looking into the possibility of systems with built-in intelligence to optimise energy use further. An example might be a proactive suggestion from the system to use a particular room or desk, based on the fact the space had recently been used and would already have achieved a comfortable working temperature. This type of intelligent programming allows for true integration between the BMS that controls the building environment and the scheduling system that is monitoring space reservations and usage.

With forecasters predicting an economic downturn and some businesses already feeling the pinch, a focus on reducing energy usage and the amount of space that organisations utilise is inevitable. In fact, most organisations are reconsidering how they plan and maximise the use of their space right now.

If the link is made between space use and energy use, the opportunities for increasing environmental awareness in the organisation to reduce the carbon footprint should prove to be as great as the potential cost savings **fmx**

### Further information

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