

The FM Road Ahead:

Technology – The New Frontier – Part 1

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In the last feature article we spoke of how FMs will have to focus their efforts on training their staff and ensuring there is a cohesive team that will be prepared to embrace the changes that are affecting the workplace. Technology is a big component that is meeting the demand for tools to assist with managing the workspace and keeping everyone safe. The adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) is one area that is offering solutions that did not exist before. These tools assist greatly in decision making and in fact the automation of certain processes that used to require manual intervention. While this may appear to be a great advantage, and it certainly is, this additional capacity is merely keeping up with the increased demands and complex interactions that are required in the FM environment of today.

While we could fill an entire book on the new technologies that are evolving and the many different options, we are only highlighting some of the key areas of technology implementations as they relate to buildings and the management of those assets.

One thing is certain. The pace of this technological revolution will continue to increase by leaps and bounds. The smart FM will learn how to harness the data and be much more strategic than ever before. The key to success will be how to best implement and reap the benefits of the new technologies, to innovate and improve the human experience as it relates to the changing work environment and buildings and adapting to new realities.

Team Collaboration

The funny thing is that this is not new in the sense of people adopting these technologies to better communicate, collaborate and document important information. What is new is the *integration* of these technologies with various applications and the many web-based offerings of these products which, in many cases a few years ago, were only available to teams in large companies with enterprise systems. Both the availability and lower cost of these systems allow virtually anyone access to these applications. Microsoft Teams, SharePoint, Office 365, Project Online, Monday.com, and Asana, are just a few examples.



Biometrics

Biometrics are biological measurements or physical characteristics that can be used to identify individuals. The most common forms of this technology are fingerprint mapping, facial recognition, and retina scans. While typically this is employed for high security requirements, the lower cost and integration with other technology platforms opens up possibilities for wider adoption.



Touchless Technology

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of changes are already happening in the workplace with the cautious return to work mandate. Even with the lower numbers of people working in the office due to more people working from home, the main task is to make the work environment as safe as possible. Aside from personal protective measures (masks) and social distancing, making the workplace as touchless as possible will be a main priority. The touchless office is highlighted in this recent article “[A New Normal: Touchless Offices In The Post-Pandemic World](https://www.workdesign.com/2020/05/a-new-normal-touchless-offices-in-the-post-pandemic-world/)” (https://www.workdesign.com/2020/05/a-new-normal-touchless-offices-in-the-post-pandemic-world/).



Building Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)

While maintaining a comfortable workplace has always been the main consideration for heating and cooling a space to provide comfort to building occupants, the focus today is on purifying the air that is delivered to the building to eliminate pathogens (COVID-19 and others) from the fresh air and recirculated airstreams. Operational strategies to reduce energy costs should only be implemented after the health concerns have been addressed. There are several initiatives that can be explored but every building and situation is different, so a specific solution can only be recommended after consultation with experts in this area and the potential deployment of relevant measures and technologies for a particular building environment. Check out recent article “[Covid-19 Catapults Indoor Air Quality To Top Of The List](https://www.forbes.com/sites/pikeresearch/2020/06/10/covid-19-catapults-indoor-air-quality-to-top-of-the-list)” (https://www.forbes.com/sites/pikeresearch/2020/06/10/covid-19-catapults-indoor-air-quality-to-top-of-the-list)



We have only touched on a few of the technologies that are available, however, the ones identified here are being considered and implemented on a wide scale to address the current pandemic situation as well as the transition to the *new normal* which nobody is fond of. The acceptance and willingness of FMs to embrace these new technologies and demonstrate progress that can be measured, will go a long way to addressing the challenges that are here today. In the next article in this series, we will delve into more of the building related technologies with a major focus on the interpretation of all that data and the actionable insights that will ensure a better workplace.

Wayne T. Collins, CFM, RPA, FMA, is an FM consultant based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He is active in FMCC and in AFE, The Association for Facility Engineering. His consulting practice features facilities consulting and training, skill-intensive asset management for demand organizations that operate capital equipment such as heavy manufacturing, and IoT technology solutions for various vertical markets.