

The increasing role of artificial intelligence in facilities management

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From Precision Facilities Management

Time is the most precious resource in business. We have to allocate our resources most efficiently in the time we have. In the Facilities Management sector, we only have a certain number of trained staff.

We want those valued people doing the job with the highest productivity so that they needn't spend time on areas that don't need it.

At Precision FM, we believe that artificial intelligence (AI) can play a prominent part in how we best employ our valued staff. We don't imagine for a second that robots will be taking people's jobs, and neither do we think that form of mass automation would work.

Can AI really replace human cleaners?

Our company believes that our valued staff are crucial in building relationships across businesses. [Our cleaning, maintenance and security personnel](#) are our representatives on the ground. In fact, our cleaning specialists could be the only ambassadors from Precision FM that most people in the offices we serve ever meet.

Brij Thankey, CEO at Precision FM, comments "the message from most customers right now is hesitancy over automated cleaning. The human factor is significant in what we do. Cleaners build a relationship with staff on site.

"There's a lot of trust there, and clients like that cleaners can do more than one task, like cleaning cutlery, taking the rubbish away from a meeting room. You can't get one single robot that can multitask like that.

"I believe there's a balance between technology and human beings in business, and it's one we've got to get right."

AI for high-risk tasks

Artificial intelligence, however, can serve a purpose in supporting FM teams in their jobs. These days, it's rare to encounter emerging themes in the cleaning sector – or the FM industry at large – that don't incorporate artificial intelligence in some way.

New technologies continue to come to market, everything from robot floor scrubbers capable of finding their way through a property to self-cleaning windows; there's no doubt that AI is transformative.

Robots can be used to do dirty or in some cases, high-risk work. Artificially intelligent robots increasingly work in hazardous situations, keeping workers safe. It is common to now see robots cleaning the windows of a high-rise building, whereas it was done in the past by people hanging in a box on a rope.

Brij Thankey: "There's no doubt that I'd rather have a piece of technology doing a job like that or working with hazardous waste than a staff member. That's why we're increasingly investing in such technology or working alongside organisations that can deploy it.

"There's certainly a place for AI in not only cleaning high-risk areas but doing so automatically and learning better ways to do so in the process. "

How can AI use data to help productivity?

The Covid-19 pandemic heightened public understanding of sanitation in the workplace, and organisations are increasingly mindful of their responsibility to ensure their workforce remains healthy.

Armed with easier access to the tools that track the emergence of germs and the information that can inform the potential loss of productivity, there's no excuse to let sanitation levels drop in the aftermath of a pandemic.

The businesses that employ the latest cutting-edge innovations and continuously invest in advanced technology will not only continue but flourish.

If you factor in that most of a business's running costs are connected with personnel, it implies that even a one percent improvement in efficiency might translate into savings of hundreds of thousands, or millions, of pounds. So there is every reason to take advantage of the data that AI can provide.

"So, for example, an automated vacuum cleaner might reveal", says Brij, "that a particular area of your office never needs any cleaning. Why? It's rarely used. So from that information on the place's cleanliness, we can build an idea of occupancy.

"Knowing how areas within a workplace are used means we're better informed to downsize an office perhaps, rent part of it out, or reorganise the desks. Whatever the action, it's better to be informed.

"Artificial intelligence can tell us who's in a building, where they are, the temperature in the room – the options are virtually limitless. We can then use algorithms to change everything from the lighting, the heating, and the use of space to best suit the purposes of efficiency and worker satisfaction.

"For cleaning, that means the task can be more informed through AI identifying areas that are hotspots and sites that are never occupied. We can then target the hotspots with intensive cleaning."

"We have some great examples of how automation and technology have brought benefits for our clients.

For one, [a large professional association located in central London](#), we seamlessly introduced thermal imaging cameras during the pandemic to allow reception staff to check the temperature of those entering the building. For another client, the challenge was to reduce absenteeism among the cleaning team. To combat this, we brought in a time and attendance biometric scanning tool. Team members would scan themselves in and this data was passed directly to the Facilities Manager and since this was implemented, absences have been brought down to zero.”

Precision FM looks forward to strengthening its service levels with the support of Artificial Intelligence. We can, however, confirm to our valued clients that we won’t be dispatching any robots in the place of our valued people.

Our staff are our voice on the ground, and we’re committed to making sure they can do their jobs with the support of the right technology.

If you’d like to know more or find out about our range of facilities management services, contact us on 0843 289 9085 to discuss your project in more detail.