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## **Smart technology leads the way for the cleaning industry**

In the right environment, complete robotic cleaning could only be a year or two away. ABM Critical Solutions business development director, Alex Blake, talks through the ways smart technology is changing the cleaning industry and calls for benchmarked standards on how it's being used.

Smart technology is providing the cleaning industry with a wealth of data and live information that has, before this, been out of reach. The result is the ability to make more informed servicing decisions based on real-time data, resulting in delivery of a service that's more reactive and needs based - driving less waste. Tasks are done only because they need to be, not to be ticked off a rota or list of daily specifications.

**Alex Blake says:** "We've embraced smart technology at ABM. We are working closely with a technology company who design and develop sensors. We have started trials and will be monitoring closely the outcomes and benefits which will help to shape our usage and strategic application. ABM has clients in many sectors and industries and this technology will have huge benefits throughout our business. Clients seek innovation with tangible benefits and that is exactly what we can offer. Our Critical Solutions business has had a lot of interest from clients who want to incorporate smart technology into their own service and have alerts sent directly to their own teams working on sites.

"These sensors – which are currently being trialled in one of our prestigious London Heritage contracts - can also be used for leak detection and act as security points for awareness of people entering restricted spaces."

Smart technology is already shaping the industry with a shift to reactive cleaning in clusters and the benefits this brings. Traditionally one cleaning operative has been assigned to a building. With this more reactive information coming through, operatives can move around and, with less wastage, overlap on job roles, with janitorial merging with security. In line with the facilities management industry generally, a more careerist type of staff is being attracted to these new roles.

Alex continues: "In the right environment, such as the very standardised and robotic-heavy distribution warehouses of supermarkets and online stores, we could even see this smart technology going one step further with full robotic cleaning of large areas within the next two years."

If smart technology, robotics and IoT are the future of the cleaning industry, what are the current challenges around it that FM operatives need to be aware of?

The upfront costs can vary, the initial set up and cost of sensors, for example, is minimal. Training staff to use different systems and getting their buy in, as well as setting up the new systems, appears to be the main barrier to investing in smart technology. Time can be a big investment; relevant alerts need to be put in place and teams assigned to the correct jobs. But once this is in place, organisation runs smoothly and the results of increased efficiency are evident straight away.

Alex concludes: “I predict the main challenge will be around how we use the data coming from this technology. Data is only useful if it’s collected and analysed correctly and service decisions are actioned around it.

“Currently there is a real mix of technology across the Facilities Management market with massive variation between the Business Management Systems being used – some are bespoke creations, others off the shelf. With so many systems, the quality of data coming in can vary and there’d be no way to know if it’s corrupt. Industry benchmarks should be in place to check and standardise the integrity of this data. If our future service delivery is going to be shaped on its quality, then the importance of standardising its collection and analysis within the industry shouldn’t be underestimated.”

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