

## **The importance of a service and maintenance programme at your manufacturing plant**

As food manufacturers strive to achieve minimum operating costs and lean operations in terms of manpower, the service and maintenance activity has become a target for outsourcing, an attractive alternative to the traditional “in-house” approach to maintaining assets. However for many organisations, maintenance is close to the core of their operations and the decision to outsource is a tough one. Often these agreements are seen as a cost rather than bringing added value to an organisation and manufacturers wonder if they can afford not to have one knowing it could be more costly in the long run? Even the best equipment can fail when faced with 24/7 operation demands – that’s when a reliable service is essential.

Traditionally, plant maintenance was reactive. Plant was individually designed with few standby features and limited spares. Many manufacturers had in house maintenance departments that took care of everything. More recently productive maintenance has been the focus, recognising the importance of reliability, maintenance and efficiency

Today with more sophisticated equipment, and the pressure to keep overheads low and production at its maximum, it is paramount for manufacturers to be aware of available resources to help with those pressures. Equipment suppliers and contract maintenance companies are alternatives to using your own employee’s for maintenance. Outsourcing the service and maintenance of your plant and process brings peace of mind; an “insurance policy” against unscheduled downtime, providing security and reliability.

To better gauge the cost implications, it’s crucial to understand the potential breakdown situations that could occur, by plant and component, outlining cause, effect, risk level, manpower requirements and ultimately cost. Having this outline is essential in demonstrating the impact of not having an adequate planned preventative maintenance program in place.

The hardest challenge is selecting the right service provider. It doesn’t have to be the company that installed the plant. Many providers can offer agreements and have the knowledge and expertise to look after other manufacturer’s equipment. But how do you decide who will give you the best value for money?

Reputable service providers will have experience in design, installation and commissioning of a variety of plant. Thus giving them knowledge and expertise and the ability to provide service and support across a portfolio of equipment and markets.

Not only should the provider be able to service the equipment, the provider will need to be able to recommend the best way of utilising your production equipment to maximise process efficiencies. The provider needs to recognise the continual changes over time due to wear and tear, technological developments, changing operational requirements, product quality and a host of other related topics. Spare parts are often part of the offering, coming with the engineer or being shipped overnight so reducing or eliminating the need for additional high expenditure on spare parts

Outsourcing ensures specialist maintenance meaning the expertise does not need to be held in house. Relationship is key part of maintenance strategy. There needs to be trust and understanding between client and service provider, trusting that the service provider is working to keep costs low and performance and it's optimum. With advancements in technology comes further efficiencies and traceability for both the customer and supplier – using PDA's, jobs are logged and completed onsite with emails and invoices being automated immediately at the end of a job.

Having an outsourced maintenance and service agreement is a tough decision. But with production increasing and improving – the need for an outsource provider is more significant. A reliable and planned maintenance service is critical. One call can solve many problems, giving the manufacturer a quick response facility in place for costly and timely breakdowns, where knowledgeable well trained engineers solve the problem or work with onsite engineers to get production up and running or a problem solved quickly and easily. Of course the quicker the resolution the more you pay!

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