

# Maintaining a competitive edge through automation

Laryssa Alexander, ECI President Field and IT Service Division, explores how field service businesses can maintain a competitive edge through automation and achieve continued success



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**2020 has forced many business owners to make an array of critical financial and risk management decisions – decisions which aren't always easy. To ensure the decisions made are the right ones, it's key to ensure data is reliable, detailed and up-to-date. Data secured through manual or paper-based processes can lack robust information or is likely to be prone to human error, leading to poor decision-making which could be detrimental to an organisation's overall success.**

Nurturing existing customer relationships is now more important than ever, and is critical to drive growth and secure repeat business. In order to ensure contracts are priced appropriately, it is essential that finance teams can easily access accurate reports and data. This is key to removing the risk of selling contracts that are overpriced in order to cover unknown costs, resulting in a less than favourable position against competitors; or under-priced, which may help win the business, but be unsustainable in the longer term.

If service contracts are at the core of a business, a complete business

management solution can facilitate far more efficient and productive ways of working. Additionally, being able to continually monitor contracts, their performance and of course, customer satisfaction is far easier via an online ERP.

Standardising a business' contract process through automation will eliminate paper trails and help prevent bottlenecks. With a single ERP it's easy to create standard contracts with automated approvals, renewals, and billing that can be deployed to any number of customers and are fully compliant.

Data that is entered into the system once can be referred to at different stages and is automatically dispersed to various teams and departments to ensure better accuracy, optimised workflow, and increased productivity.

## Better service

After standardising the contract management process, organisations can easily allow for the variables that are unique to each customer, by creating customised service contracts and options.

In most cases, customers will opt for a complete service, support and maintenance package allowing the

provider to easily monitor, manage and maintain service using automatic notifications and reporting. If, however, clients still want the option of hourly or per-service solutions, service providers will be able to add them and let the system do the work, avoiding hours of number crunching.

The ERP system will also generate regular profitability reports and automate preventative maintenance calls, ensuring customers feel supported. Serialised equipment on job sites can also be tracked, this can help deliver a better understanding of profitability by model or system, to ensure field technicians' time is fully optimised.

## Adaptable

The impact of COVID-19 has forced many organisations to quickly adapt, and for field service businesses this is no different. To avoid losing valued customers, the ability to be proactive and flexible, by addressing any unforeseen customer needs or concerns as and when they arise, is key.

Automated and cloud-based systems are now advancing in almost every industry, facilitating improved customer service and better overall reporting. A fully automated business management solution provides instant access to contract performance data which provides context for negotiations or adjustments, ensuring customer expectations are met without compromising profitability. Additionally sales teams can proactively re-engage with customers, ward off potential competitive threats, and ideally increase customer satisfaction in the process.

Throughout the disruption caused by COVID-19, cloud-based systems have proved themselves as a vital tool across a range of sectors. In order to maintain a competitive edge in such a competitive market, field service businesses must be confident in their data, with a good understanding on overall performance and able to make quick business decisions to help fight shrinking margins, beat the competition and ultimately grow the business.

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