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QUESTIONS

TO ASK BEFORE
BUYING CMMS
SOFTWARE



Finding a CMMS solution that's right for your business isn't as simple as just picking one off a list. After all, every business is unique, and not all maintenance departments perform the same tasks. Likewise, some organizations will lack a traditional maintenance department entirely, meaning that ease-of-use is key. For others, precise control is a crucial requirement: they need complex asset tracking, detailed work orders, and fleet monitoring.

Trying to figure out the specifics of what your business requires (and which CMMS fits best into your workflow) can be stressful. Yet if you're able to ask the right questions, and find the right solution for your organization, you can transform not just your maintenance department, but your entire business. A survey of 558 companies using CMMS software reported an average 28% increase in productivity after implementing their new software.

While CMMS software promises a lot, reaping the potential benefits depends upon balancing the needs of the company, the capabilities of the software, and other industry-specific factors. Feeling lost, or like you don't know where to begin? Start by following the guide below:



*A survey of **558** companies using CMMS software reported an average **28%** increase in productivity after implementing their new software.*

2 Things You Need to Do Before You Begin Shopping for a CMMS

1. Assemble a CMMS Selection Team.

Before you begin the hunt for a solution that will work for you, you must first get the opinion of multiple stakeholders; those who are working in the proverbial trenches at your company. Look to those already working in maintenance (or, if you don't have a maintenance department, those who work with your outside contractors and vendors.).

These are the people who will be using your new software every day; their insights are priceless. They know what is necessary to spruce up operations, and at the end of the day, they're the ones who have to deal with the consequences.

2. Define your requirements.

Determine the features you'll require to successfully transfer 100% of your maintenance management operations over to a software system, provided you aren't using one already. If you're looking to replace your current CMMS, consider the tasks that your current system doesn't help you automate, and take note of any features that you find superfluous.

Create a list of features that are required and a secondary list of attributes that you'd find helpful but are not necessary. Look to your CMMS selection team for insights.



If you're not sure where to start, here are some frequently requested features:

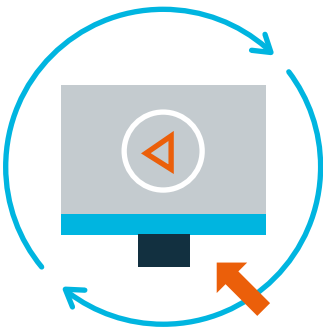
- Tracking monthly or quarterly maintenance repair costs
- Reducing equipment downtime with preventive maintenance tools
- Eliminating the need for paper
- Simple, easy work order and work order request forms
- Ability to process work orders using mobile devices (likewise, do they have both an iOS and Android app?)
- Method for tracking location of equipment and parts
- Calendar system for planning maintenance activities
- Improving communication between team members and to upper management, if necessary

For more information on deciding between essential and must-have features, [read our article here.](#)

4 Preliminary Questions to Ask Every CMMS Vendor

Once you have a general idea of the feature set your business requires, you need to identify solutions that could be a potential match for your organization (we suggest picking 3 or 4 different vendors to compare). When you're going through the process of meeting with vendors, keep the following in mind:

Will they provide a demo?



Never jump into a system, no matter the price tag, without testing it first. If the vendor is able to coordinate a demonstration that is already attuned to your company's needs, you'll know that you're in good hands. During the demo, refer to your list of required features to be certain that the CMMS meets your needs. Be wary of excessive functionality – you'll likely be paying for them even if you never use them.

What industry is the software intended for?



Some CMMS solutions are attuned to a particular type of business or organization – nonprofits and small businesses aren't going to need the same tools as enterprises and hospitals.

In a medical environment, for example, maintenance workers might be tracking millions of dollars worth of equipment that is constantly shuffling between floors at a hospital. That equipment can't fail – if it does, lives could quite literally be at risk, meaning that maintenance tasks might need to be timed to specific intervals, or linked with triggered events that could happen at any time.

Other businesses might require a solution that can monitor not just the maintenance needs of their equipment and building, but also the service requirements of their automotive fleet. While some CMMS suites might provide for fleet management, not every CMMS will come built to accommodate that sort of business.

On the other end of the spectrum, a smaller office might just need to ensure business-critical machines are kept in working order, and of course, that light bulbs and vacuum filters are changed on schedule.

Is the CMMS user-friendly?

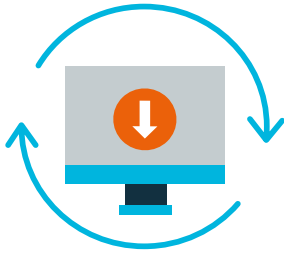


Usability is key. You won't see a return on investment if you're wasting time and money struggling to understand your new CMMS. A CMMS isn't just for the tech savvy members of your organization -- it's for everyone. This means that everybody from the ground-floor maintenance techs to C-level managers need to be able to effectively use your CMMS on a daily basis.

With CMMS (and any software for that matter) the more info and effort you input, the better the return will be from the system. If you're choosing software that only fits the needs of the most tech-savvy members of your organization, you're setting your business up for failure. If an employee struggles to learn the system -- or worse, refuses to learn it because it's too frustrating -- they might incorrectly input a work order, or forget to update a maintenance task on a crucial component. If your employees work out of an office building, that could mean that your HVAC unit dies during a hot day in July. Worse, if you work in a hospital, that could mean life-saving equipment might fail when it's needed. The point here is that a CMMS needs to become an assistant to the maintenance department, software that is used at every stage of a maintenance process so that it collects all the information necessary to report on critical areas later on. System uptake by all users will be dramatically increased by choosing user-friendly CMMS software.

Ask each vendor how long implementation usually takes, and also how many tickets (or support calls) they usually see from a new client within the first few months. These questions will give you a good idea of how user-friendly their software really is.

Is the software web-based or installed?



A web-based (sometimes referred to as SaaS, or Software as a Service, or cloud computing) CMMS solution is usually hosted by your provider on hardware that they manage in their own datacenter. Users access it via the Internet, either via a website, or a specific app or software solution.

An installed CMMS, on the other hand, is completely hosted on-site, meaning that all the hardware has to be managed and controlled by the company using the CMMS.

Generally, web-based CMMS solutions are much less expensive, and they offer users a much higher level of support (and often, those support features are more streamlined into the product). Yet, because they are not hosted on site, users feel they have less control over their CMMS, as they don't have control over the hardware their installation is hosted on. This can cause some users to believe that their data isn't as secure as if it was hosted on site.

This idea is outdated and incorrect in today's sophisticated SaaS models. For a detailed explanation of this and other CMMS myths, [read our article here](#). It's worth mentioning that Hippo, like many web-based CMMS providers, employs 256-bit encryption in protecting its clients' data. That's in addition to performing annual security tests on our hardware, ensuring that any possible holes are patched immediately. Considering the cost of managed security services, it's unlikely that an installed CMMS is any more secure than a web-based solution, in actual practice.

5 Questions to Ask About Your CMMS Pricing

Of course, finding the perfect CMMS for your business is only half the battle – you also have to be able to afford it. The actual cost of using CMMS software is going to vary from vendor to vendor, depending on the desired functionalities, number of users, and amount of data being managed. We've seen single user licenses run as low as \$25 a month, all the way up to \$200 a month – and that's not counting other annual subscription or service fees.

As a result, if you want to get reliable information about costs, it's best to look beyond the information provided on the websites of various CMMS vendors. Communication is key – and if you're going to get an accurate estimate, you need to be ready to ask a lot of questions:



Will the vendor charge you for each additional user?



While some CMMS solutions are built around a flat license fee, others will charge an increasing amount depending on the exact number of users that need to have access to the system. This means that at first glance, some CMMS packages might seem like they are within your budget, but when you calculate how many users you'll need to add, they can quickly climb out of your price range.

These systems can also be prohibitive if your business is rapidly growing. Every time you add another employee to your maintenance team, your expenses will go up. As an alternative, some companies offer packages that allow for an [unlimited number of users](#), eliminating concerns about rising costs.

It's also important to ask vendors how they define a user. Is a user someone that just accesses the system, or is a user someone who can make work order requests? Make sure that you're on the same page as your vendor so you can accurately estimate the quote you will receive.

Is the pricing structure clear? Avoid hidden fees and surprises by talking to CMMS vendors in detail about their fee structure. Explain the needs of your company and ask directly what kinds of fees you can expect going forward. Not every CMMS ties cost to the number of users accessing the system. Some charge by the amount of work orders submitted monthly, and others have rates that change depending on how many sites, buildings, or departments your business has.

If web-based software is an option, take this into consideration. Pricing on web-based software is typically more flexible and manageable, available in incremental (annual or monthly) payments. On the flip side, software that must be installed on dedicated company servers typically comes at a hefty up-front cost – and despite that cost, your business might still end up paying monthly or annually for licensing fees and a support subscription.

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Are there any discounts available?



Many CMMS companies offer a discount for [nonprofit](#) clients, long-term commitments, and other types of customers. During your research, be sure to ask each vendor what types of discounts they offer, and how much the discounts are. Discount amounts can vary from vendor to vendor; factor any applicable discounts into your considerations.

What is the refund policy?



Finding the right CMMS is hard work, and if you make a mistake, it's nice to be able to undo it. Does the company offer any kind of satisfaction guarantee? Find out how long the guarantee lasts and what the terms are.

Installation and implementation of CMMS software can take several weeks or months, and a long refund period is ideal so that you have time to get things set up. You don't want to find out all too late that the system doesn't meet your preferences – and that you have no way to get out from under your new software.

What is the cost for setup?



Software implementation can be the stalling point for some companies. If you want to play it safe, ask the vendor how much setup usually costs for their clients -- and ask them how much their clients typically pay over their first year as a customer. As every business has different implementation hurdles, make sure you consider this a low estimate.

Setup typically happens in one of two ways: either you'll set everything up yourself, or you'll pay the CMMS software company to help you. If you want to save money by setting up your new CMMS software by yourself, but the CMMS software is so complicated that you require the help of the vendor, it's probably not the right software for you. As a rule of thumb, web-based systems are typically easier to get up and running compared to on-site systems that require dedicated hardware.

2 Tech Support Questions to Ask Every CMMS Vendor

Even the most user-friendly software can cause some growing pains – the important factor is making sure that proper training and a robust support staff are able to keep those pains to a minimum. If you plan on successfully implementing any new piece of software, you need to make sure your vendor has a team ready to back up your company. Make sure you bring these two questions to your vendor during your initial consultation:



Do they offer training?



Find out if the CMMS vendor will train you to set up databases, input equipment, schedule preventive maintenance, and queue work orders – as well as any other services your team needs out of your CMMS. Likewise, find out if training is included in your monthly fee (or the setup fee). If they aren't, what are the additional costs for training?

Your best bet is to get a few key people, such as management and other power users, trained in the software as soon as possible. Those leaders can then impart their knowledge to other maintenance team members over time. Sharing information in this fashion can save you money if the CMMS vendor you've selected charges for training and support.

Is support easy to reach?



Find out the hours during which support can be contacted and, more importantly, inquire about expected response time. What communication methods are available to you? The more options, the better. While email might seem like a slow option, you might not always be able to make a phone call when you need support.

Furthermore, is the support team qualified? Are you calling an 800-number call center where the technical support staff is outsourced, or are you interacting with people capable of correcting bugs and actually improving the customer experience?

Chances are, if you are investing in a CMMS, then proper scheduled maintenance is core to your business. If a bug knocks out the functionality of a feature that you desperately need, you don't want to be stuck playing phone tag in the hopes that someone might be able to answer your question, or forward your ticket to someone that can help you.

Support is something that businesses rarely think about until their software breaks. When you're in the dark because you can't figure out something in your CMMS, or a bug pops up when you're trying to finalize your annual maintenance budget, you don't want to talk to someone that can't help you fix the problem.

3 Questions to Ask About Your CMMS Success in the Long-Term

When purchasing CMMS software, it's common to get bogged down in the present. You'll worry about the installation cost and how you're going to train all of your employees, but you won't necessarily think about how it'll impact your business in the future (or how future-proof the software you're purchasing is). Make sure you consider these three factors that might impact your business in the future:



Can your CMMS software scale as your business grows?



Talk to your CMMS vendor and find out how flexible the software will be should your business grow, whether you add an addition to your building, take on several new employees, or end up changing the duties of your maintenance staff. If you're in charge of a hospital's maintenance team and you are suddenly responsible for new equipment that requires daily maintenance, or a fleet of ambulances that need to be on the road 24/7, will your CMMS be able to handle the additional load?

Anticipate the possibility that your company will evolve, and that your software must be able to evolve with you. Ensure that all the details are laid out ahead of time so that your company isn't caught off-guard in the midst of a major change or expansion.

Can the data be extracted for use in another CMMS system?



If your company grows beyond the limits of the software you select, you don't want to be in the position of starting from scratch with a new system. Will the vendor allow you to repurpose information stored in their system for use in a new maintenance management software system? Be sure to inquire about the procedure should data extraction be necessary.

What is the frequency of software updates?



Any software company worth your time has a team of developers who are always working out bugs and quirks. Updates are a good thing, and indicate that your CMMS vendor is in this for the long haul. Find out how frequently software updates are released and what downtime you should expect during updates.

Web-based software can often be updated without interrupting service, and updates are likely to be more frequent than with software that is installed on your own servers. With that said, update frequency (and associated downtime) is entirely dependent on the vendor. If the CMMS you are interested in is web-based, make sure you ask if they have scheduled weekly or monthly downtime, or if downtime is even necessary for their updates to go live.

To Find the Right CMMS For Your Business, You Have to Ask Questions

If you are still trying to keep track of your maintenance needs with a spreadsheet, it's time to look into an upgrade. The U.S. Department of Energy reports that, on average, companies reported a 20% decrease in equipment downtime once [maintenance management system software](#) was implemented. Yet, even with the potential for large cost savings, finding a CMMS that fits your business can be daunting.

At [Hippo CMMS](#), we aim to simplify the extensive research process by making information about our software accessible and transparent. Check out our [Pricing FAQ](#) and [Software & Support FAQ](#) to start your journey toward finding a CMMS that fits your business. For an even more in-depth guide, [download our free CMMS e-book](#). We also offer live demos and a [30-day free trial](#). Take the first step toward revolutionizing your maintenance department by [contacting us today](#).

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