

Journey to a High-Performance Building

Digital Dialogue: Webcast Overview

Converging IT and building management drives efficiency, cost savings

Speaker: Rich AuBuchon, General Counsel for the Missouri Chamber of Commerce

Speaker: Dave West, Sr. Director, Cisco Systems Engineering, Public Sector Segment

Speaker: JoAnn Garbin, Program Director of Energy & Sustainability Information Services, Johnson Controls

As federal, state, and local government agencies feel the pressure to cut costs and improve efficiency, many are looking at energy management as a way to achieve both goals. Today, with the technology tools available to help government managers control energy usage in a way that is automated, optimized for efficiency, and can be done from remote locations, energy management is no longer a lofty goal, but a reality. However, government managers should be sure they do their homework to truly understand their energy use and needs before embarking on a path to high-performance buildings.

“In the journey toward high-performance buildings, we’re looking at how to take current systems in a building – from HVAC to lighting to alarm control and energy – and drive greater efficiency,” says Dave West, Senior Director of Cisco Systems Engineering, Public Sector Segment. “As you look at all the services delivered to constituents in a building and the services provided ... among multiple buildings, how do you create greater efficiency to drive new services and new innovation around high performance buildings?”

As drivers such as executive orders and energy acts move government agencies to begin planning along these lines, other aspects of building management come in to play, says West. After all, energy is just one service that government building managers provide; there’s also safety and security, collaboration, automation, communication, and networking services, to name a few. Converging and automating the management of all of these services into one unified plan can help achieve the greatest cost-savings and repeatable return on investment, as well as maximum efficiency, says West.

“Cisco provides the network capabilities to support this move ... it’s the glue to provide that great efficiency” he says.

Looking Before Leaping

When it comes to launching energy and sustainability programs for government agencies, there are a number of things that managers should consider before they begin

looking for products to help them, as the market for these tools has become quite crowded. At the market’s peak in 2008 and 2009, there were roughly 85 companies selling energy and sustainability management tools, and there are still about 25 companies with such products on the market today, says JoAnn Garbin, Program Director of Energy & Sustainability Information Services at Johnson Controls. “These can be very robust, multifaceted programs, but there are a few things to think about before you jump in,” she says. “At the heart of any solid energy and sustainability program is information – how we make our decisions, how we prioritize what we’re going to do, and how we engage the right people to get the job done.”

Gone are the days when government facilities were controlled by strict lists of mandates with items that could be checked off as they were met, says Garbin. Today building managers need to pull together people from many different parts of the organization – legal, public relations, strategic decision makers, as well as management – to make sure all of their viewpoints are heard and objectives are met.

To help an agency prepare for an energy and sustainability program, Garbin recommends that before purchasing any products government managers launch a small pilot program with existing tools – such as Excel spreadsheets, Word documents, and file-sharing programs – with a defined set of objectives. This way, an organization can walk through the process and discover the types of obstacles that emerge. Once an organization determines the requirements needed to solve those challenges, it can better choose products and services that will fit those needs, Garbin says.

Agencies should also keep in mind that they already have tools on hand – spreadsheets, for example – to perform some of the energy and sustainability management tasks, and leveraging those existing tools can help streamline the business process. That said, government managers shouldn’t expect to be able to completely implement an energy and sustainability program without bring into the organization some products specifically tailored for such use, Garbin adds.



Go to <http://lcn.com/webcasts/2010/11/cisco-journey-to-a-high-performance-building.aspx?tc=page0> for the complete transcript.

Building

“One of the biggest conversations I have with customers is ‘I already know how to do this with my spreadsheet, why would I want to go and buy [another] software product or database or what have you?’” she says. “Spreadsheets are great, we definitely want to work with that data and it’s a tool we’re comfortable with, it’s familiar and easy to use and widespread. But when you’re looking at an enterprise initiative around energy management and sustainability reporting, you want to make sure that the data is available and accessible, that there is transparency, security protocols, audit trails, etc., which are all the functions of a database that can’t be controlled in a spreadsheet.”

On the other hand, government managers should be careful to choose an energy and sustainability management tool that meets their needs without overwhelming users with bells

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and whistles. If an employee is only going to use a tool once a month or once a quarter, for example, that tool needs to be easy enough to use that they’ll remember how to work with it each month or each quarter, she says.

“We want to balance these things so we don’t get caught up in ‘Oh it would be great to know my real-time carbon footprint at my desk,’” says Garbin. “If you can’t use that information to fulfill objectives, then it’s not worth paying for the tool.”

One feature that government managers shouldn’t shy away from is the ability to use energy and sustainability management tools as a service, Garbin says. Often management will bristle at the thought of having data stored at the Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) provider’s premises instead of on site. But if government managers can find SaaS providers who conform to their security protocols and standards, then the physical location of the data becomes irrelevant, she says.

“Getting IT personnel comfortable with the idea of a third-party SaaS provider is often a security conversation, but [it’s an issue] that should not stop the conversation,”

she says. In fact, using such a service is one of the most cost-effective ways of keeping up with relevant tools in this space, since the service provider becomes responsible for upgrading to the most recent products and implementing the latest features. And having the option of 24x7 availability from anywhere via a Web interface is always a plus, Garbin adds.

Understanding the Problem

Rich AuBuchon knows what it feels like to be squeezed between downward pressure from government budget reductions and upward pressure from rising energy costs. AuBuchon is currently General Counsel for the Missouri Chamber of Commerce, but previously served as the Deputy Commissioner and Chief Counsel for the State of Missouri’s Office of Administration. Converging IT and building systems is how AuBuchon approached the problem.

Starting in 2005, Missouri began centralizing the function of building management. The state had been operating with 16 government agencies that each had their own IT functions and building managers; those duties were centralized into the Office of Administration that streamlined IT, energy use, procurement, and building management into one agency, which took about two years to complete, he says. But simply streamlining the organization didn’t solve the problems, AuBuchon recalls; the biggest issue the state had regarding energy management was in the implementation.

“We couldn’t really personalize the issues to the individual (employees), all they really cared about was that the lights were on,” he says. “When you’re in a hospital or other critical infrastructure the last thing you want to worry about is the building, you just want it to work.”

With the help of Cisco and Johnson Controls, AuBuchon’s office was able to link up all the state buildings to one computer in Jefferson City and manage real time energy usage – down to being able to turn lights off in other cities – from a central console.

“We gave people in administration a business function of the agency to provide good service where it never existed before,” he says. Empowered with the right tools, AuBuchon says his staff was able to leverage converged systems to do their jobs. “Now [remotely] they can look at a building and turn the lights off, or change the environmental controls, or lock the doors.”



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