

## **U**ser Friendly Design

The concept of User Friendly Design or usability is directly applicable to many areas of the broad facility management scope of service. Designing buildings and services that are user centred with direct focus on the needs of the occupier; Creating user-friendly systems and processes to enable users to access facilities services in an uncomplicated and direct fashion; Communication with stakeholders in audience appropriate language; All of these strategies apply the User-Friendly concept to improve the impact of FM.

The first step to establishing User Friendly FM is to establish a thorough understanding of the users themselves. This basic but elusive information is essential to the success of any facilities service offering. Some FM providers make assumptions about the needs of their building users, mistakenly believing that their needs are all the same and remain constant and that if they want anything different they will ask for it.

Unfortunately, determining the real needs of a service consumer is not as simple as that. Many people are unable to articulate their real needs or to understand how good facilities practice could help them. So they ask for what they have always had instead.

To learn what customers really need requires lots of listening, observation and research on the part of the FM to identify their real concerns and desires. Only by thoroughly understanding the broad environment that the customer lives in on a day-to-day basis, as well as their specific and detailed needs and wants, can the FM apply their professional facilities skills and knowledge to design a compelling solution that will be successful.

The second step is to apply that understanding to the development of new processes that begin with the impact on the end user. What is the end result they desire? What needs to happen in order for that result to be realised? How can the facilities team facilitate that process? What information, equipment and resources will be required to enable that activity? By starting from the customers need and designing backwards rather than merely trying to adapt existing processes a different more User-Friendly result will be assured.

To make the User-Friendly approach sustainable the process must be systemised to ensure that learning is captured and used to drive continuous improvements. The external environment must be routinely monitored to identify any changes that might affect the customer's requirements and regular communication maintained with the customer to listen carefully to their needs and concerns.

*An excellent book exploring techniques to develop User Friendly relationships in service operations is Service Operations Management: Improving Service Delivery by Robert Johnston and Graham Clark published by The Financial Times ISBN-10: 0273683675*