Major challenges for maintenance sector

Maintenance 2017 provides answers through interactive platform

*Five A-players from the maintenance industry all agree that Maintenance visitors and exhibitors get exactly what they are looking for: an interactive platform that informs, forms the basis for partnerships and where knowledge is shared. This fair still has reason for existence, as was shown in the roundtable discussion organised by Easyfairs on the occasion of Maintenance. “Maintenance is a crucial tool to address the challenges that the Belgian industry is about to face”, the interlocutors said in unison.*

It should be no surprise that Industry 4.0 and the Internet of Things are the first answers we hear when we ask the roundtable discussion participants about the current trends in maintenance. Martin Smit, Business Development Manager Rimses (maintenance software from Real Dolmen): “At the moment, a lot is being said about this concept. Unfortunately, the translation into practice is far from finished. It is not enough to invest in new technologies and tools. The challenge is to include your employees in the story. This implies that they need to understand what the added value of this evolution is, what changes they will face and what the consequences will be. In terms of maintenance, I already see one great consequence of Industry 4.0: we are heading towards a situation in which maintenance will be offered more and more as a service. This is not completely new: maintenance contracts have been closed with machine suppliers for a while now. In the construction sector as well, contractors are increasingly responsible for the management after completion, in other words, the maintenance. What is new is that this service is starting to weigh more heavily in the decision process of the client. This builds a bridge to the Internet of Things: in order to work more cost-efficiently, more qualitative data must be collected and managed.”

Service linked to guarantees

*In line with this trend, the regular maintenance contracts evolve to performance agreements in which the (service) provider must provide the necessary guarantees. Wim De Vrieze of Actemium explains: “In the context of Industry 4.0, the operation of a plant will be considered as a fixed cost. The management will want to calculate the exact annual cost. To that end, all permanent posts, including maintenance, will be given a fixed price. Unfortunately, maintenance is not an exact science so it is difficult to turn it into a fixed cost item. Unless you outsource it partially or fully and pay a monthly fee for it. In that case, it is logical that managers will ask strict guarantees from the (service) providers: x interventions per year, problem solved within x hours, etc. The time of loose agreements and payment per hour is definitely over.”*
Guarantees on all fronts

However, the trend towards performance contracts is not only related to budget. In that context, Gerald Hofs, Manager Marketing & Communication at Brand Energy & Infrastructure Services says that the requirements and guarantees in specifications are becoming increasingly stringent. “Indicating that you have the necessary licenses is no longer enough. You also need to prove what procedures you follow and how you continue to enhance your safety policy.” Martin Smit points out the legal aspect of this evolution: “We are keeping up with the United States: as soon as something goes wrong, you must be able to prove in every way possible that the fault does not lie with you. Hence, guarantees play a major role here as well. By the way, we can make the bridge to big data here too. We know that capturing, managing, interpreting and using these data will become more and more important.”

Retrofitting is growing

Retrofitting of assets may seem a little contradictory with all the technology associated with Industry 4.0, but the demand for it increases. “It often concerns machines that are critical to the production process. Their replacement requires not only a great investment, the new assets can also have a serious impact on the operation of the plant”, says Wim De Vrieze. “Usually, there is not much wrong with the old systems in terms of mechanics, but they are hopelessly outdated in terms of control. That makes that they cannot meet the future production challenges, for example, the personalization of products, little waste and emissions, a faster time-to-market, etc. Also connecting with other systems, such as MES, ERP and Business Intelligence is impossible and in many cases, compliance with the safety standards becomes a problem. Moreover, the search for affordable spare parts becomes harder and in some cases, the service of the original OEM becomes just impossible. This means that the market is open for companies that want to focus on retrofitting: once again, maintenance as a service.”
Companies want to be care-free

Kenny Viskens, Area Sales Manager at REM-B, sees a great future for service companies that specialize in one subject. “Today, there is no such thing as a hydraulic study programme, while about every plant makes use of hydraulic systems. The quest for cost-efficiency also makes training people on the job not that obvious anymore. Therefore, maintenance departments wanting to be relieved when it comes to hydraulics, sign maintenance agreements with companies like REM-B. Of course, every euro is flipped five times today, but such service is not necessarily more expensive than when everything is done by own staff. For example, we keep a wide range of parts in stock ourselves. That means that the client does not need to invest in that themselves. Through our expertise, we can also quickly detect the causes of defects and repair them. The result? Less maintenance and in turn, less downtime.”

Sector must reinvent itself

Unburdening its customers is also an important pillar of ARG EMEA’s business. Marketing & Sales Representative Bart De Moor points out the major changes that are coming for the service companies. “Outsourcing the maintenance to specialized parties in combination with performance contracts will undoubtedly be in favour of the client. On the other hand, service companies must of course stay healthy. To that end, they will do everything to keep the interventions to a minimum, including through condition monitoring and predictive maintenance. Many service companies will have to reinvent themselves to keep their business profitable. Fortunately, advancing technology opens many doors. Personally, I expect a lot of remote solutions. Today, ARG EMEA has a hundred employees on the road, but who knows? Maybe everything will be monitored remotely by only a few employees within a few years. Finally, I would like to add that it is very nice that European companies make the transition to Industry 4.0. However, they must be aware that it is not a sanctifying answer to face competition. As soon as a plant is built according to the principles of Industry 4.0 in a low-wage country, this country will again have the lead we are now working for so hard in Europe.”
Join forces

All participants in the roundtable discussion agree that Maintenance 2017 provides the ideal platform to show the world of maintenance what challenges are lying ahead for the sector and what solutions already exist to deal with them successfully. Real Dolmen will use the fair to demonstrate how they see 'Maintenance as a Service'. Martin Smit: “Certain companies have the resources and manpower to make the transition to Industry 4.0 and the associated maintenance, but for smaller factories that is much less easy. There is often little time besides the daily tasks. That is why we want to set up communities in which forces can be joined. This way, parts can be purchased jointly, maintenance technicians can be exchanged and knowledge can be shared. Moreover, this concept not only adds value for smaller companies. The challenges are universal after all. That is why we want to develop user-friendly tools that are also usable on smartphones and tablets. Those are the solutions we will present at Maintenance 2017.”

Added value service

Actemium too focuses on added value service. “We offer accessible service level agreements as an extension of our own maintenance team”, explains Wim De Vrieze. “Companies can count on us just as well for an all-inclusive service, including corrective, preventive and predictive maintenance, training, coaching, monitoring, etc. We want to show the Maintenance 2017 visitors our approach and hereby put the light on our remote solutions. The bridge with Industry 4.0 is made thanks to these solutions. After all, we capture a large amount of data that we manage, analyse and use for the client in the context of predictive maintenance. Of course, we will also demonstrate our tool that predicts maintenance tasks on the basis of measurements and histories. At our stand, we introduce a new service to OEMs in which Internet of Things is used worldwide for their installations. The intention is to apply benchmarking, to find correlations and to perform analyses to give the machine manufacturers information that allows them to optimize the design of the installations and offer additional services to their end customers.”
The participants in the round table discussion

**Real Dolmen** is a Belgian listed company that provides IT products and services. It offers strategic, tactical as well as operational solutions. With 'Rimes', Real Dolmen developed an efficient software tool for maintenance activities.

**REM-B HYDRAULICS** is a service company that specifically focuses on hydraulic systems. Repairs, components, spare parts, services, projects and training are all part of the service. The company has fifty employees and exports to over thirty countries.

**Allied Reliability Groep EMEA NV**, based in Heverlee’s research park, positions itself as market leader in Global Asset Integrity Management solutions. This company helps its customers all over the world to produce more and to produce more efficiently at a lower (maintenance) cost.

**Brand Energy & Infrastructure Services** is an industrial service provider specializing in scaffolding, rope access, elevated work platforms, insulation, tracing and fireproofing. From its headquarters in America, this company operates in 30 countries. The Belgian subsidiary employs about a hundred people.

**Actemium**, brand of VINCI Energies, has built a strong reputation in consulting, study, realization and support of industrial processes and equipment by implementing software, robotics, electricity and mechanics. In Belgium, the company has about 900 employees, spread across seven branches.