

Operation and Maintenance Manual Authors and Systems. Which one to choose.

As O&M Manuals have become more complicated and other handover documentation is being requested, there are more people and companies appearing that will take this burden from you.

This is a brief guide to the differences between the various options.

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In basic terms, professional O&M Manual systems and authoring / compilation options can be summed up in the following three categories:

Database Systems:

These are usually large well organised systems that store the O&M information on a database. They usually store information by product or system which helps when items are replaced or removed and they are usually searchable for quick access.

These companies often offer different levels of service ranging from the full information gathering and data entry level down to the ones whereby the client pays for use of the system but is then left to ensure that it is used properly.

Very often, it will be building owners who opt for this type of system, especially if they have a largish portfolio of properties and they want all information from all buildings kept in a similar system.

Specialist Non-Database compilation and authoring companies

This is the category that we fall into.

Typically, these companies will have a number of coordinators / authors and will have a set preferred template or layout on which to base all documentation. They will also be able to easily abandon or adapt their preferred set up to accommodate client requirements.

Specialist Non-Database compilation and authoring Sole Traders.

These are the same as the companies above with the exception being that they are one-man/woman-bands. They will often specialise in certain types of works such as M&E.

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Pros and Cons and notes to help choose the best option for you.

Database Systems:

Pros:

- A robust DB system can hold all available information and be easily searchable.
- There is no need for bulky paper versions.
- Information can be accessed easily from anywhere with internet connectivity using computers, tablets or smartphones.

Cons:

- Some systems require licenses to be paid in order for information to be accessed. Check out these ongoing costs before choosing to use a DB system. Contact us for information about DB systems that do not have licenses or tie in clauses.
- The building owner may opt to use a DB system that requires substantial input by the Main and Subcontractors. If the latter are not prepared for the work involved then the information may not be added in time. We know this because we are often called in to bridge the gap between what is required by the DB system and what has been allowed for by the contractors in terms of personnel and time.
- DB systems can (necessarily) require quite complicated templates to be completed and submitted. This can prove daunting to the less I.T.-savvy subcontractors which can in turn lead to late or no submissions.

Specialist Non-Database compilation and authoring companies:

Pros:

- These are adaptable companies who should be able to produce documentation to meet the client needs both in terms of layout and format.
- They will usually be cheaper than the equivalent service from the Database companies.
- Workload can be spread amongst employees instead of one person having to do everything. This is a safeguard against becoming overloaded with work during busy times.
- They are likely to offer a good set of options to cater for different budgets.

Cons:

- If you want a managed database system, it is unusual for these companies to have ones that will match the functionality of the specialised Database O&M companies mentioned above..

Sole traders:

Pros:

- These are usually seasoned and capable authors with good knowledge of the systems that they specialise in.
- They usually have lower overheads which can translate into cheaper costs.

Cons:

- There is an argument that one person can become swamped with work at busy times in a project life and that this can lead to other projects suffering. However, a well organised individual will foresee most of these problems and organise their work around them.
- Some clients require various factors to be in place before they will consider employing a subcontractor. Because of the nature of the sole trader status, these things can often be missing.

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Summary

It's a case of horses for courses and all these types of O&M compiler / system can work for nearly all jobs but some are more suited to some types of project and organisation than others. Also, they can overlap and work in conjunction with each other. For example, the Specialist Non-Database companies and soletraders can work on the database systems and sole traders can be employed to help out with the larger companies. So although there it's not a clear cut differentiation, a very generalised summary is as follows::

The database systems are better geared to building owners or very large contractors where standardisation is important and the ability to pay for it is present.

The Specialist Non-Database compilation and authoring companies offer better value if you can do without the database functionality and are more adaptable. Best suited for main and subcontractors.

The Specialist Non-Database compilation and authoring sole traders are often the first choice for subcontractors that require specific trade knowledge of their particular discipline.