

New ways of associating?

The self-styled 'big three's' announcement last month that going global is the only sensible way forward for the 21st century facilities management profession seems like a big step (see News page 5).

IFMA, BIFM and FMA (that's the Australian facilities management association), all signatories to the International Memorandum of Understanding, met before the BIFM Annual Conference to reaffirm their commitment to create an international organisation that will collaborate and share knowledge to further the status, understanding and benefits of people in facilities management, and provide support and promote the development of the profession worldwide.

In other words, if the facilities management profession is to prosper not only in the places where it has become established, but also in those where it is new, the key is to be open and inclusive. For the older hands in FM this is a reversal of the exclusive national approach of the early years, when the arrival of IFMA from the USA to spread the word across Europe was seen as a threat to be repelled.

In an increasingly globalised world facilities management needs to develop anywhere where business want to locate. Making the knowledge and skills necessary to develop effective facilities management available in areas of the world opening up to globalisation to anyone who needs to know, makes sense for the facilities management sector as a whole – professionals, customers and suppliers. The new organisation – a name and structure is still to be confirmed – will aim to support countries wanting to form an facilities management association on the one hand while promoting the profession at government level on the other. It is a bold step but an 'association of associations' surely reflects the 'partnering' approach that facilities management lives by.

Winning partners?

Plenty of you will be putting the finishing touches to your entries to the PFM Awards which are due in at the end of this month. For others, the everyday tasks of being in facilities management might have got in the way, and the final date is coming up too fast. If that is the case, call or email the PFM office and see if a few extra days can be granted for you and your partners to enter.

Jamie's 'Turkey Twizzlers' go but what about the workers?

Everyone's talking about Jamie's School Dinners programme on TV, but what about workplace eating? Andrew Etherington says it's time to reassess workplace catering to meet the demand for healthier eating habits among adults

It is almost certain that the impact of many of the issues arising from Jamie Oliver's campaign to improve school dinners will be felt far beyond the school gates. Not only has it questioned the nutritional value and quality of many of the foods that we eat, but it has also highlighted the adverse effect of the constant drive to cut the cost of catering services.

Productivity

Amongst other conclusions, Jamie's programme affirmed previous studies that found that pupils' levels of attention, performance and productivity were greatly improved after a mid-day meal prepared from nourishing, fresh ingredients. It is believed that these lessons can be transferred into the workplace with great effect. Although organisations may not wish to dictate what their employees actually eat in the staff restaurant, there is a belief in many quarters that the provision of a healthier range of food and drink in the workplace will bring tangible benefits.

As the demand for traditional canteen fare diminishes, the market is continuing to see the

swing towards sandwiches and other 'grab and go' products. Healthy eating is becoming the norm – especially amongst young professionals. Research shows that the future will see a change from 'good and bad diets' to the more subtle 'good and bad foods'. As food labelling becomes more important, customers will be able to make their own choices of foods that they believe are good for themselves. Thus, we will see greater awareness and demand for products proclaiming themselves to be 'low fat', 'sugar free' or 'high fibre'. Following the success of specialist regimes such as the Atkins diet, significant elements such as the carbohydrate value of foods will also be more closely examined.

Water value

This changing demand is also reflected in the type and style of drinks available. Whether bought from a vending machine or sold over the counter, sales of bottled water have rocketed in recent years. Canny FMs have installed water purification systems which turn mains tap water into both still and

sparkling chilled water 'on tap'. These products can be accessed directly by employees in place of the old water fountain, or bottled for use in meeting rooms, enhancing the perception of a contemporary image for the organisation. The range of vended hot and cold drinks available includes both healthy and low fat products, and also the increasingly popular 'fair trade' coffee and tea.

So what can the FM do to meet these needs? If your caterers have already suggested a healthier regime, pressure should be maintained to ensure that they continue to develop and expand the range of products on offer. If they haven't, isn't it time you thought long and hard about your existing catering service provider?

This is also a good time to consider the cost of providing a catering service that benefits not only the organisation, but also the good health and maximum performance potential of your employees. Even if the much-quoted 37p food cost per meal in Greenwich was at the lowest

end of the market, it was still shown that a lack of spending has dire consequences.

Catering costs

In recent years, 'nil-cost' catering has become the holy grail of many companies. As they continue to seek ways to reduce the cost of providing employee services, catering is often seen as a prime area for finding potential savings. In truth, there are very few instances where a catering service can be operated without a financial subsidy of some kind. Those rare successful examples are mostly where there is a workforce in excess of at least 1,000 on site, or where the tariff is raised to high street levels.

Although we all sat up and took notice of what was happening in our school meals service, isn't it also time that we took stock of what is happening in our own workplaces? Do we really need a visit from the likes of Jamie Oliver to tell us what we already know?

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