

Business transformation in 2018: operational challenges and IT solutions in the construction equipment market



January 2018

Executive Summary

About the survey

During November 2017 KHL Group and Infor carried out market research with a wide variety of construction industry-related companies, including manufacturers, dealers/distributors and rental companies.

The survey asked businesses about the main operational challenges they were facing; their approach to investment in information technology (IT); and their views on emerging IT solutions, including equipment tracking systems, the Internet of Things (IoT) and augmented reality (AR).

Based on the more than 105 responses, it has been possible to identify concerns and priorities across the industry on IT challenges and opportunities. The survey also highlights the differences in views across business types and business sizes, and between managers at different levels of organisations.

The findings

The detailed findings are given in the following pages, but key points include:

IT strategy

- Less than half of all respondents have a comprehensive IT or digital strategy, and in the case of rental companies less than 40% do;
- Around 30% of businesses have no IT strategy at all, or only invest when absolutely necessary;

IT goals

- The most popular goals for IT investment are to increase operational efficiency and enhance customer experience and engagement;
- Reducing errors in data collection was seen as an issue by branch-level staff, but less so by senior managers/directors.
- When it comes to using technology to provide real-time visibility of operations, companies are hampered by lack of time to analyse data, by lack of accurate or timely data, and by problems integrating multiple IT systems;

Service operations

- A large number of companies are using CRM (Customer Relationship Management) systems or internally created spreadsheets to manage service operations;

- Around a quarter of companies are still using paper and clipboards to manage service operations;

Telematics

- The most important application for telematics is seen as tracking the use of equipment on site, followed by tracking of field service operations. The third most popular application is as an aid to billing accuracy.
- Theft prevention was seen as an application for telematics, but was considered less important than operation-focused uses;

Applications for Internet of Things (IoT)

- Almost 60% of respondents – and three quarters of rental companies - said their companies were not using Internet of Things (IoT) technology or telematics in their businesses;
- The key application for IoT was seen as smart scheduling of equipment maintenance and repairs, followed by reducing lifetime cost of ownership;

Augmented Reality (AR)

- Less than 50% of respondents thought that Augmented Reality (AR) would be important or very important for their business;
- AR was seen primarily as an aid to internal training of technicians and machine operators;
- A third of respondents said they were either not sure or saw no applications for AR in their businesses.

Full service contracts/agreements

- Almost two thirds of respondents said their current IT systems did not allow them to offer full service contracts with guaranteed equipment uptime.

Conclusions

- It is reasonable to claim, on the basis of the survey results, that companies in the construction equipment sector could be more innovative and adventurous when it comes to IT. Less than half of all respondents have a comprehensive IT or digital strategy, and as many as 30% have no IT strategy at all or only invest when absolutely necessary.
- The most popular goals for IT investment are to increase operational efficiency and enhance customer experience and engagement. At the same time, many companies

recognise that new technology can help with applications such as intelligent management of fleet, the use of real time data to manage operations, predictive maintenance, and new pricing models.

- The implementation of the latest technology and the realisation of operational improvements through IT are lagging in the construction equipment sector. A positive way of looking at this issue is to recognise the scale of the opportunity for businesses to transform their operations through the latest IT solutions.

1. Business Challenges and Profitability

1.1 What strategic challenges are you facing?

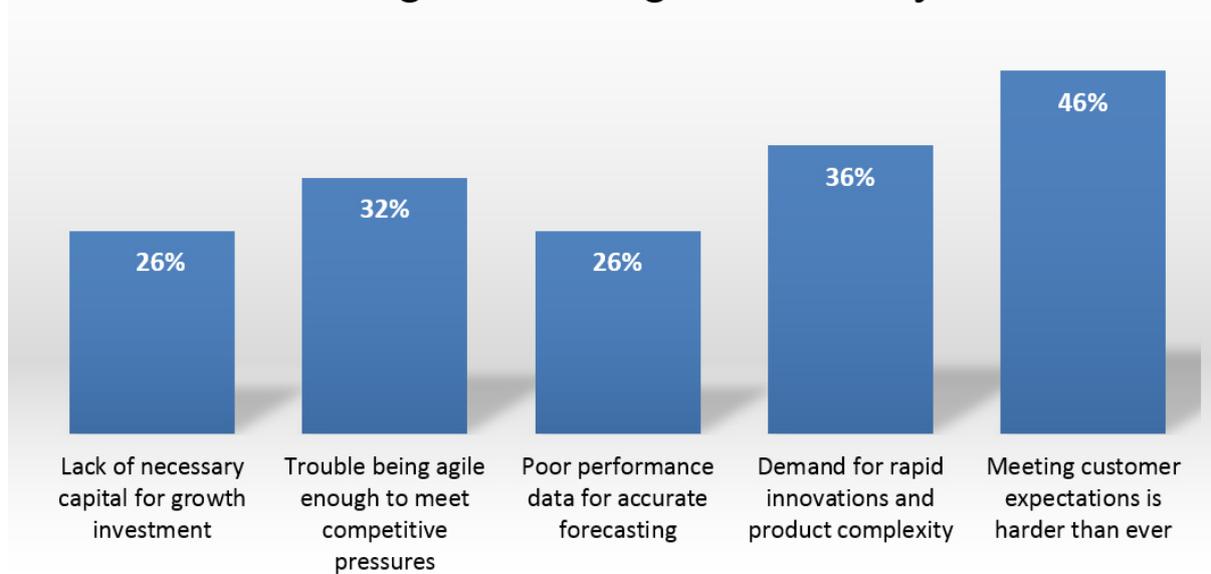
The perception in business that **customer expectations** are increasing is supported by the survey. It was the most highly ranked strategic challenge facing businesses today, most notably among equipment dealers/distributors (80% of whom cited this as a key strategic challenge), followed by equipment rental companies (50%). Larger companies – those with annual revenues of more than \$100 million – were also significantly more likely to cite this as an issue than were smaller companies (39%).

The extremely high figure for distributors/dealers perhaps reflects the pressures these companies face in terms of price competition for parts, the requirement for them to react quickly to service requests from customers, and the trend for customers to become larger through the consolidation of rental and contractor customers.

For original equipment manufacturers, on the other hand, the key challenge was **demand for rapid innovations and product complexity**, which was cited by 55% of OEMs, compared to 25% or less for distributors and rental companies.

Competitive pressures and the need to be agile was a mid-ranked challenge for all types of business, with a third of all respondents citing this as a challenge, with relatively small variation between business types, ranging from 25% for dealers to 36% for OEMs.

Are you facing any of these strategic challenges currently?



For rental companies, a **lack of capital** for growth was second only to customer expectations as a key strategic challenge, which was almost double the rate for the other respondents.

This is perhaps not surprising given the capital intensive nature of equipment rental. Distributors/dealers and OEMs were much less likely to cite this as an issue. It is also unsurprising that it was small companies (less than \$100 million revenues) who were much more likely to view this as a restraint, with 35% citing it compared to just 8% of large businesses.

Companies were also given the option of choosing **poor performance data**, and the difficulty that creates in forecasting, as a strategic challenge. Only for OEMs was this considered a significant issue, with 41% of OEM respondents saying so, compared to 25% for the entire sample and just 17% of rental companies. This clearly reflects the all-important issue for OEMs of forecasting production volumes and investment in raw materials and components.

The responses to this question broadly confirmed the generally held view that the business environment is more challenging than ever. Business has always been competitive, of course, but these pressures are perhaps being exacerbated by the need to adapt to the new digital environment, where customers have easy access to information on alternative suppliers, and where new technology is requiring suppliers to provide real time information on their service levels and performance.

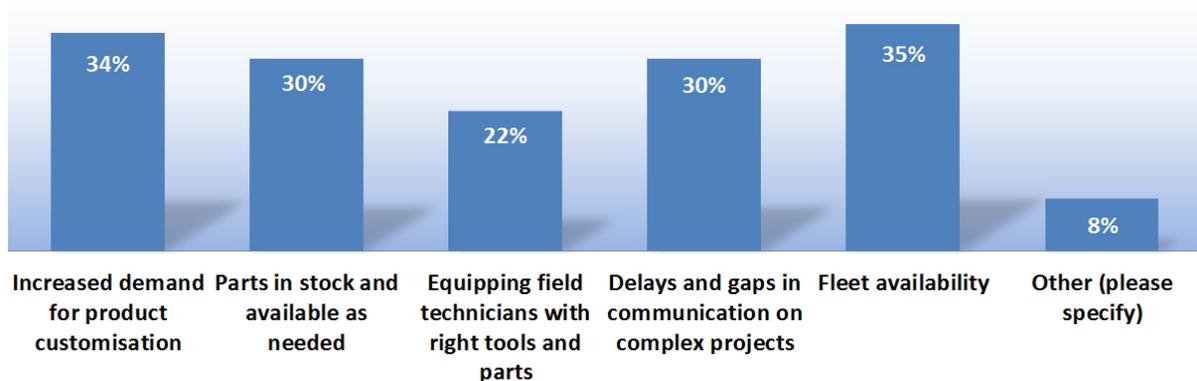
1.2 Operational challenges impacting on profitability

This question looked in more detail at the nuts and bolts issues that have the biggest impact on company profitability, with companies asked to rank the following five issues: fleet availability, product customisation, availability of parts, communications on large or complex projects, and the availability of the appropriate tools and parts for field service operatives.

Tools and parts for field technicians – which includes technology aids – were given the lowest priority in terms of impact of profit, although rental companies were the most alert to this issue, with a third citing it compared to 25% of dealers/distributors and just 14% of OEMs.

For rental companies, not surprisingly, it was **fleet availability** that was by far the greatest issue – cited by 60% of rental respondents - reflecting the core of their business supplying equipment and the need to minimise the downtime of their equipment. This was also important for dealers/distributors (40%) but much less so for OEMs (14%).

What operational challenges are you facing that are affecting profitability?



The demand for **product customisation** was a big issue on profitability for OEMs, rated so by 52%, but less so by rental companies or distributors.

The availability of **parts and part stocks** was considered a profit-related issue by 31% of all respondents, with distributors/dealers the most likely to cite it as a challenge (40%), followed closely by OEMs (38%). This was seen as less of an issue by rental companies, with just 17% considering it an operational challenge.

Finally, there was broad agreement across all types of business that **delays and gaps in communication on complex projects** was seen as a challenge impacting profits, but most of all within rental companies, with a third of rental respondents citing it.

On this topic there was a clear gap between the views of senior managers and staff at depots and local managers, with almost 40% of the operational-level respondents seeing communication as a problem compared to 25% of executives, director and owners. Perhaps the senior people need to communicate more with their employees...

2. Technology strategy and priorities

2.1 Do you have a comprehensive digital strategy?

One of the challenges facing companies is having a joined-up digital strategy, encompassing sales, rentals, maintenance, customer service, operations. Having an integrated IT strategy has itself been a challenge for business, and one that has not become any easier in an age when digital technology is evolving so quickly and on so many fronts.

In fact, the answers appear to show a construction industry that is at least trying to grapple with the challenge, with 43% of all respondents indicating that their company has a **comprehensive strategy**.

Rental companies and equipment dealers/distributors are significantly less likely than OEMs to have a comprehensive strategy – 56% of OEMs say they do compared to 37% of rental companies and 39% of dealers. There is an almost identical split between large and medium sized companies – with 54% of larger businesses saying they have a comprehensive strategy.

Even so, it is perhaps slightly surprising that only 45% of senior level managers view their digital strategies as comprehensive.

What approach does your company take on digital or technology strategy?



The proportion of businesses that have a **general digital strategy**, but falling short of comprehensive, hovers around 28-35%, with no great differences between types of company.

Put these two results together and you have between 70 and 80% of companies with general or comprehensive strategies, which doesn't seem so bad.

Put that another way and you have almost 30% of companies with **no strategy** or **only what is absolutely needed**. That falls to 16% for OEMs, which tend to be larger businesses.

The conclusion you can draw here is that there are a significant number of rental companies and equipment distributors who not only have no over-arching digital strategy for their business, but have no strategy at all and who only invest on a 'needs must' basis. That would suggest, at the very least, that there is enormous room for improvement in developing digital strategies.

There is again a disconnect between senior and ground-level or middle managers. The senior people are much more likely to claim - 41% compared to 25% - that they have a general strategy, although not comprehensive.

There is little difference between those two groups of managers when it comes to claiming a comprehensive strategy, which suggests that companies with all-encompassing strategies are also better at communicating those throughout an organisation.

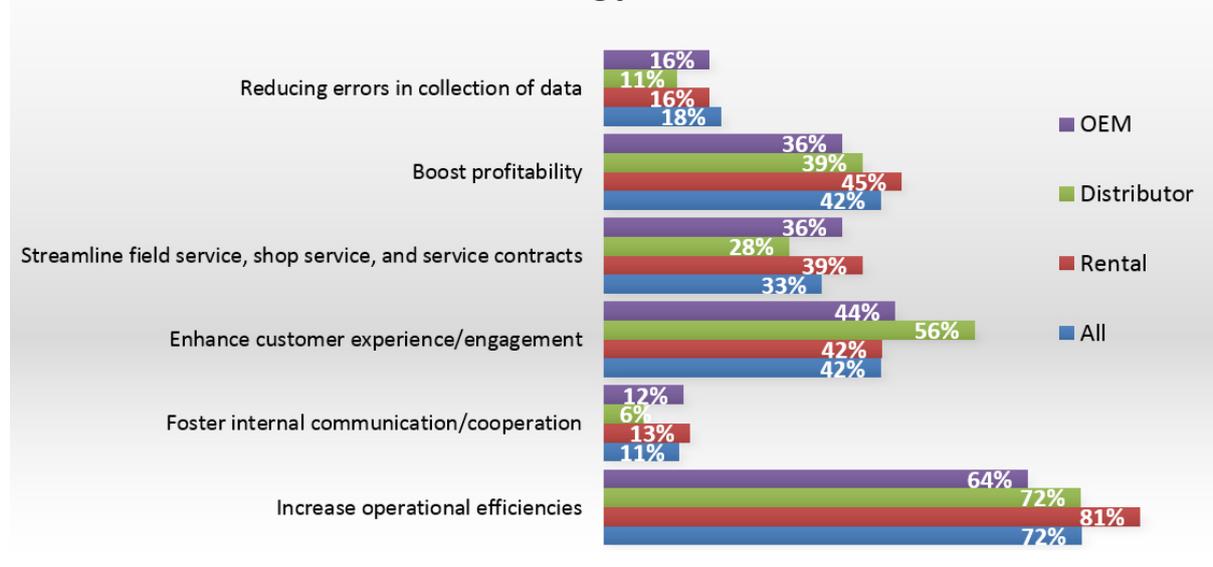
2.2 What are your two primary goals with technology investment?

When offered the choice to prioritise two out of six options for technology investment, there was a very clear winner: **increase operational efficiencies**. Almost three quarters of the respondents chose this as one of their two priorities, with 81% of rental companies citing this option – a clear reflection of the service and logistical focus of rental businesses.

Dealers/distributors were only a little less enthusiastic about this investment focus, with 72% choosing it as one of their two priority areas, with OEMs also making it their number one priority, although with significantly fewer ticking this option, at 64%.

Dealers were the most interested in **enhancing the customer experience and engagement**, with 56% making it one of their top two choices, compared to 42% of rental companies and 44% of OEMs.

What are your two primary goals with technology investment?



If these numbers seem a bit low - surely customer experience is all-important? - then remember that businesses were able to choose two out of six options, with several of these, such as operational efficiency and reducing data collection errors, mapping closely with customer service; they are *routes* to improved customer service.

Is **reducing errors in data collection** an important focus? It seems not. Overall, less than 20% identified it as one of the top two issues, and it was chosen by just 11% of dealers/distributors and 16% of OEMs and rental companies.

It is interesting, however, that almost twice as many mid-managers and local branch staff viewed this as a priority – 21% - compared to the 12% of senior executives, directors and company owners who identified it as a top two issue. It would seem that staff 'on the ground' recognise data collection errors as an issue more so than senior management. This is another example of a gap in perceptions between staff at different levels of an organisation, with an element of wishful thinking, perhaps, among those in senior positions.

Technology investment as a means of **boosting profitability** was, not surprisingly, rated second equal alongside enhancing customer experience. Using technology to increase profits was seen by 45% of rental companies as a key issue and by 39% and 36% of distributors and OEMs, respectively. Technology can have an immediate impact on rental profits through systems such as dynamic pricing and real-time sales data, so it is not surprising that it is rental companies who are most conscious of this option.

Rental companies was also the business type most interested in using technology to **streamline field service, workshop service and service contracts**, with 39% identifying this as a top two issue. OEMs were not far behind at 36%, with dealers/distributors at 28%. This is a key operational issue for rental companies – repairing equipment on customer sites and making sure that as much fleet is 'rent ready' as possible - so this finding is not surprising. However, it is perhaps unexpected that it is rated a distant fourth for dealers/distributors at 28%, behind operational efficiency (72%), enhanced customer experience (56%) and boosting profits (39%).

One final option was provided to respondents, which was **foster internal communications and cooperation**. For all types of business this was the lowest priority of all six choices, with only 11% of respondents tagging it as one of the top two priority areas for technology investment.

3. Real time visibility of operations, servicing, telematics and IoT trends

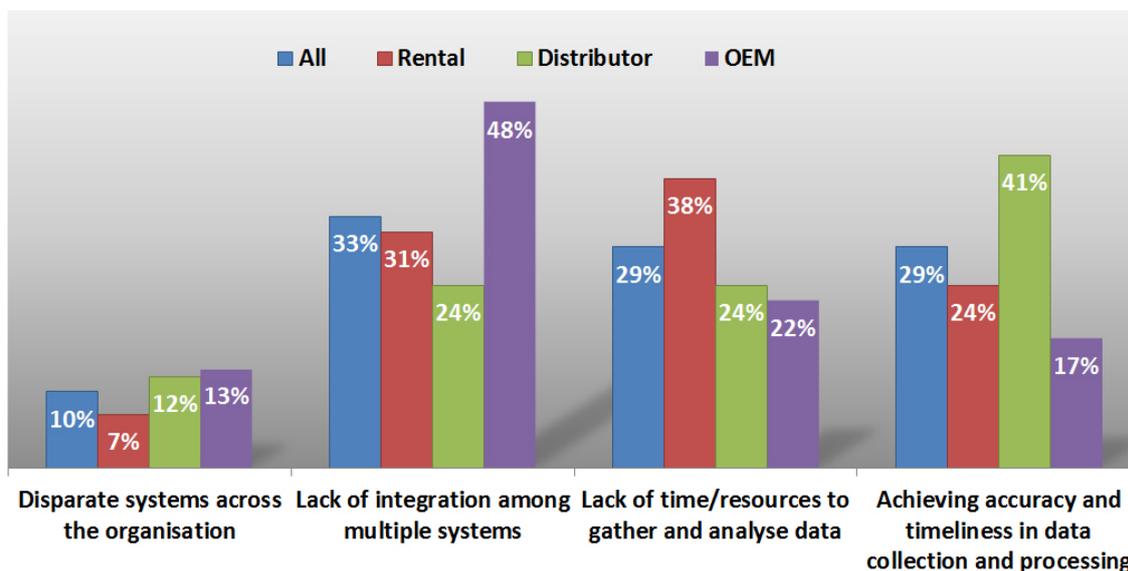
3.1 What is the main challenge in achieving real-time visibility of your operations?

Respondents were allowed to pick one of four main challenges, and the clear winner (loser might be a better word) overall was the **lack of integration across multiple IT systems**, which was cited by 34% of companies.

However, there were significant differences between company sizes and types. For rental companies it was **lack of time and/or resources** that was the key factor, cited by 38%. For dealers it was the **accuracy and timeliness of data collection** that was the biggest challenge (41%), while for OEMs it was the lack of integration of multiple systems (48% of OEMs cited it).

It is not surprising that for small companies the biggest issue was lack of time (39%), while for large ones it was lack of system integration.

What is the top challenge in achieving real-time visibility across your operations?



The least challenging issue was the **use of disparate systems across an organisation**. Just 2% of small companies saw this as a problem – ‘across an organisation’ is less demanding than it sounds for a small company.

Companies were only able to tick one option on this question, and it is striking that lack of system integration was a far more likely choice than disparate systems. It seems that the problem isn't about ‘rogue’ depots or subsidiaries using different types of software, but

more about integrating the common systems used across an organisation. One thing to note, however, is that while not a single senior level respondent saw a problem with disparate systems being used, 14% of local staff or mid-managers did. Again, it would seem to be an issue of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is up to.

The findings highlight a kind of fault line between the three types of players – distributors, rental companies and OEMs. For rental companies it is about time shortages, for distributors it is the timeliness and accuracy of data, and for OEMs it is integration of multiple systems.

How to explain this? Perhaps for distributors it is about their dependence on third-parties – their customers - for data and information on machines. For rental companies, the focus on day-to-day operations – rental is a fast-moving business – means they don't have time to analyse data. For OEMs, with so many facets to their operations - manufacturing, servicing, dealer management, sales management – system integration becomes a choke point.

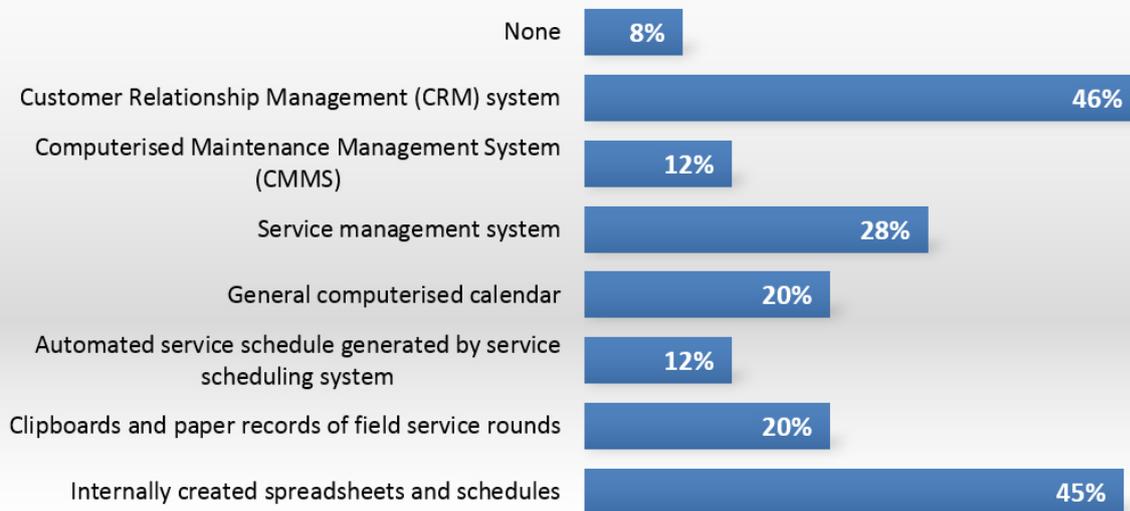
Although there are clear differences between the category of business it is clear that, finally, all three challenges – time, data, integration - are significant, whether large or small, rental, dealer or OEM.

3.2 What technology are you using to manage service operations (shop and field)?

There were two clear favourites among the eight options for managing service operations, **Customer Relationship Management (CRM)** systems, which were ticked by 47% of all respondents, closely followed by **internally created spreadsheets**, chosen by 44%. (Respondents were able to choose multiple options.)

It is no surprise that CRM and spreadsheet systems feature so heavily in the survey – both are ubiquitous in modern day business and are readily available to be 'repurposed' for managing service operations.

What technologies are you using to manage shop and field service?



Service management systems were next in popularity – chosen by 28% - followed by **clipboards/paper records** and **computerised calendars**, both on 25%.

Far less popular are **Computerised Maintenance Management Systems (CMMS)**, chosen by only 13%, and **automated service schedule generated by scheduling systems**, which was the choice of just 12%.

These are among the most sophisticated software tools available for managing maintenance and repair activities, and you might expect more to be using them. Rental companies were the biggest users of these systems, with 21% using CMMS and 17% automatic service scheduling.

It is surprising that 8%, almost one in ten of all respondents, reported that they used **no technology** to manage service operations. It is possible that this reflects simple lack of knowledge on the part of the respondent, a view supported by the fact that only 3% of branch staff (those most likely to be using it) reported using no technology compared to 13% of senior staff.

The numbers of companies still using paper records is quite striking – a quarter of all respondents – and that remains pretty consistent between different company types, although it was dealers/distributors who were least likely to be using pen and paper (just 18%).

There are some clear differences in approach between company types. For OEMs, by far the most popular technology for managing repair activities are internally generated spreadsheets (marked by 64% of OEM respondents). The next most popular was CRM systems, on 48%.

For rental companies on the other hand, dedicated service management systems were almost as important as CRMs and spreadsheets. This reflects the fact that equipment and fleet management is a core activity of rental businesses.

There is also another interesting divergence between senior and mid-level employees. The latter were much more likely to view CRM systems as important in managing service than were their bosses (57% compared to 33%). Those percentages were then reversed for internal spreadsheets, which were much more likely to be cited by senior managers.

Given that CRM systems and internal spreadsheets are the two most popular methods of managing service operations, this divergence in understanding over how they are used suggests, once again, that senior managers may not always know what is going on at ground level.

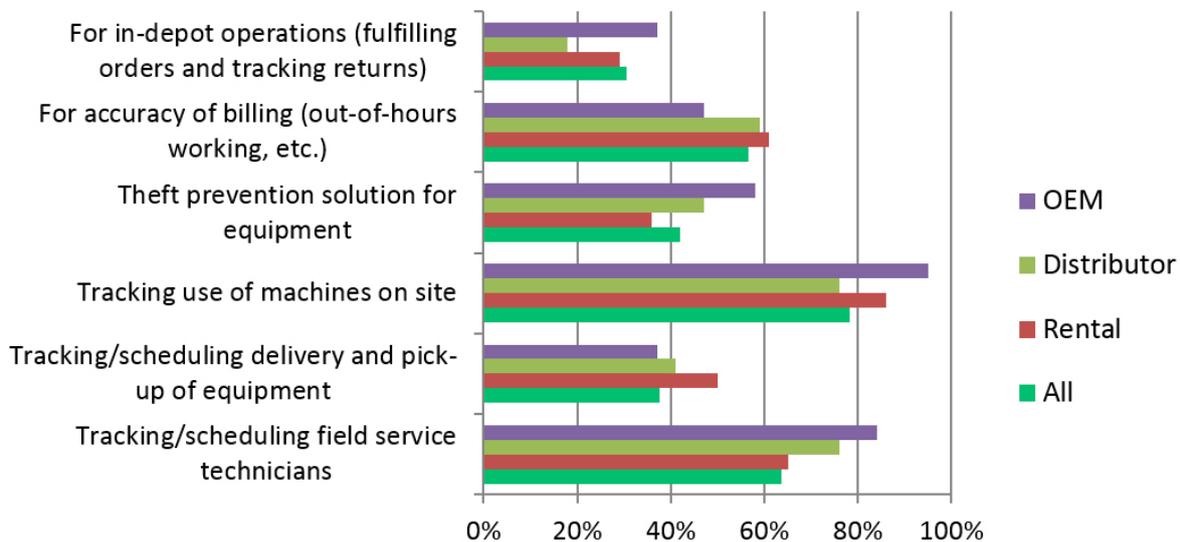
3.3 What are the most important applications for telematics/tracking technology?

Tracking the use of machines on site is the most important application for tracking/telematics technology among all the respondents, regardless of size or type. Overall 79% of respondents ticked this category, and its popularity as an application was clear among rental companies (86%), dealers/distributors (76%) and OEMs (a whopping 95%).

Tracking and scheduling of field service was the next most popular use of telematics – particularly for OEMs (84% of whom ticked this box) – and it was also extremely common for dealers/distributors.

Billing accuracy - which could be seen as a sub-category of ‘tracking the use of machines’ – was also a popular application, most of all with rental companies, 61% of whom chose this as an important use for telematics.

What do you see as important applications for telematics technology?



One of the most cited reasons for investing in telematics technology has been **theft prevention**, but in this survey it proves to be the fourth most highly rated application, with 43% of all respondents giving it the thumbs up. For rental companies, indeed, it was second bottom of the six options, with just over a third citing it. This contrasted the 58% of OEM respondents who included it as an important application for telematics.

There are differences in opinion among people at different levels of seniority, with senior staff much less likely to be focused on theft protection as a goal (just 33%) compared to 55% of in-depot staff. This likely reflects the direct connection that depot staff have with equipment and their perception of its importance as an issue, which does not seem to be shared by senior managers, who are more focused on operational benefits.

The scheduling of equipment deliveries and pick-ups was considered important most of all by rental companies, although even here it was just 50% of respondents who considered it important. The equivalent figure among OEMs and dealers/distributors was lower, at around 40%. It seems that tracking delivery drivers falls way short of several other applications.

Telematics was not seen as an important technology for **in-depot operations (fulfilling orders and tracking returns)**, with just 31% of all respondents ticking that option. Perhaps this reflects the widespread use of different types of technology, such as bar coding and RFID tags, for management and tracking of in-depot operations.

3.4 What applications do you foresee for IoT (Internet of Things) technology?

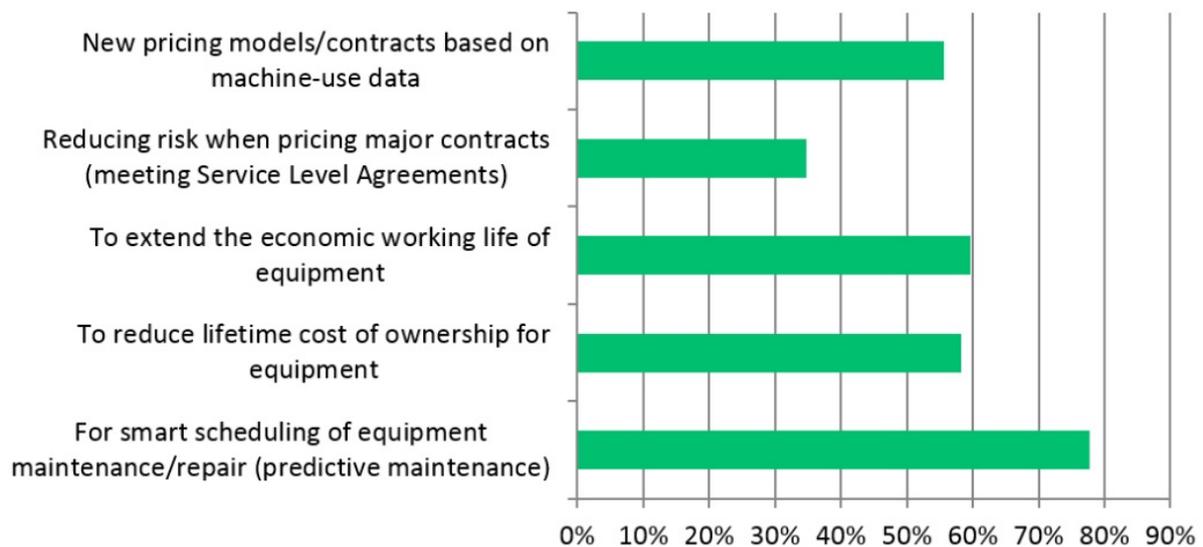
IoT technology implies a much greater degree of data collection and analysis, through the detailed tracking of the use, performance and location of equipment over long periods.

As such, it raises possibilities of smart maintenance schedules, reducing lifetime ownership costs, extending the economic life of machines, and more sophisticated applications such as new pricing models based on actual machine use or reduced risk when pricing supply contracts (on the basis of having a better understanding of the performance and costs related to equipment).

There was a clear favourite application for IoT technology, true of all types of companies, and that was for **smart scheduling of equipment maintenance and repair (predictive maintenance)**. This was seen as a likely application by 78% of all respondents, and especially so by rental companies, where the figure rose to 83%. For both OEMs and distributors the figure was 71%.

Reducing the lifetime cost of ownership was seen as a use for IoT technology by 59% of respondents, and larger companies (with revenues of more than US\$100 million), were much more likely to hold this view (70% compared to 53% at smaller businesses).

What further applications do you foresee for IoT (Internet of Things) technology?



Rental companies and OEMs were significantly more likely to cite this as an application for IoT technology than were dealers/distributors.

You might think that rental companies would be keen on using IoT to **extend the working life of their equipment**, but in fact it is the OEMs who are most alive to this possibility, with 71% citing it. That compares to 55% rental companies and 47% of dealers.

Distributors and OEMs are keenest on using IoT to **create pricing models based on machine use data**. Perhaps this is because they both see this as an area where warranties and service contracts come into play. In contrast, rental companies might fear the scenario of low-use on site leading to lower rental charges. That is a cat that they want to keep securely in the bag.

However, rental companies are much keener on using IoT technology to **reduce risk when pricing contracts (meeting service level agreements (SLAs))**. The argument here could be that understanding exactly how equipment is performing on site, in real time, and being able to track and predict costs, will give rental companies more confidence in pricing long-term contracts (and more confidence in their ability to meet SLAs).

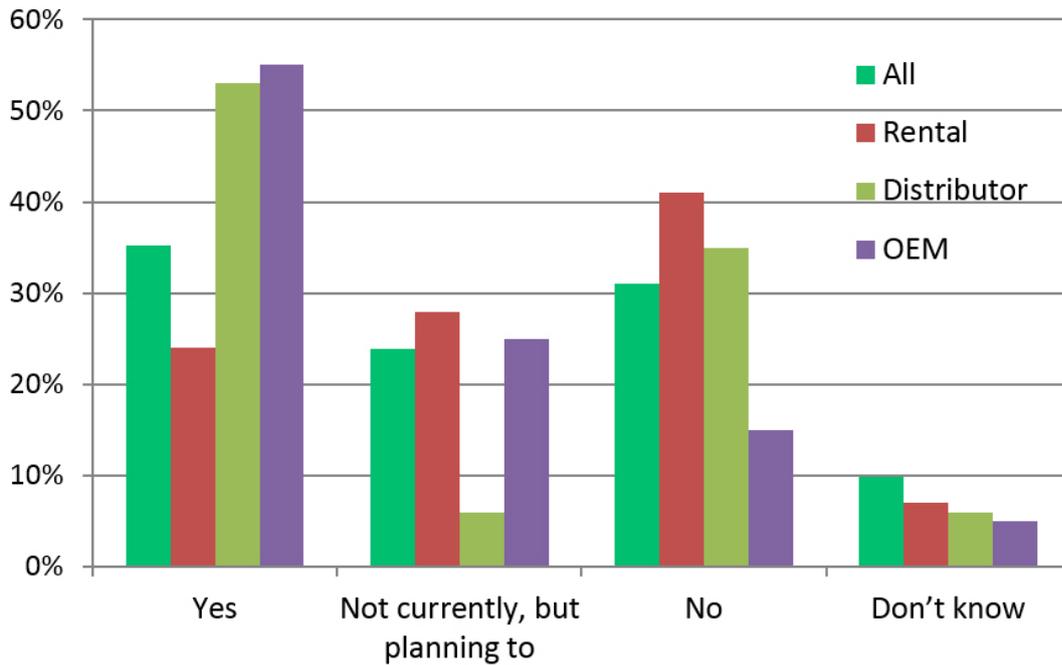
Not surprisingly, it is larger companies that are much more likely to be progressive on issues such as lifetime costs and extending the working lives of equipment. The contrast with smaller companies is marked. Only in the smart scheduling of maintenance and repair did small companies match (and exceed) the enthusiasm of big companies.

3.5 Are you using Internet of Things (IoT) and telematics data?

Potential applications are one thing, but what about actual use of data generated by IoT technology and telematics systems? It turns out that just 36% of respondents said they were using this data in their operations, while 58% said they were not, which is a very high proportion.

Quite a few of these 'non-users' – 46% in fact – said it was their intention to use IoT/telematics data in the future, but even so, it is pretty remarkable for almost six out of ten respondents not to be using telematics or IoT data in their businesses. It says something about the slow rate of adoption of such technology in the construction equipment industry, and even more about the opportunities to improve the efficiency of operations.

Are you using IOT and Telematics data?



Rental companies, who as asset managers you might think had most to gain for using such technology, are actually considerable less likely to be using data – less than a quarter said they were, compared to more than 50% of both OEM and distributor respondents.

In fact, 41% of rental company respondents said they did not use data and did not intend to. That compares to just 15% of OEM respondents. As we stated above, the bells of opportunity are ringing for rental businesses, even if many seem intent on ignoring them.

4. Augmented reality and your business

4.1 Will augmented reality be important in your business in the future?

All the respondents seems less than sure about whether augmented reality (AR) will play an important role in their business in the future, with just 45% saying it would be important or very important.

There was some variance between company types, with dealers/distributors the most likely to see a role for AR – 50% said important or very important – compared to 41% of rental companies and 45% of OEMs. Larger companies were also much more likely to see a role for AR, with 54% viewing it as potentially important compared to 41% of smaller companies.

A key application for AR is likely to be related to servicing and operation of machines, either for training of employees and customers or as an on-the-job aid. It therefore offers the opportunity to reduce costs, either by speeding up training or by offering the potential to assign maintenance or repair tasks to less experienced personnel.

With that in mind the finding that less than half of rental and distributor respondents see AR as potentially important is surprising, and represents another opportunity for adventurous or innovative companies.

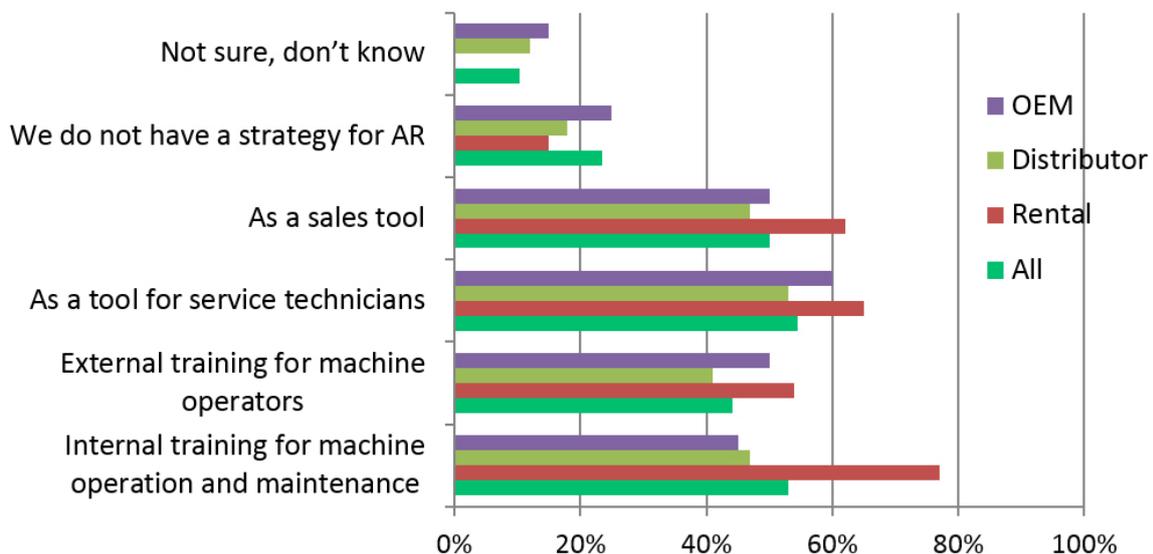
4.2 What will be the main applications for augmented reality (AR)?

The two most popular perceived applications for AR are **internal training of staff for machine operation and maintenance** (54% highlighted this) and as a **tool for service technicians** (also 54%).

Closely behind, at 51%, was the using AR as a **sales tool**, followed by **external training of machine operators**, which was cited by 45% of all respondents.

Almost a quarter of respondents said they had **no strategy** for the use of AR at all, and 10% were **not sure**.

What do you see as the main applications for Augmented Reality (AR)?



Rental companies clearly see AR primarily as an aid for training internal staff on equipment use and maintenance (77% of rental respondents ticked this option), with 65% viewing it as a tool for service technicians.

Dealers/distributors expressed no clear favourite application for AR, with an almost equal rating for the four most generally popular applications: tool for service technicians, internal training aid, sales tool, and external operator training.

For OEMs, on the other hand, there was a clear preference to use AR as a tool for service technicians (60% chose this option.)

5. Technology and full service contracts

5.1 Does your current technology allow you to offer full service contracts with guaranteed equipment uptime?

Just 36% of all respondents said their IT systems allowed them to offer service level agreements (SLAs) with guaranteed equipment uptime.

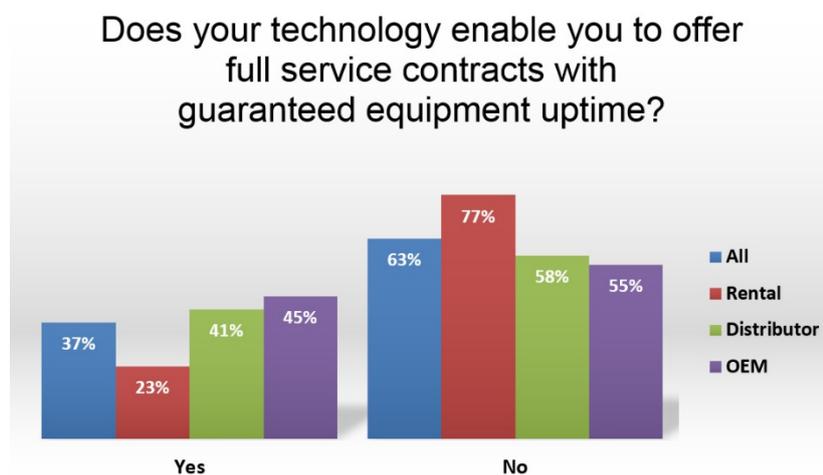
Those with most stake in providing equipment – rental companies – were the least likely to be able to offer this, with just 23% saying they could. That contrasted with 41% of dealers/distributors and 45% of OEMs.

No surprise that it was smaller companies who were least confident that their IT systems could support SLAs, with just 24% of companies with revenues of less than \$100 million able to do so, compared to 56% of larger businesses.

When those that said they couldn't offer full service contracts with guaranteed equipment uptime were asked what it was that prevented them, 57% reported that their systems didn't support such contracts, while 43% said it was a lack of data.

The majority of OEMs (66%) who responded to this question said it was system deficiencies that created the problem, while for dealers/distributors it was the reverse, with a lack of data being the key issue. Rental companies were split evenly between data and system issues.

These findings reflect the earlier question about a lack of integration of multiple systems and a lack of time to collect and analyse data.



6. Key findings

Is it fair to say, on the basis of this survey, that companies in the construction equipment sector could be more innovative or adventurous when it comes to IT?

The answer is probably yes, given that that less than half of all respondents have a comprehensive IT or digital strategy, and as many as 30% have no IT strategy at all or only invest when absolutely necessary.

This conclusion is further supported by the finding - to give one example - that paper and clipboards are still used by a quarter of respondents to manage equipment servicing operations. A large number are also using non-specialist CRM systems for this purpose.

Likewise, when it comes to new technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT) and Augmented Reality (AR), construction equipment businesses do not appear to be at the vanguard of their adoption. Almost 60% of respondents – and as many as three quarters of rental companies - said their companies were not using Internet of Things (IoT) technology or telematics in their businesses and fewer than 50% of respondents thought that AR would be important.

That conservatism, however, does not mean that companies are blind to the potential for this type of technology in applications like training or service engineers (in the case of AR) and for smart repair and maintenance of equipment (IoT).

There are also sometimes differing views on IT policy between staff in senior positions (executives and directors) and those at branch or middle-management levels. This highlights a likely need for greater communication on IT systems within organisations.

The most popular goals for IT investment are to increase operational efficiency and enhance customer experience and engagement. At the same time, many companies recognise that new technology can help with applications such as intelligent management of fleet, the use of real time data to manage operations, predictive maintenance, and new pricing models.

The implementation of the latest technology and the consequent realisation of operational improvements may be lagging in the construction equipment sector, but there is a more positive way to look at investment in IT: the scale of the opportunity for companies to transform their operations.

About Infor

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