3 expert tips for selecting a smart building technology platform

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Highlights:

- The most effective workplace management and intelligent building platforms balance powerful capabilities with intuitive user experiences that drive adoption.
- Open, interoperable platforms can help organizations maximize existing technology investments while maintaining flexibility for future growth.
- When evaluating AI capabilities, insist on live demonstrations using real operational scenarios to test the claims made in product marketing materials.

Choosing smart building technology may look like just a software decision. In reality, it is an operational decision that can shape how teams manage buildings, use data and act on performance issues for years.

Many platforms force buyers into a false choice: simple tools that lack depth or powerful tools that teams struggle to adopt. The strongest smart building technology platforms do both. They combine advanced capabilities with intuitive experiences that help people make better decisions every day.

Before investing, facilities leaders should look beyond feature lists and evaluate how well a platform supports real users, connects existing systems and turns AI-driven insights into action.

Here are three practical tips to help organizations identify solutions that strike the right balance.

1. Validate the real-world user experience

Product demonstrations often showcase ideal scenarios. Dashboards look intuitive, workflows appear seamless and analytics deliver instant insights. However, day-to-day user experiences can differ significantly from what is presented during a demo.

Ask vendors to provide references from organizations with similar portfolios, operational challenges or staffing structures. During those conversations, focus less on implementation stories and more on everyday usage.

Questions worth asking include:

- How frequently do facility teams use the platform?
- Which features deliver the most value?
- What training was required to achieve adoption?
- Are users able to find the information they need quickly?
- How responsive is the vendor when issues arise?

It's also important to understand who uses the platform most often. A solution may work well for data analysts but prove challenging for frontline operators, technicians or facility managers who need fast access to actionable information.

The goal is to determine whether the platform can support the people who will rely on it every day – not just the stakeholders involved in the purchasing decision. Look for platforms designed around building operators.

Red flag: A platform demo only shows executive dashboards, not the workflows used by facility teams.

2. Prioritize interoperability and open architecture

Facilities generate data from a wide variety of systems, including building automation and workplace management systems, energy management platforms, asset management software and Internet-of-Things (IoT) devices.

That challenge is showing up in the market. In the 2026 AI & Digitalization in Facilities Management Report, 33% of business leaders said ease of integration was what they wanted to change most about their current workplace management system. This friction illustrates that interoperability is more than a technical preference. It is a core buying consideration.

A workplace management and intelligent building platform should help unify this information, not create additional silos.

When evaluating vendors, look closely at how the platform integrates with existing technologies and future planned investments. Prioritize platforms that can connect across building systems, workplace tools and enterprise data. Platforms built on open architectures can help organizations maximize the value of their current infrastructure while maintaining flexibility for the future.

A platform that only works effectively within a single ecosystem may limit your ability to incorporate new technologies, support mergers and acquisitions, or adapt to evolving operational requirements.

Ask potential vendors:

- Which building systems can be integrated today?
- What open standards and protocols are supported?
- How are third-party systems incorporated into workflows and analytics?
- What resources are required to connect new systems in the future?

Interoperability becomes increasingly important as organizations pursue goals related to energy efficiency, sustainability, resilience and operational optimization. Achieving a comprehensive view of facility performance often requires data from multiple sources working together.

Choosing a platform with strong integration capabilities can help prevent costly technology constraints later while creating a stronger foundation for continuous improvement.

Red flag: The vendor talks about integrations but cannot explain what data flows bi-directionally.

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3. Evaluate AI through live demonstrations and real use cases

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a central part of many facility technology discussions. However, AI capabilities can vary widely between solutions.

Some platforms offer genuinely useful tools that help users identify issues, prioritize actions and uncover opportunities for improvement. Others rely heavily on marketing language without demonstrating clear business outcomes.

Rather than evaluating AI based on product descriptions alone, request live demonstrations using realistic scenarios.

Ask vendors to show how AI supports actual workplace and facility management tasks, such as:

- Identifying equipment performance issues
- Detecting abnormal energy consumption
- Prioritizing maintenance activities
- Generating operational recommendations
- Helping users access information through natural language queries

Whenever possible, use examples that reflect your organization's specific challenges. The closer the demonstration is to your operating environment, the easier it will be to assess practical value.

It is also important to evaluate explainability of AI features and insights. AI should translate building data into explainable, actionable recommendations. The most effective AI applications provide transparency and context, allowing users to understand how recommendations are generated and why specific actions are being suggested.

Red flag: AI recommendations appear without explainability or operational context.

Long-term success depends on balancing usability and capability

Selecting a workplace management and intelligent building platform is a strategic decision that can influence operational performance for years to come. The stakes are high for technology evaluators, and it can be tempting to place too much weight on either usability or capability when assessing these solutions.

In reality, long-term success depends on striking the right balance between the two. The most valuable solutions are those that help users solve meaningful operational challenges, generate actionable insights and support better decision-making while remaining accessible enough to drive widespread adoption.

By validating real-world user experiences, prioritizing interoperability and carefully evaluating AI capabilities, facilities leaders can make more informed decisions and invest in platforms that are both usable and powerful.

The best smart building platform is not the one with the longest feature list. It is the one your teams can use every day to connect data, understand priorities and take action with confidence.

For a deeper framework on comparing platforms, evaluating vendors and aligning stakeholders, download the Smart Building Technology Buyer's Guide.

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