IBM making the Louvre Museum smarter

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IBM's "building whisperer" has been listening to the Louvre to make the famed Paris museum better at protecting art, saving energy, and staying open for its millions of annual visitors.

"It is not a job; it is a mission," said IBM industry solutions vice president David Bartlett, whose passion for figuring out how to make places more efficient has earned him the nickname "The Building Whisperer."

"If you listen to a building holistically, there are all kinds of opportunity for improvement," Bartlett told AFP. "The Louvre has told me that it is a complex network of systems within systems."

A recent acquisition allowed IBM to upgrade software installed as part of a deal made years ago to enable the Louvre to more efficiently manage maintenance, repairs and other aspects of running the museum, according to the US technology titan.

IBM made its work at the Louvre public at a company gathering in Las Vegas.

Established in the 18th Century, the Louvre has more than 650,000 square feet (60,400 square meters) of permanent exhibition space and is home to precious art such as the Mona Lisa.

The Louvre logs approximately 65,000 repairs and maintenance jobs a year, with fixes sometimes causing sections to be closed temporarily at Europe's most-visited museum.

IBM Maximo software was installed to naturally and efficiently coordinate planning, cleaning, maintenance, heating, lighting and even the locking system for the more than 2,500 doors in the Louvre.

"You could design the best house for energy conservation, but if a teenager leaves a door open it destroys the whole model," Bartlett said, noting that along with energy concerns the Louvre's art has humidity needs.

"We can design in corrective action."

Prior to installing the IBM system, museum staff managed maintenance using paperwork.

"Managing thousands of repairs, cleaning and maintenance visits per year to preserve the facilities and artwork while keeping the galleries available and accessible to visitors is a daunting undertaking," said museum computer maintenance system department manager Metin Pelit.

"Thanks to IBM software, we're able to visualize our entire infrastructure and make better, more informed decisions about when and how to respond to problems -- and about when to proactively address a potential problem that we otherwise wouldn't have seen coming."

The system uses feedback from sensors to anticipate problems, such as motors nearing failure points or filters in need of changing. The software also tracks which vendors have the best records on jobs contracted out.

The Louvre logged a record-breaking 8.8 million visitors last year. IBM said that its work with the Louvre is in its early stages but that it has achieved energy savings of as much as 40 percent in old buildings.

"In the Louvre's case, there's the added challenge of being home to thousands of irreplaceable pieces of art which must be carefully preserved while trying to accommodate millions of visitors annually," Pelit said.

"The Louvre is now able to keep the majority of their galleries open to customers on a daily basis while simultaneously reducing costs and energy consumption."

Since New York State-based IBM launched its "Smarter Buildings" initiative in early 2010, it has installed systems in resorts, museums, colleges, resorts, and more.