

Selection for the Season

Tips on prequalifying a snow and ice management provider

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I truly feel that snow and ice management of any commercial, medical, industrial or HOA facility is a partnership between the customer and the provider. It is the service provider's responsibility to educate a potential client on the true intricacies of our business and how we can add value to their property or product that they may produce.

I was recently in a meeting with several facility managers. We were being interviewed for a multi-site snow and ice management contract when the potential customer posed this question to me: "I want you to describe your action plan on servicing our 13 sites when we receive two to four inches of snow and you have four hours until we open."

My answer was as follows: With all do respect plowing your facilities when we receive two to four inches of snow with a four-hour window is a task that I believe most of the snow and ice management contractors can perform. Let me explain our process when we were expecting two to four inches of snow and received 12 inches of snow instead, my team has been out for 30 hours straight, and I need to keep them motivated to finish the task at hand and keep your facilities clean and safe to get your staff home. This comment actually was the difference I was told later on our firm being awarded the contract.

With that in mind, here are five items I feel are imperative to clarify when you are interviewing a snow and ice provider in the order of importance:

Experience

Experience of the site supervisor as well as the team he has assembled is paramount in my eyes. Many times you are dealing with a sales person and he may or may not be the one putting the rubber to the road when the services are rendered. All good planning is as it sounds: just planning. When night falls and it is snowing at a rate of one inch per hour, all bets are off and it is comforting to know that experience takes over to

make the game-time decisions that need to be made quickly.

Density

Density is the amount of work that particular contractor has in your geographic region. This is very important to the level of service they can provide to your facility. Not only does it help when equipment breaks down, which is inevitable in snow and ice management,

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but it also allows the site supervisor to remain in your geographic area to monitor existing site conditions and potential changes in weather patterns. All of us know that the weather can deteriorate pretty rapidly in a short period of time in Northeast Ohio and navigating the streets can become a time-consuming issue if the supervisor needs to travel great distances.

Technology

Technology is our friend in this business. Whether it's communicating an issue via email, monitoring weather remotely in a supervisor truck or the equipment and/or materials we are using to service a site, a good snow and ice management company will be on

the cutting edge of technology to allow for the best quality of service expected.

Planning & Education

Planning is very important to allow a customer's expectations to be translated to the front line team members. I believe that planning should start in May after the last occurrence from the previous year. A good provider will service all of its equipment to make sure it is in good working condition for the next season. Most importantly they should identify any service issues or areas that need improvement for the following year services. All of us our human and make mistakes. Those of us that fix those mistakes and grow from them are great service providers.

Value

Notice I did not say price. I truly believe that the value of what a good snow and ice management provider is a culmination of cost of service and the piece of mind you receive knowing that a client has chosen a company that will be there at 2 a.m. when their services are needed the most.

I will leave all of you with this last words of wisdom when interviewing your 2010-2011 snow and ice provider. A good partnership comes from good communication. The more information you provide to your potential service provider and the more questions that provider asks at your initial meeting should help you qualify a good fit for your facility. **P**

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