

# What to know for your snow management

**B**eing in the snow removal industry for the last 17 years, I've seen many changes and trends. The good news is the wave of change has been beneficial for the snow and ice removal industry as a whole.

**Equipment trends.** One of the most difficult dynamics in the snow and ice management industry is managing the never-ending labor shortage. Finding individuals who want to go out, in the middle of the night, in cold and/or freezing conditions, to perform the laborious act of shoveling snow, without a restroom in sight or warm food, can be difficult. Additionally, finding qualified candidates to drive and operate heavy equipment is a continuous issue. The unwavering labor shortage ultimately brought about increased wages. Unfortunately, even though the contractor is forced to pay more, most clients are unreceptive to increased rates, which has put pressure on the industry to evolve.

To offset the labor shortage, many snow and ice management companies have purchased equipment that goes beyond the industry "basics" of plows and shovels. This equipment not only saves time, but is efficient as well. The equipment plays a significant role in time management, allowing companies to clear sites faster, with less snow removal personnel.

Snow brooms, Ventracs and larger shovels can double the clearing time for typical sidewalk work. Snow pushers of varying lengths, from 8 to 20 feet, can clear parking lots in one-half to one-fourth of the time it takes a plow truck to clear, not to mention the higher depths of snow accumulation these pushers are capable of clearing. Additionally, the pushers enable the operator to strategically relocate snow on sites in a cost-effective manner, ultimately taking up fewer premium parking spaces with snow accumulation. Property managers should pay close attention to the equipment used on their properties to ensure they are benefiting from these advances.

**Pricing trends.** Another trend is

Owners and property managers who commit early are guaranteed better resources and pricing.



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New technologies, such as new snow pushers, have made snow removal more efficient.



Ventracs can double the clearing time for typical sidewalk work.

the growing number of clients who are converting from the old standard of time-and-materials contracts to seasonal contracts. These seasonal contracts offer a fixed cost for services/ice mitigation for an entire winter season. And why not? We live in a world where most of us pay for life, health, dental, homeowner's and auto insurance. This seasonal contract is just another insurance policy. The seasonal contract takes an owner's line-item variable costs of snow removal – which all owners hate because it's the unknown, bill in the night, budget breaker – and provides him with a budgeted fixed cost. Yes, it might snow less than planned, and yes, he might pay more one year versus another year, but it averages out. This is applicable in our everyday lives as we pay an annual auto insurance premium whether we have an accident, require towing or have damage from acts of God, such as hail. With the seasonal contract, owners now see the benefit of a fixed cost, which can be multi-year, as well as priced in a variety of ways to meet the owner's budget and needs.

Another angle to consider is this: On a time-and-materials basis, what drives the contractor to be efficient with the owner's money? On a seasonal contract, the contractor must manage the site with efficient equipment and personnel in

order to meet the margin set. This is absolutely worth checking into for 2015.

**Time management and record keeping trends.** Time tracking and record keeping are vital in snow removal operations. Time tracking plays an essential role for contractors invoicing clients, and the internal documents are crucial for recording the time of services, as well as type, for property managers. The goal is for these records never to be needed, but the reality is that in the litigious world in which we live, thorough and meticulous documentation of services is mandatory. The shrewd property manager is ever mindful that it's not only important the job is done in a cost-effective manner, but also that the contractor has the ability to back up his work should circumstances demand it.

To help achieve the best of both worlds, many snow and ice management companies in today's market either have some sort of technology-based software, or are looking into it for their future. Countless manufacturers strive to come up with the right fit for tracking data, whether its phone-based, modular-vehicle-cab-based, GPS tracking tied into an accounting database, or something altogether different. A variety of sophisticated apparatus comes out on the market each year to assist our industry in technology-based time management.

**Education and training trends.** Education and training play a significant role in the success of a professional company, now more than ever. The Accredited Snow Contractors Association is centered on networking, legislative action, education and insurance initiatives. By connecting contractors, the association can create education standards and seek legislative reform. To tie into the educational aspect, ASCA created a quality management system for the snow removal industry.

SN9001 was established exclusively for snow and ice contractors and works in conjunction with the existing International Organization for Standardization: 9001. Through SN9001, contractors earn certification through an independent, third-party audit that focuses on processes and procedures that adhere to service quality, as well as implementation of the industry standards for snow and ice management.

The Snow and Ice Management Association provides resources, leadership and support for snow removal and management professionals across North America. It is a nonprofit trade association with a focus on training related to snow plowing, ice management and business management. Additionally SIMA offers training and education for Certified Snow Professional, which is the recognized standard for professionalism and excellence



## Vendor Trends

in snow and ice management services. Similar to the commercial real estate's Real Property Administrator or Certified Property Manager certifications, the training is rigorous and is followed by testing through an outside third-party facility. CSPs are professionals who not only get the job done, but also have invested the time and effort required to successfully achieve the designation, and maintain the credentials by meeting annual continuing education requirements.

The benefits of working with a contractor who is affiliated with snow removal industry groups is that it allows a property manager another means to truly qualify the company he seeks to hire. Although pricing is always a key consideration, qualities associated with a professional organization are equally significant. A contractor's safety, liability, and risk management training and education, as well as expertise and competence, are invaluable aspects that show the level of sophistication within an organization. It is through training and education that contractors remain current on the latest and greatest equipment, technology, trends, laws and improvements. Furthermore, having a knowledgeable contractor partner can make all the difference in the event of legal action from a claim or incident involving snow removal.

**The early bird trends.** Early signing and commitment in snow removal is a newer trend. There is so much that goes into snow and ice removal operations that contractors are now spending the time to educate their clients to the importance of early decision-making. The newly educated client no longer waits until late summer/early fall to shop snow



Snow removal contracts are changing to seasonal-based formats with fixed costs for the entire season.

services. Contractors must forecast for the future winter season, which requires purchasing equipment, labor planning, and chemical and materials ordering. Furthermore, contractors who purchase early are better equipped to plan their operations and guarantee the most competitive pricing from their vendors, ultimately

passing on the savings to their client. Owners and property managers who commit early are guaranteed better resources and pricing.

Some of the aforementioned trends in the snow and ice industry have brought about improvements that not only benefit the snow and ice contractors, but property managers

and building owners as well. And it is through the collaborated efforts of the snow and ice management contractors, manufacturers and suppliers of snow removal products, goods, services and equipment, trade industry groups and our clients that we are all clearing the way to a better future.▲



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