

How to Ensure Success After Installation

Selecting a boiler is about more than simply the equipment specs. Learn how to evaluate suppliers up front for long-term service and support.

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Many industrial sales organizations do a wonderful job of wooing a customer, gaining the customer's trust and making the sale. But what happens after the ink dries on the contract and the purchase order is cut? The reality can leave process heating professionals in a state of distress and confusion.

Here are nine tips about what to look for — and expect from — an aftermarket support program for critical industrial heat processing equipment such as boilers.

1 Require a Quality Product

Though this should go without saying, the first step to successful aftermarket collaboration is to begin by demanding a quality product from the boiler supplier. A low-quality product may have an attractive initial price tag, but the cost of constant repairs will result in higher costs over time. Quality also is important when considering safety. Industrial equipment often can be unsafe if not operated or maintained properly. If a product is in need of constant repair or breaks down often, it can put facility operators in a dangerous situation.

2 Aftermarket Support Does Not Stop With the Warranty

Many sales engineers move on after the sale, leaving maintenance to a local mechanical contractor. The contractor typically honors the installation warranty for the first year and then goes missing for the remainder of the equipment's life. Many heat-processing professionals then are left with equipment they know little about. Look for a company that provides training to equipment operators.



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3 Insist on Reliability

Many plants have process equipment such as boilers that can last 60 years or more. This, combined with the significant capital costs that often come with new equipment, is precisely why it is important to have an aftermarket support program that can be relied on. The aftermarket service provider must be committed to servicing the equipment decades from now with the same vigor demonstrated immediately after installation.

To help ensure you are getting a reliable aftermarket supplier, find out how long the provider has been in business. Ask others in the industry about the company's reputation, and check the provider's references. Also, factor in longevity. Looking at a company's history for stability and longevity can provide assurance that the equipment supplier and its service providers will be around for the long term. While these steps will not guarantee success, they can make you aware of potential "red flags" before you sign the contract.

4 Perform Lifecycle Costing

Serious consideration should be given to operating costs over the life of your new equipment. For example, in a boiler

system, the cost of operation for the first year can equal nearly four times the purchase price. High energy costs dictate that equipment run at optimum efficiency at all times. A supplier dedicated to equipment upkeep and continuous research and development on retrofit solutions will keep lifecycle costs under control and be able to offer continuous improvements throughout the life of the product.

5 Assess Availability of Training Information

Access to a good, informative equipment supplier web site and meaningful training programs is important when questions arise or new personnel must be trained. Helpful web sites should have reference materials, training tools and technical tips to help boiler users become more familiar with the equipment, enabling them to troubleshoot minor maintenance issues on their own if desired. The training programs should be versatile, covering the real need-to-know aspects.

6 Get It In Writing

When a supplier has incomplete or erroneous operating manuals, parts lists or other documentation, you could be left high-and-dry if something goes wrong — with

little ability to troubleshoot the problem in-house. This could leave you at the mercy of the service technician, who must then work you into his schedule. When evaluating potential suppliers, ask to see their product documentation up front.

7 Location, Location, Location

In industrial boiler situations, time truly is money: an hour of downtime can potentially cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Therefore, the location of service technicians and spare parts inventory in relationship to your facility is critical. Local service teams can respond more quickly and deliver the parts needed to fix problems.

8 Consider the Single-Source Approach

Some equipment suppliers also offer aftermarket service. If a supplier can provide an entire system as well as aftermarket support, there is no room for finger-pointing. This also helps ensure the local service provider will have the necessary parts needed for routine maintenance.

9 What to Do If You Are Stuck in a Bad Situation

Sometimes, you just have to "break up" with your aftermarket supplier. If you find aftermarket support to be inadequate, find a new local service provider who has on-site parts inventory for your equipment. It is not necessary to stick with the service team from the equipment manufacturer if they are not meeting your needs. You may be able to get the same parts availability and far better service by looking elsewhere. **PH**

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