

Bid Specs get a reality check

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Contributor

As this issue of *Snow Business* arrives in your mailbox, you've probably already sold all the snow removal and ice management your company can handle this winter, right? Wouldn't that be nice? But if you're like most of us, you're still trying to secure as much work as possible before the flakes start flying. In a world where most clients pretend it doesn't snow—until a month or two before it actually does—we still have time to improve upon our sales and bidding strategies.

Let's focus specifically on bid specs—especially for those sites we bid that come with specs written by someone who is not a snow professional. Those of you in the business for some time know exactly what I'm talking about. You'll find these sub-standard specs in contracts of all sizes—from homeowner associations, to office buildings, to major retail chains. It's important to recognize that even when dealing with a large client or prospective client, the specs and terms provided need to be realistic and doable before submitting your bid.

What if?

We've all been there: We want the job so badly we wouldn't dare call the prospective clients and tell them that the specs they've been using for years are wrong. Consider this example: "The specs read that we are to plow when snow accumulation reaches 2 inches and salt when slippery conditions exist. This is a fairly standard bid specification, but what do I do when there is 1.75 inches and it's 11°? My experience and knowledge tell me I should plow 1.75 inches of snow before I salt in 11° weather. I'll just ignore the 2-in. spec on those super-cold nights and



plow. The client can't possibly refuse to pay for the push. Salt would have never melted that much snow at that temperature. I'm just looking out for the client and doing what's right."

The example shows what a lot of us do every day when we sign our clients' contracts and agree to their unrealistic bid specs. We too often convince ourselves that common sense will prevail and that they "must know" there are going to be exceptions. Don't assume that they know anything. Now is the time, during the bidding process, to ask questions and amend the specs. Don't be afraid to ask "What if?" Don't be afraid to be the professional and tell the client that his or her specs are neither practical nor realistic. In a perfect world, these clients would be signing our contracts, but we all know that's not always the case. Don't agree to something you can't do.

Use your knowledge as a sales tool

I try to put myself in a property manager's shoes. I personally would appreciate and assign value to dealing with a contractor whose knowledge of the services he is selling far surpasses mine—or that of his competition. That's why I'm hiring him, right? As a property manager, would I want a long-term relationship with a contractor who's destructively compliant, or would I want to build a

lasting relationship with someone whose knowledge and professionalism can be captured and utilized at my site?

There are a lot of clients, including property managers, who view snow removal and ice management as a commodity. A lot of them think we're all the same and that the only thing that differentiates us is our price. What if actually challenging the bid specs and demonstrating our knowledge could be utilized as a sales tool? What if telling a prospect that their specs won't get them the type of service they need could actually boost your image to that potential client? Be the professional. Be the

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expert. Show the prospect or client that what we do while the rest of the world is sleeping is *not* a commodity.

I am a certified snow professional with more than 13 years of experience in this industry, and I refuse to sign a contract—or even a proposal—that does not reflect a professional snow removal and ice management service. Professionalism and knowledge brings more money to our industry. Next time you see a 2-in. trigger or an unrealistic spec in a bid, pick up the phone. Educate the property manager and set yourself apart from the so-called competition.

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