

## 11 Questions to Ask Your Equipment Manufacturer Before You Buy

New or renovated equipment is a significant investment and once it's installed, you want to make sure it works without incident. Equipment that's not suited for your materials or process can cause expensive downtime, maintenance costs, product inconsistency and more. How can you make sure you're getting the right equipment before you buy? Knowing the right questions to ask your equipment manufacturer will make sure you get exactly the system you need.

### 11 Essential Questions To Ask Your Process Equipment Manufacturer

#### 1. *Can You Build My Spec?*

This might seem like a no-brainer, but a detailed spec sheet is the first and most important step in ordering the right equipment and finding the right manufacturer. When your manufacturer knows your production volume, materials, process requirements, electrical needs and other requirements, they can build a system that fits seamlessly into your facility. The more specific your spec sheet, the more accurate the build. For this reason, one of the first questions to ask your equipment manufacturer is whether or not they can build the spec for you.

Make sure your spec sheet includes following:

- Production amount
- Electrical rating
- Environmental hazards (combustible dust, extreme heat, moisture etc.)
- Material hazards (caustic materials, respirable dust hazards etc.)
- Build material requirements (stainless steel, food grade, polyethylene etc.)
- Sanitation regulations
- Safety requirements
- Upstream and downstream system operations

#### 2. *Do You Have Any Questions?*

It's essential to ask your manufacturer the right questions, but it's also important to address their questions as well. If the manufacturer doesn't ask for any clarification about your spec or requirements, this might be cause for concern. Be wary of too many easy answers; make sure your manufacturer thinks about your constraints or potential obstacles as hard as you do.

#### 3. *Are All Specifications In The Quote?*

From the small details to the big-ticket items, all of your specifications should be written in the quote. If it's not written down, miscommunications between sales and manufacturing can happen and you get might not be what you thought. There are just as many important questions to ask manufacturers about the quote as there are about the build itself.

#### *4. Is This Quote Accurate?*

A lower price is tempting, but low-ball offers tend to pile on extra costs and frustration later on. Make sure you know the right questions to ask manufacturers about the price; how accurate is it? What could cause it to change? Are testing, delivery, and maintenance included? When comparing quotes, make sure all the same considerations are included on each.

#### *5. What Components Do You Use?*

If you, your technicians, manager, or client prefer certain brands of controls or other components, ask if these are available. Make sure your manufacturer uses off-the-shelf components; specialized equipment can make later maintenance, upgrades, and repairs much harder and more expensive.

#### *6. Who Can I Call About This System?*

One of the best questions to ask manufacturers about your system is, who else uses it? Your manufacturer should be able to provide references you can talk to. When checking these references, make sure the system and process is the same. Remember that differences in the process, additional parts, or a system purchased more than five years ago might not be the same.

In addition to information about the system, the reference can also tell you about the manufacturer. Consider the following questions for your reference:

- What system and process do you have?
- When did you purchase it?
- Have you seen any problems?
- Was the purchase price the same as the quote?
- Did the manufacturer provide maintenance or assistance?
- Was delivery on time?
- After purchase, was the manufacturer easy to get back in touch with?

#### *7. What Testing Do You Provide?*

Testing is the best way to make sure that your system integrates properly and completes the process without a problem. Factory approval testing should be available before shipping. The manufacturer should also be able to conduct ingredient testing to address any potential problems with bulk density, angle of repose, particle size, materials hazards, and more.

Make sure you know the right questions to ask your manufacturer about equipment testing; when have they conducted this testing before? How much does testing cost? Is it written into the quote?

### 8. *Are You Certified?*

It's better to double-check that your manufacturer has required certifications and adheres to standards rather than find out later your equipment might not be up to par.

Consider the following certifications and standards;

- UL wiring and control standards
- ASME and/or AWS welding standards and codes
- ISO standards
- OSHA equipment safety standards
- IEEE standards
- Canadian, European Union, other international standards

### 9. *What Service Do You Offer?*

Knowing the right questions to ask about the service department will make sure good service continues after purchase. Do they have an in-house service department? How many technicians are there? Do they offer set-up and training? An extra investment in an in-house, top-notch service department can prevent costly downtime later.

### 10. *Can I Purchase Wear Parts?*

The majority of your system should have a long, effective life, however some parts do inevitably wear down. Ask about sprockets, nozzles, replacement belts, screens, strainers, belt and valve calibration, etc. Addressing these concerns at purchase will reduce downtime drastically later.

### 11. *Will This System Age Well?*

Durability isn't the concern when it comes to system aging. If regulations change, new technology becomes available, or ingredients change, can the system adapt? Consider potential changes on the horizon, or industry upsets you've seen in the past.

Can the system adapt to:

- Stricter sanitation requirements
- Stricter safety requirements
- More precise measurements
- Changes to ingredient mixing
- Additional nutrient needs
- New software capabilities
- IoT integration

As the saying goes, the key to success is 90% planning and 10% execution. Once you know and verify that your manufacturer can and will build the system you need, the hardest and riskiest part of the job is done. Ask your manufacturer the right questions from the start and you can have confidence in your system when it arrives.

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