

Know What You're Paying For

by Al Ouellette 

Many of us have heard the saying, "cheap man pay twice". Although this is not always the case, many think that saving money up front is best. This up-front savings may cost you more in the long run. Keep in mind that more expensive doesn't always mean better, and less expensive doesn't always mean worse. You must always consider one very important ingredient.

That ingredient is customer service.

There are many questions that need to be answered prior deciding on a specific instrument, including the amount and type of I/O, power requirements, physical size, classifications, certifications, accuracy, warranty, and the list goes on. Assuming you have a choice of instruments available to you that will suit your requirements, the only question to ask is which one to select. Many decisions are made purely on the answer to the questions; "Does the instrument do what we want it to do, and is it less expensive than the competition?"

When deciding on what instrument to select, whether it's a Gas or Liquid Meter, Gas Chromatograph, H2S analyzer, or CO2 monitor, it is very important to do your research into what others have selected and why. I find it very easy to ask the vendor for references, and if references are not offered in response, you may want to rethink that purchase as good news travels fast, but bad news travels even faster.

I have worked in the natural gas pipeline industry for many years and have witnessed the benefits from great customer service. In my opinion the greatest benefit is the hands on, one on one training and assistance that can be gained. Many companies are relying on their own staff to manage and maintain the in depth understanding of complex devices. When relying on your own staff for the knowledge and understanding of instruments, education is key.

You could have an instrument that appears to be accurate, however it may not be, and you may not know it! That is where the vendor and or consultant can relieve you of some of the burden of working through your post and pre commissioning needs. If you have selected an instrument that you are told is plug and play, this doesn't necessarily mean it will play nice. What you want is great "Customer Service", that will ensure the instrument is accurate, and when it plays dirty, the support must be readily available. You may require someone to assist with verification and troubleshooting, or the instrument may require an upgrade to software, firmware or even hardware. This is where the vendors' true colors often show.

Ensure you select a vendor that has your future needs and requirements at the top of their list, and not just making the sale. Some vendors have technical support somewhere at the bottom of their priority list, in another region and even in another country. This makes for a difficult situation for the technicians that are required to ensure functionality and accuracy of instruments. What a technician requires is technical support that will respond quickly to their needs, whether it's over the phone or face to face. You want support that is available and within your region. You also want support that will have parts on hand to reduce down time which costs money.

Aside from the instruments capabilities, one must always remember what happens after the instrument is purchased and installed. If you know your purchase includes great "customer service", you will get what you pay for.