

How To Be Sure You're Buying The Right Wastewater Equipment

Sooner or later, each wastewater plant has to approach a manufacturer and discuss a purchase. Anyone who has ever tried to buy a piece of expensive, sophisticated wastewater equipment will know there are pitfalls. Some manufacturers offer the best solutions, others don't. Some manufacturers will go above and beyond to meet a customer's needs, others won't. But how do you figure out who has your best interests in mind and who is just out to make a sale?

To get to the bottom of it, we went straight to the horse's mouth. [Huber Technology](#) has been providing wastewater equipment to the market for more than 175 years. Water Online spoke with Dieter Weinert, Huber's director of engineering, to find out how customers can be sure they are working with a qualified manufacturer to get the wastewater solution that's best for them.

What qualifications should an end user look for in a wastewater manufacturer?

There are the obvious statements of qualification that are often made by manufacturers in their brochures, such as "high-quality equipment and solutions" or "experience combined with reliability."

What really makes a manufacturer a consistent and reliable partner to the end user is the diversity of the company



structure. A qualified firm controls all aspects of the technical solution starting with research and development, design and sizing, manufacturing, prototype testing, and market implementation. It does not end with the installation. The company needs to service the equipment and solution throughout its entire life-cycle. Diversity, represented in the organization of the company and the multitude of engineers from different fields, is the key indication for a reliable and knowledgeable partner.

How can a wastewater customer be sure that a manufacturer is not just out to sell something, but to sell something of true value?

Talking as a technical sales person or as an engineer, it is the ability to ask specific

questions about the customer's situation. We are in the business of selling, and even the director of engineering is striving towards securing the purchase order. Therefore, I do not see anything wrong with being out there and selling. The way of selling is what it comes down to.

The goal should be to sell the most efficient and cost-effective solution that solves the customer's problem. There are no shortcuts in selling highly technical equipment. The manufacturer needs to show the expertise and willingness to understand the client's problem. This being said, it is all about asking the right questions and being able to explain why an answer is so important for the success of the project.

A manufacturer should explore the actual situation with the client. It is very important to listen to the client, and especially to the technical staff, to understand the challenges they are facing.

Manufacturers need to understand the challenges to be able to determine the limitations of their equipment. The clients do not look for “cookie cutter” solutions; they need customized solutions to solve their problems. Customized solutions can be based on standard equipment, but manufacturers should be able to provide modifications to their standard equipment that improve the performance.

Our experience shows that even with thousands of pieces of equipment installed worldwide, every application has its uniqueness and it is important, from a manufacturer’s perspective, to maintain the curiosity to find the parameters that make the application special. The ability to look at the application from different perspectives requires diversity in engineering personnel as the key to the overall goal of finding the right solution.

What are some common qualifications a wastewater manufacturer might exaggerate to make a sale, but that won’t stand up to more scrutiny from a potential customer?

There are plenty of sales tactics available and statements made about quality, experience, reliability, and servicing the customer. Customers are in a difficult situation because they have to verify and evaluate the information. References are always an option, but they don’t always tell the whole story. It is relatively easy to substantiate single qualifications, but it is more difficult to explain liaisons (— e.g., how is the experience with an application transferred into more reliable designs, or is the service provided to the client translating into higher quality of the equipment?). The cross-referencing will identify the shortcoming of the sales strategy, because only companies with the diverse structure described above are providing the entire knowledge as a package. The evaluation will identify the original source manufacturer as the

provider of the solution with the most value and most sustainability.

What is the number one question a customer should ask a wastewater manufacturer to find out whether or not they are bringing value?

The summary of all the above leads to the question: Are you an original source manufacturer?

What would you say is the most important first step to take when seeking out a wastewater solution?

It is all about the transcription of the customer’s problem. It is not about a certain piece of equipment that might be available for sale. The process of finding a solution revolves around the particular problem presented by the customer.

The customer, often supported by an engineering firm, has already spent the time to identify the problem and has started a data-mining process to characterize the problem. It is crucial for the solution provider to understand the conditions and start the evaluation process to identify the best solution. Often the customer has already made a decision on what piece of equipment will be used, but equipment manufacturers with large equipment portfolios might be able to identify the pros and cons of certain designs for the particular application.

When is it time for an end user to decide that an under-performing wastewater solution needs to be discussed with the manufacturer?

The end users should never have to be in situations where they have to make this kind of decision. What this really means

is that the manufacturer is not staying in contact with their customer. This does not mean that the manufacturer is constantly monitoring the equipment performance, but the manufacturer’s service group should stay involved in the project. The service group needs to stay in frequent contact with the customers and should be able to verify the reasons for the fluctuations in the performance.

Our service group makes available maintenance contracts designed to prevent decreasing performance. Only abrupt declining performance should require action by the customer to have to pursue the manufacturer. In this case a notification should be sent to the manufacturer, and the process of troubleshooting should be set in motion. The performance issue needs to be evaluated in detail to identify the reason, whether it’s a mechanical problem or a process issue.

For any customer that has realized their chosen wastewater manufacturer is not as competent as they once thought, what do you advise as a course of action?

Call Huber Technology, Inc... Just kidding. We know we are not perfect, but we work consistently on improvements to our products and processes. It is all driven by the overall goal to serve our clients, which includes modifications to existing installations, repairs, and retrofits. There are always legal aspects to be taken into consideration, but in general, it comes down to that first step: Transcribe the problem and have a knowledgeable and reliable manufacturer help you to get through the challenge and solve it. ■



Dieter Weinert has been involved in the municipal and industrial wastewater industry for 21 years. He has been with Huber Technology since he entered the business field in 1994. Dieter is currently serving as Director of Engineering for Huber Technology, located in Huntersville, NC. Huber Technology serves the municipal and industrial wastewater treatment market with high-quality liquid-separation technology.