

# SNOW START UP

ISSUE #4: FOCUS ON **BUSINESS**

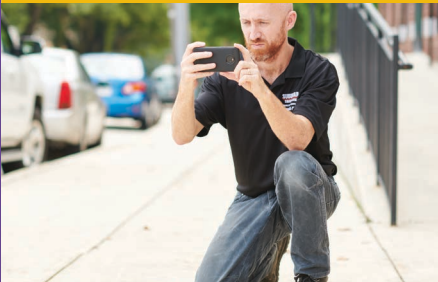
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## COOL CUSTOMERS

There's nothing worse than getting "that call" ... a very unhappy customer is on the line and wants answers. Keeping your clients educated and informed before, during and after the season will go a long way toward minimizing the complaints and questions that may arise during the winter season. This issue of Start Up focuses on tasks and processes that should be done that will lead to satisfied customers.

### PRESEASON



The more information you can provide up front ensures you and your team and the client and their team are on the same page. Alignment on level of service details and communication are key.

### IN SEASON



A lot can happen during the season. Solid processes regarding reporting, billing, change requests and storm plans will make in-season interactions with the client easier.

### POSTSEASON



Communication is essential after the season. It's your chance to learn what went well, what didn't and to open the door to securing a renewal.

## BEST PRACTICES: CLIENT SERVICES

SIMA's Best Practices Checklist has several items related to customer service:

- Client sign off on agreed-upon level of service, including site priorities and timing
- A consistent communication plan that includes multiple points of contact on each side exists between the client and service provider
- Pre-event communication to customers regarding upcoming event and planned response
- Documented snow response planning process for various storm scenarios
- Documented snow site engineering plan verifies priority areas and zones
- Assign a consistent manager/foreman with experience to each route/site
- Provide post-event communications to clients related to weather and services rendered



Download the complete best practices checklist at [sima.org/best-practices](https://sima.org/best-practices)

# PRESEASON: TIME TO GET ON THE SAME PAGE

With winter looming, preseason is the time to get the client (and representatives such as on-site property managers) and the service team together to review key details and finalize communication expectations.

## LOS REVIEW

The Level of Service (LOS), often referred to as a Service Level Agreement, is the client's expectations of the service you will deliver, including surface conditions at specific times, or alternate/additional expectations for events that exceed a defined timeframe and/or a defined amount of accumulation(s). These details should be in your signed contract. But it's important to meet with the client, any of their on-site managers and your team to review the agreed upon LOS so there is no misunderstanding during hectic winter events. Key items to review:

- Initiation of services, including trigger depths if applicable
- Timeframes for service completion (including any changes for long-duration or extreme events)
- Who is authorized to make service-related decisions
- Site priorities, like sidewalks, handicap stalls, delivery ramps, emergency exits, etc.
- Post-storm service requirements
- Services that may need to be requested in writing by the customer

In addition to reviewing the LOS, share with the client how service will be delivered and identify any challenges. Make sure all parties have a clear and defined understanding of expectations and what is



in and outside of the scope of work (SOW). Key items to review:

- Boundaries and areas to be included in service
- Equipment/materials being used, and whether they will be staged on site or brought to the site for each event.
- Services included (and not included) such as plowing/clearing, stacking, relocation, removal, deicing, anti-icing, post-storm ice watch, etc.

## SITE VISIT

Conduct a preseason site visit (ideally with the client) to address the following:

- Existing damages and any issues that should be resolved before the season (e.g., potholes, heaved pavement, etc.)
- Issues or hazards that may impact service (e.g., poor drainage, slopes/hills, heavy traffic, etc.)
- Site security and request necessary keys, training, lock combinations, etc., for off-hours site access.
- Document hours of operation and any shift changes for equipment operators and account managers.

If the client can't (or won't) visit the site with you, document your findings and provide them to the owner, property manager, etc. to protect you in the event of an incident.





## COMMUNICATION & REPORTING

It's an industry best practice to ensure the flow of information goes to the right places at the right time before, during and after an event. Before the start of the season, build a communication plan that includes current phone numbers and emails so either the service provider or client can quickly reach the right people when needed — and the next in the chain of command if the initial contact is not available.

Beyond capturing contact information, the following communication expectations should be documented:

**Service verification.** Every client will have different expectations for when or if they want service updates or other communications from the service provider. Confirm these expectations before the season begins and inform anyone who might be responsible for delivering that information. Establish how services are to be reported and invoiced.

**Complaint / LOS change procedures.** Confirm the process for receiving complaints or level of service changes. It isn't unusual for a store manager to approach a team member requesting service that isn't in the contract. Those on site need to know how to manage those situations by knowing who to contact and what is and isn't an acceptable response. Never perform work that isn't in the signed contract. Doing so can open your company to additional risk. Any changes to the LOS should be presented and approved in writing.

**Incident reporting.** Establish a process for reporting damages, slip and falls and other incidents. This may include text, email, forms or online reporting.

### RESOURCES:

Procurement Guide Best Practices  
Best Practices Checklist  
Site Engineering Sell Sheet  
Preseason Risk Assessment

Find these resources at  
[sima.org/startup](https://sima.org/startup)

# IN SEASON: KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN

Hopefully all of the preseason process development will allow you to work unimpeded by constant interruptions or second-guessing from customers. However, important information should still be communicated before, during and after events.

**Pre-event:** Provide the forecast and initial dispatch plan.

**During the event:** Communicate the current state of operations, changes to forecast and resulting changes to the event plan. If equipment breakdowns or staff no-shows slow you down, share the contingency plans to hopefully head off the “why hasn’t my site been cleared yet” text or phone call.



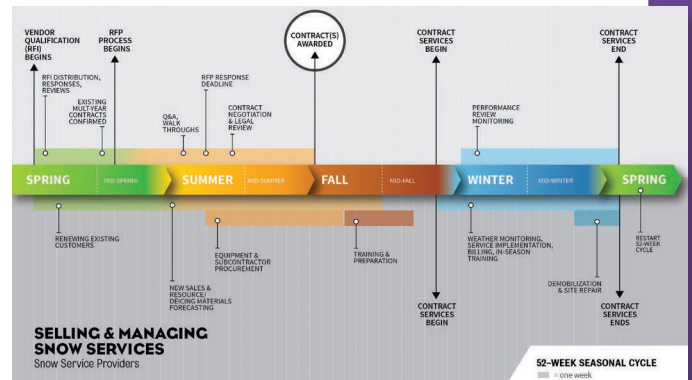
**Post-event:** Wrap up the storm with information regarding event followup (e.g., clean up, hauling, ice watch plans) and providing the required service verification documentation.

# POSTSEASON: TIE UP LOOSE ENDS AND LOOK AHEAD

The final piece of client communication is to conduct a postseason site visit and performance review as soon as possible after winter operations cease. Items that should be addressed:

- Any new snow-related damage that was not noted in the preseason walk-through and a timeline to have any issues resolved.
- An established end-of-season clean-up date and equipment and stake removal.
- Any open and honest feedback reviewing the season’s performance (on both sides). For example, were they satisfied with service? If not, what were the pain points and how can you resolve them? Did your team have communication issues or situations that prevented successful service? Iron these out now for better performance next season.

**Springtime is sales renewal season.** The postseason walkthrough is a great time to strike while the iron’s hot. Implement a standardized postseason review process with clients to determine opportunities to improve for next season. Review Level of Service (LOS) expectations



with clients to address root cause issues for complaints. During this process is ideally when the renewal should be presented for approval once any further improvements or punch list items have been identified and addressed.

Making it easy to sign up for next season’s snow services could be a valuable proposition to ease their future bottlenecks of budgeting and decision making. Now is also the time to share the 52-week timeline that shows why it benefits them to renew early and the risks if they wait until fall.



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