

# SNOW START UP

ISSUE #5: FOCUS ON OPERATIONS

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## IN SEASON CHECK UP

As winter progresses, it's important to keep an eye on the details that can get lost when operations are in full swing.

### CLIENT SERVICE

In the lead-up to any snow season, a ton of communication is happening. Don't go dark once the season begins.

Communicating with clients after every storm and asking them to rate your performance will ensure against the need for major midseason course corrections.

A disgruntled client is often the result of a lack of communication. It's understandable that you wouldn't want to interact with clients during the intensity of the snow event; but nothing is more

valuable than the feedback you receive from clients afterward. A customer feedback program can be as simple as administering a survey twice a year, or as in-depth as personal interviews. For most, using an electronic survey with up to 20 questions a few times a year can generate enough data and insight from which to implement positive changes.

### IMPLEMENTING A CUSTOMER FEEDBACK PROGRAM

**STEP 1** Determine what you want to improve, learn or a problem you wish to solve. Perhaps you have multiple items on your list. However many you have, get started and keep focused on your plan.

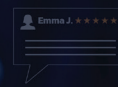
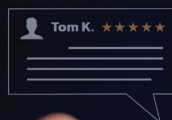
**STEP 2** Craft questions that will give you information and insights. Once you've identified the improvement or problem area, create a number of questions in which answers will provide you with information and insights on the issue(s). Tailor your survey to maximize responses from those who will receive it.

**STEP 3** Choose a survey generator to help with sending and responding (e.g., SurveyMonkey, Google Forms). These types of programs enable simple response collection and reporting on the results. You can also build survey templates that you can use as a base to create feedback surveys in the future.

**STEP 4** Send the survey. Make sure to test your survey before sending so that there are no errors or omissions.

**STEP 5** Review the survey findings and develop a game plan. Based on the data, feedback and insights received, you should be able to formulate an improvement plan. However, be aware that not all data and insights you receive will be concise, so plan on budgeting some time to reach out for more information.

**STEP 6** Implement the required changes. Knowledge of what can be done to improve means little if you don't take the time to make the changes. Although change is often difficult, without it, nothing happens.



## EQUIPMENT

**Once you're into the season, maintaining your equipment is key to being successful and efficient.**

Crews should be trained to report issues with equipment during and after each event. Priority should be given to these items as time allows between storms.

If you have offsite equipment, it's a good idea to have a manager or your mechanic check those pieces. Make sure that there are no blades with uneven wear, pinched hydraulic hoses, leaking fluids, or damaged moldboards or trip springs. It's also important to fire up those machines and move them around to get a good evaluation. This aids in keeping the machines from sitting too long when you're in between storms.



For equipment that comes back to the shop, it's much easier to get a visual check but it's still wise to move the plows, salters, sprayers, blowers, etc., to make sure they're in good operating condition. Washing your equipment and using a salt neutral-

izer is also a massive help in keeping your equipment in top shape.

As a snow professional, you understand the importance of quality products and equipment. You also know that downed equipment or lack of product in the middle of a snow event means loss of work and money. It is essential in the downtime to make sure all fittings are secure and that everything's properly greased and fully operational. It's always easier to fix plows and spreaders in the calm of the daytime when it's not snowing.

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## ROUTE EVALUATION

**You probably spent time during the preseason preparing routes for your team. But it's important to constantly evaluate them. Do you have the right equipment and team members on each route? Do your routes need to be reordered to better accommodate clients or increase efficiency?**



## BILLING

**Check with your accounts receivable team to ensure that invoicing is up to date.**

Failing to invoice customers in a timely and efficient manner can create cash flow problems.

You should also identify any customers who are late on or

haven't made payment and reach out. Don't wait until the end of the season. If the customer does not return phone calls and ignores emails and invoices, it may be necessary to cease service delivery and initiate the collections process.



## SITE VISITS

**Conducting site visits and hazard analyses are a must in the preseason; but midseason is a great time to get a fresh perspective, especially in the calm of a post-event visit.**

Maybe trees are hanging over a parking lot or sidewalk, which interferes with a crew during an

event. Take special note of possible areas where snow pile melting and potential refreeze could occur, keeping in mind that most slip and falls happen in the days following the actual event. Additionally, report back to your team any serious issues that might have occurred on site — especially any damage that might need to be reported to the client. It's a good idea to create a

post-event checklist so that anyone performing the inspection can easily engage in the process.

SIMA has a variety of courses and downloadable resources. Check them out at [my.sima.org](https://my.sima.org).

Visit [www.sima.org/startup](https://www.sima.org/startup) for Snow Start Up resources.



## TEAM

**Working in snow and ice management can take its toll on your team—whether it's battling storm after storm, or worrying when the snow doesn't fall at all.**

Constantly polling your team and asking them how they're doing throughout the winter will give you an insider's view of their mental and physical capacities.

It's wise to also invest time

on in-season training. Rather than taking the time to reiterate proper snow removal principles and address staff after every storm, many owners will wait until spring to address key in-season problems. The best time to course correct, or to celebrate quality workmanship, is right after a storm. You will never regret planning post-storm debriefs after every event, giving your team a chance to tackle performance related issues early and often.

## DOCUMENTATION PROCESSES

As an owner or manager, you can probably list the benefits of documentation quicker than you can snap a picture of a salted parking lot; but can your team do the same? Take the valuable time to constantly monitor your team's use of your documentation strategy and course correct as soon as you can.

### DEBRIEFING GIVES QUALITY FEEDBACK

There is significant value in a formal, consistent debrief process. The U.S. military uses a formal debrief for every mission to learn from each success and mistake. The process helps perpetuate knowledge sharing across teams and team members and can be invaluable for future planning.

**1 Timely and consistently scheduled.** Make sure to put the debrief on the calendar for a convenient time as close to event operations wrapping up as possible. This ensures that everyone can prepare effectively and remember clearly during the review. Do it every time regardless of the circumstances of the event—there is always something to learn. In the case of year end, make it an event, celebrating success and reviewing improvements for next year.

**2 Involve everyone.** Get as many people from all areas involved in the discussion as possible. Everyone has something to offer, and multiple brains in the discussion can pull apart a scenario more completely than one or two.

**3 Have an agenda and lessons.** This is partly "Meeting Rules 101," but it is especially important in a debrief. It will keep you focused on the task of learning from the event so the meeting doesn't just turn into a gripe session. Keep it simple but structured:

- What worked, what didn't?
- What and who was missed?
- How do we do better next time?

Make sure someone is responsible for taking good notes. Hold your operational planning, customer service and leadership teams accountable for reviewing the notes and amending the plan(s) going forward to avoid repeat issues and to ensure duplicated successes.



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