



Focus on HVAC Management

Chain Store Age spoke with Ron Prager, COO of Brinco, about how retailers can better manage one of their most critical assets: HVAC systems.

Q What are some of the most common mistakes retailers make when it comes to HVAC maintenance and repair?

The most common mistake we see retailers make is deferring or canceling preventive maintenance (PM) service in an effort to reduce expenses. We understand the need to reduce expenses, particularly in the current challenging retail environment. In certain circumstances that necessitates reducing or deferring PM spend, however wholesale cancellation of PM is not the way to go, especially if the equipment employs gas heating. Reduction of PM cost is best dealt with strategically, ie: rotating months of service based on geographic location and other factors. When a retailer simply turns off the PM switch, the result is typically increased expense and increased exposure to substantial liability.

The second most common mistake we see is attempting to commoditize a highly specialized and technical service solely via the RFP process. Customers should take into account the HVAC services are just that; a service not a commodity, with many variables including the quality of those services and the capability of the provider to stand behind the service provided.

Q What is the best way retailers can control HVAC costs?

Brinco is a single trade vendor within the HVAC / refrigeration discipline. Our offerings and expertise within this highly specialized technical discipline are vast and comprehensive. We maintain and

have replaced systems ranging from a single 2 ton unit to 500 ton chilled water systems. We have worked, and continue to work, with retailers to develop prototypical designs and lease exhibits, and multi-year proactive replacement programs. We provide preventive maintenance programs designed to meet the retailer's specific needs and excel at performing high quality demand repair work quickly and at reasonable cost.

Q How does Brinco set itself apart from other HVAC service companies?

Brinco's model is transparent. Our clients appreciate our integrity, our superior technical capability and expertise, and our dedication to building a comprehensive long range cost effective program. We build long-term relationships with retailers who value what we bring to the table, and strive to deliver maximum value for each dollar spent on their HVAC systems.

Q What criteria should retailers use in evaluating an HVAC service contractor?

First on our list would be integrity and reputation. HVAC is far too complex a discipline to simply use metrics to make judgements. Second is the total cost of repair and maintenance per square foot, or per ton of installed equipment excluding replacement costs. These are numbers that cannot be manipulated, although their accuracy increases with each year a contractor continues servicing the same equipment.

Third would be the ability of the con-

tractor to solve for root cause on ongoing issues, as this is a good measure of the provider's overall ability.

Q If you had one piece of advice to give regarding the upkeep of HVAC equipment what would it be?

We cannot overstate the importance of maintaining accurate asset lists with all pertinent equipment information as well as accurate service histories. In order to manage repair and maintenance of HVAC systems, the retailer needs to be able to forecast future requirements. These requirements will be based to a large degree on current equipment age and condition as well as historical data.

Q How do you think HVAC equipment will evolve during the next five years?

Over the past 20 years, we have seen HVAC equipment become increasingly complex at an exponential rate. We believe that this trend will continue over the next five years. The increasing complexity of the equipment is being driven by the application of EMS systems, internal microprocessor based controls, and code required energy savings. Low leakage economizers with self-diagnostics, variable air flow on constant volume equipment, and variable flow refrigerant systems will become increasingly prevalent. We believe that systems will have better self-diagnostics, and that we will soon see equipment that can communicate faults directly, and via wireless communication, to the technician onsite or remotely offsite in far greater detail than has been available in the past.