

# How to Choose Your Winter Services Provider

Finding the right winter services provider to meet your company's needs can be challenging. Whether you are looking for a contractor to plow your driveway, a five hundred car parking lot, or something in between, there are a number of questions you should consider.

## ***What do I need my service provider to do?***

The lot needs to be plowed. Will I need some form of de-icer applied? Does my current contractor have the equipment to handle big storms or a blizzard? Will I need to have the snow trucked off site? These questions should be answered before you start looking for a contractor to do the job.

## ***Is my current level of service sufficient?***

Does my present service provider have the financial strength to manage during slow economic cycles? Do they maintain their snow removal equipment? Can they provide the necessary personnel to service my property and keep it up to standard? Can they deal with a blizzard or major equipment failure? Is my existing level of service protecting me from potential litigation due to slip and fall accidents? If that is the case then there may be no need to change. As long as your relationship with your service provider is mutually beneficial then it may be in your best interest to stay with them.

## ***Insurance?***

This is a non-negotiable item. If the provider does not have the proper insurance coverage, they should not work for you. You have to consider the potential liability if anything happens on your property and your service provider is not carrying the right level of insurance. Always ask to see proof of insurance coverage. Any real professional service provider will be willing to make this available.

## ***Does the service provider have qualified references?***

Make sure references quoted have similar needs to your own. Excellent service for a strip mall might not qualify someone to deal with a million square foot parking lot which must be up and running around the clock.

## ***What about an estimate?***

Ask a service provider for an estimate. Make sure they visit the site before submitting the estimate. A site visit will determine the best way to approach the job and will provide a first hand look at any potential trouble areas. Without a site visit, the provider will be plowing blind and may cause unnecessary damage to areas that should have been mapped out prior to a blade touching surface.

## ***Has the service provider been in business long?***

Look for a provider that has experience and stays up to date on equipment, products, and technology. Do they belong to any professional organizations? Ask if they are affiliated with the professional trade association like the Snow and Ice Management Association. This is an indication that the provider is trying to maintain as high level of excellence as possible and attempting to stay in tune with industry innovations.

## ***Does the service provider present a contract?***

The contract should clearly define the level of service to be provided, including the pricing of services as well as payment terms. Any additional services should also be quoted, such as piling, stacking or hauling snow away.

## ***Are the prices quoted clear and concise?***

Pricing should be the last area for comparing potential service providers. However, for the better or worse, price is too often the number one factor used in awarding a contract. Do you really want to know how much per hour it will cost you to have the job done properly? Not likely, as this pricing would be different depending on the quality and kinds of equipment that each service provider will use. What you should be interested in is how much it will cost to do the job right while meeting your specific needs.



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## ***The five ways a service provider prices service:***

### **1. By the Hour/ By the Truck**

Inexperienced providers most often use this type of pricing. It is a favorite for large national accounts because it makes the bidding process easy. No expertise required. While most providers are honest, some are unscrupulous and add unwanted costs to a job to increase profit. This happens when a client is off site or during the night when the work is being completed. They always get caught which only makes it more difficult for the true professional to create a long lasting relationship with the client.

### **2. By the Push**

“Per Push” pricing takes time and expert figuring. The provider has to know what their equipment capabilities are in order to best price the job. It must be noted that all responsible contractors include a clause in their contracts that allow for additional charges in the event that the snow accumulation exceeds a certain total. If a provider has to plow a certain site more than once during the storm, they have to charge for each visit.

### **3. By the Season (with a Maximum Occurrence or Inch Clause)**

This pricing is usually combined with other services, such as grounds and landscape maintenance or sweeping the parking lot. It typically includes at least a three-year contract. This pricing is based on the average number of snowfalls in a given season. A three-year contract allows both the provider and the client to benefit from the law of averages. With this type of pricing, the client will typically be able to budget expense more easily.

### **4. By the Inch**

This pricing is usually set aside for large accounts that are located in the areas of the country where snowfall totals vary from “0” inches to five feet the next year. Airports, schools, and very large properties are examples of where “by the inch” contracts are usually used.

Nearly all providers’ pricing are usually “by the hour/by the truck,” “by the push” or “by the season”. Any combination of these approaches can be used by the provider for unexpected storms.

### **5. Limited Seasonal**

This type of pricing includes a set number of plows for a set price. In this situation, the clients pays the contracted price for any number of plows up to and including the the number set forth in the contract. If the seasonal snowfall requires additional plowing above and beyond the number in the contract, the client then pays a “per push” price for each time a plow is needed.

## **Professional service providers must:**

- Have the proper insurance as well as the financial stability to maintain and grow their business.
- Be totally dedicated to service, safety and quality.
- Keep their equipment running and stay up to date on products to improve service.
- Be associated with trade associates that keep them in tune with their industry.

***The lowest bid isn't always the best bid.***

***Choose a professional that will work with you, get the job done safely, be on time, and be within budget!***



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