

KNOW BEFORE YOU BUY

Partner with your vendors to be successful when purchasing technological advancements



By MICHAEL WAGNER, CSP, ASM

Advanced technologies are hitting the snow and ice management market at a rapid pace, and it can become an overwhelming challenge to know which might be right for your operation.

Let's examine why it is incredibly vital to partner with vendors and suppliers in determining the best solutions, and why it is so important for them to stand by their products and services so all interested stakeholders are successful.

Some of the biggest mistakes an organization can make in selecting a new tech solution are not researching the available solutions, not fully understanding their operational objectives, and not testing multiple options before clicking the "BUY" button!

It is vital that business leaders consider the key points in this article to arrive at a solution that fits their

individual needs. There is definitely no "out of the box" solution. For instance, a snow and ice company that has various regions throughout the country will expect a vastly different solution and onboarding process than a local 10-employee business.

Products and services

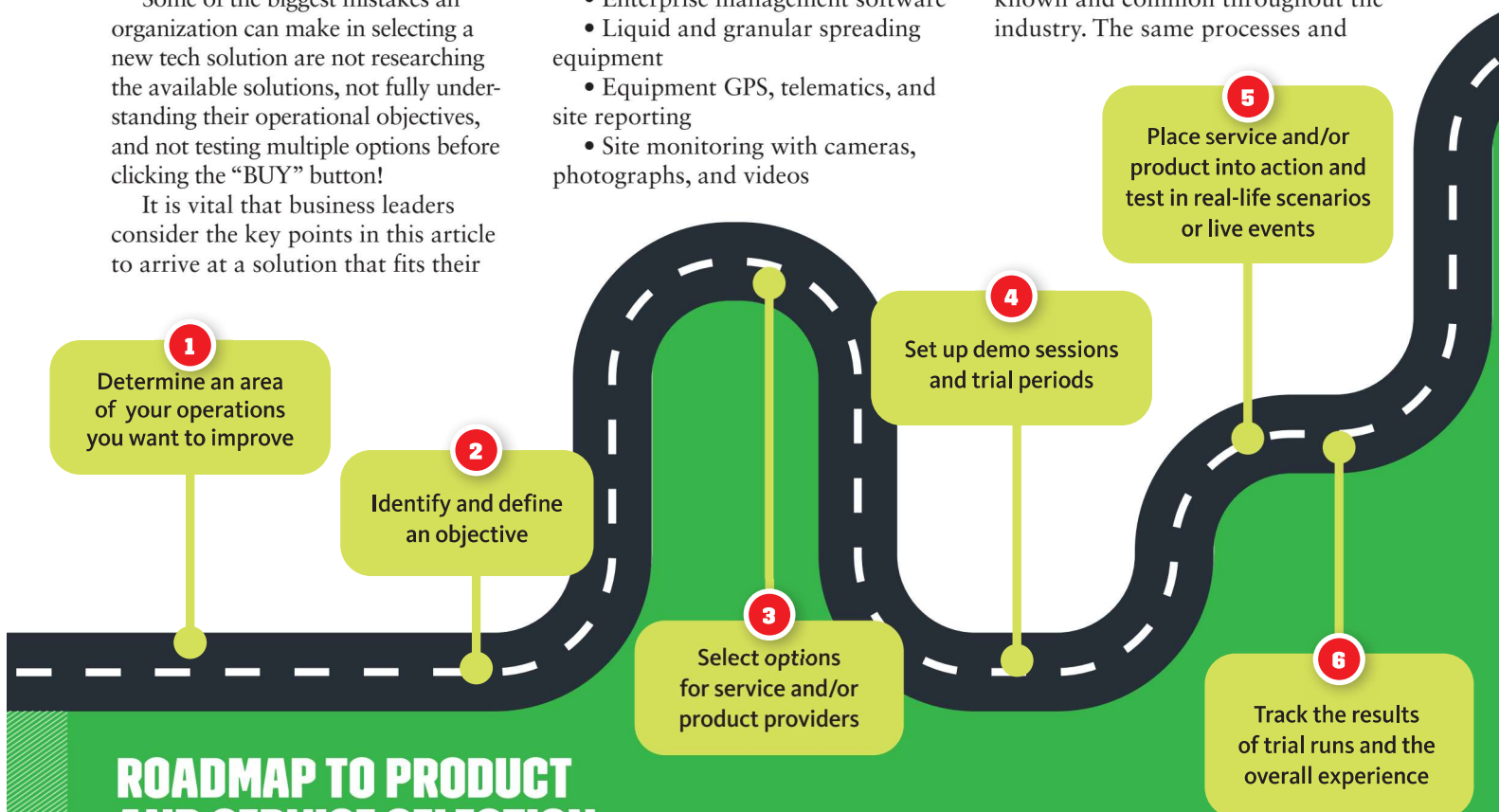
There are many advances in product and service solutions for the snow and ice industry. Here are just some of the high-tech options you might consider utilizing in your operation:

- Weather tracking, reporting, and forecasting
- Mobile and digital timekeeping and data retention
- Enterprise management software
- Liquid and granular spreading equipment
- Equipment GPS, telematics, and site reporting
- Site monitoring with cameras, photographs, and videos

It's important to consider the reasons you might want to take advantage of some of these tools. Is it to stay competitive in the market, meet client and site expectations, improve your internal processes, or maybe a combination? There are so many technologies to consider, but knowing what you are trying to accomplish is the first step!

Outlining objectives

When you are trying to decide how to select options for potential improvements, you must begin with an objective. We're going to use the example of weather forecasting and reporting, since this is well known and common throughout the industry. The same processes and



principles outlined can be applied to any technological change.

Let's say our objective is to be more proactive in our deicing operations and response times. Start to think about your current operations and focus on key data such as:

- How much time does it take us to prepare equipment and crews for deicing operations 24 hours prior to snowfall?
- How many pieces of equipment do we prepare?
- How many employees do we have to prepare?
- How many sites do we service?
- What services will be performed?

These are some of the most important factors to consider as you work to better understand the time it takes to prepare for service and still achieve your onsite service at 24 hours prior to a storm. Do you require 12, 24 or 36 hours to prepare? Only you will be able to determine these thresholds and what you require.

Let's say you require 24-hour notice to prepare and be on-site performing services 24 hours before a winter event. This indicates that you need reliable weather forecasting at least 48 hours before a storm. While you are receiving weather data and reports, make sure you keep a separate document or spreadsheet with notes on how well you performed given the weather forecast and event details, as well as tracking the accuracy of the forecasts.

The second phase would be meeting your objective of response time for the event. This is where you will have to do a little homework and know how much time it takes for your personnel to prepare for different weather events, knowing the quantity of sites, equipment needed, and work to be performed. Once you come up with a total number of hours or days it takes to prepare everything for an event, you then can determine how many hours or days ahead of time you are looking for accurate forecasting. As mentioned above, make sure you compare weather data, forecasting, your response efforts, and overall achievements, and determine which service and product provides you with the most accurate forecasting and data to achieve your preparation and service goals.

Vendor selection

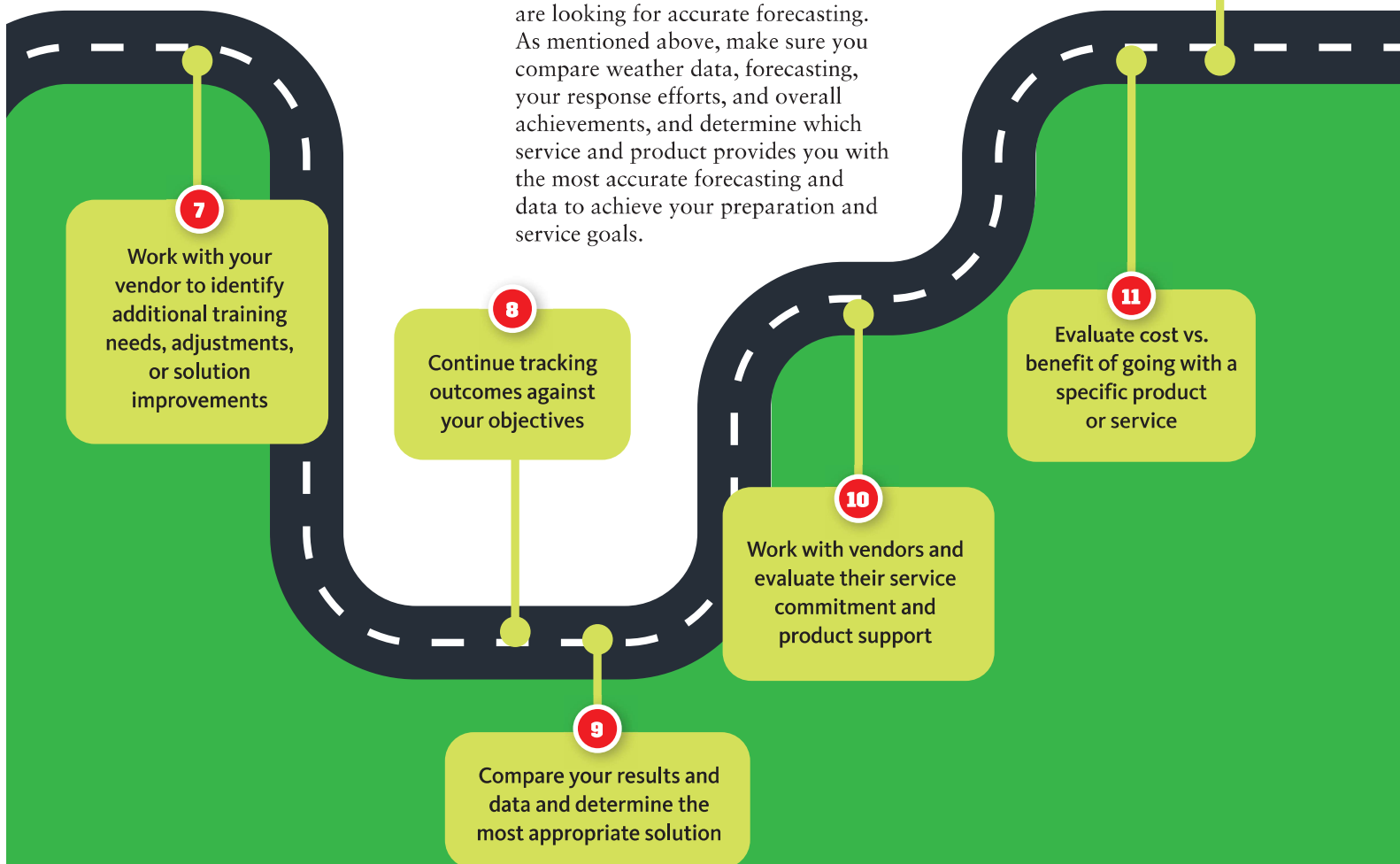
This may be the most pivotal part of selecting new technologies. When selecting a new product or service, it is important for any organization to identify a few potential solutions, and to demo, test or run short trial periods before they make their final selection.

Many vendors allow and support these opportunities as it helps them acquire the sale, as well as showcase their product and really let the user gain the full experience before making a commitment.

In selecting a vendor and understanding which one stands out compared to the others, ask yourself these questions:

- What are our expectations through the onboarding process?

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- How quickly do we expect answers and resolutions on issues?
- What time commitment and team involvement do we expect from the training? (How often, who is involved, are we training in large or small groups and then re-training others)
- Do they like receiving input from users?
- Do they have an eye on the future and have a plan for their service to evolve with the industry?
- How well do they align their service with industry norms and expectations?
- Do they set themselves apart from the competition with their service or product?
- Is pricing reasonable in helping you achieve your financial goals?
- How accurate is the reporting and data services?
- How long do they store weather and storm data?

The goal in the vendor selection process is to gather information and compare your findings. Beyond all the good things about the product, get granular and gather information from your team on what works and what doesn't.

You may have two, three or even four services offering you relatively similar products. What you're really trying to determine is which one, and only one, is the standout with the greatest potential to help you achieve your objectives and goals. Determine who will be your partner in business!

Continuous success

So much of successful implementation of new technologies in the workplace depends on the support you have from your vendors and the relationship you have built with them. This should be a partnership, since the ultimate measure of success is when consumers are pleased because these

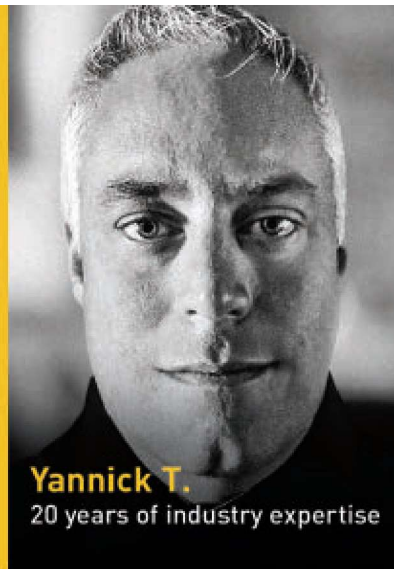
products and services have allowed them to achieve their goals.

Even if the integration is challenging at times, remember that change is tough at any stage of business, since people have become accustomed to performing tasks in certain ways. When personnel become comfortable, they feel more effective and more confident in their work. Change brings uncertainty, so it is the job of operations supervisors, managers and executives to press forward on their objectives while participating with their employees in managing those obstacles and building on the small wins whenever possible. **SB**

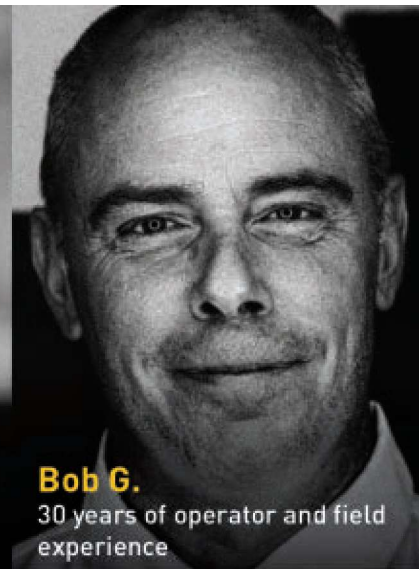
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