

My Take: Buying Into The Reliability Proposition

Written by Jane Alexander, Editor-In-Chief
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Come summertime, I'm into buying lots of casual shoes and sandals. Cool. Cute. Cheap. They just need to survive a few weeks of backyard barbecues, farmers' markets, beach picnics, kids' birthday parties and the like.

I purchase with the expectation that I'll probably be caught in more than a few rainstorms and plenty of sand, mud and unidentifiable child/pet-generated gunk before the season ends. By Labor Day, the shoddily made uppers of my once feisty-looking summer footwear are usually separating from their low-quality plastic soles. I throw 'em away.

My high-heeled pumps are another matter entirely. Chic. Classic. Not Cheap. They do the proverbial "heavy lifting" for me (in more ways than one). I'll gladly pay extra for higher quality. My pumps take me many places—*business-related and otherwise*. They have to look fine, feel great and be ready to roll whenever I am, all year-round. I've learned to purchase recognized brands that offer superior style and fit and a reasonable expectation of long service life. Beyond the visual impact and comfort I demand, I guess I buy based on a reliability proposition: I can't afford for my pumps to fail when I need them.

Many of you say the same thing—*but you're not talking about shoes*. Your "pump" concerns actually turned into a topic of conversation during a lovely, lively party hosted by ITT at the recent American Water Works Association (AWWA) Conference. There, a major equipment distributor asked me if Maintenance Technology could help him in "quantifying reliability" for his customers—
reliability being at the top of their minds these days. I had to smile, not because I know that's exactly what most of you are doing every day, but because I realized pigs had finally flown! Let me explain...

For several years, suppliers of critical process equipment, led by some great minds in the pump industry, have worked tirelessly to transform the marketplace from one where end-users buy based on first cost, into one of buying based on life-cycle costs (LCC). "When pigs fly," many thought—*the day when pump users would "quantify life-cycle costs" would never come*. They were incorrect.

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Rising energy costs have played a significant role in proving the naysayers wrong. As you'll recall from the LCC pie chart, energy and maintenance (i.e., reliability) are the two big costs in the life of a pumping system, dwarfing initial purchase cost. As a result, a growing number of end-users are now making purchases that have higher initial costs, based on a calculated life-cycle savings in energy. (It's an easy case to make. Simply dissect the enormous power bills your company is no doubt paying.) According to Mr. Pump Distributor, though, when it comes to proving the actual value of reliability, purchasing departments aren't convinced: "The algorithm is harder to follow." (Does that mean the "efficient equipment is more reliable" message really hasn't stuck?)

If you help keep any type of critical equipment up and running in a facility, you may want to become more involved with the suppliers of said equipment—well before it's purchased and installed. Your suppliers are capable of providing products that are more reliable than ever. In turn, you could be more qualified than anyone else in your end-user organization to understand and quantify the value of that reliability. Perhaps you should be working together to deliver a truly compelling message to others. **MT**



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