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In the last 25 years, the service market has transformed substantially. Service strategies once centered on the most basic elements: time and material, product replacement and service agreements. While many customers understood the value in having a strong business partner to serve their needs, the purchasing trend often took a commoditized view of the marketplace. The technology was similar, skills to provide services were somewhat homogenous from one company to the next and there weren't many service providers or customers that really understood the value of service to both sides of the relationship.

Today, those primary services are still a vital component required to support operations, and they're still supported in most service organizations' portfolios. However, as markets and economies evolve, so have customers' needs and expectations. To meet this challenge, we must recognize that our customers now demand—*and deserve*—a more holistic approach that centers on mutual business goals throughout a facility's complete lifecycle.

Think about a negative service experience you've had recently—*personally or professionally.* When you analyze the experiences that did not meet your expectations, you'll likely recall that one or more components of the whole process either did not receive enough attention or were disregarded altogether.

Assuming the service provider has a defined portfolio, process and culture in place, a negative experience generally stems from two common issues.

On many occasions, the poor experience can be traced to a service company placing too much emphasis on its own mission before getting to know you, your company, your operation, your performance criteria and your strategic vision for the lifecycle of your facility. This isn't to say the service provider's goals and objectives aren't important—*but they should align with the results of their customers to achieve mutually sustainable benefits.*

In other instances, your business could be overly generalized based upon the industry market in which you reside. Rather than look at each customer's specific needs, many service providers tend to view a market as a single entity, where all customers have the same requirements and opportunities and can, therefore, be offered a "cookie-cutter" solution. While consideration and

expertise of the market as a whole are essential ingredients, providing valuable context for solution generation, they're not the only aspects that matter. A good service provider has the in-depth market experience and knowledge to benchmark a company's operation, but is also aware that nuances exist from customer to customer—*even within the same market*—and that a "one-size-fits-all" approach is inappropriate and, often, ineffective.

To avoid these common roadblocks, service providers need to develop better customer relationships through an understanding of key goals and objectives, based on answers to questions such as: What are your most important key performance indicators (KPIs)? What are your short- and long-term strategies, and how can a service partner help you achieve your goals? How can we assist you in adapting to changes in the market, the economy or from regulatory agencies? Awareness of these and other specific needs enables high-impact customer interactions leading to value-added service partnerships that allow both businesses to thrive.

Yes, the landscape is changing to holistic, with lifecycle service becoming the norm. If we want to stay ahead of the curve, we must embrace service. **MT**

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