

Choosing an Air System Vendor – Fabrication



What questions should you ask in order to assess whether a trim or dust collection system vendor can get the parts needed for your system, now and in the future?

This week, the focus is on how a prospective vendor sources the parts and components needed to assemble and service an air-conveyed scrap collection system. If you've never purchased a system before, you may not realize that some of the vendor proposals you'll be considering will be from "integrators," companies that manufacture few or none of their own components. Instead, an integrator designs a system, purchases all the components from other companies, and then coordinates the installation process.

Working with an integrator may seem like a good idea for a value-conscious buyer because their bids often seem very competitive. However, there are risks. Asking the following questions of each vendor candidate will help you determine whether you're willing to accept those risks.

1. For the initial system installation, what parts and components will the vendor be manufacturing in house? What parts and components will the vendor be sourcing from other companies?
2. What manufacturing/fabrication capabilities does the vendor have on site? Include only those capabilities performed by employees of the vendor's firm, not independent contractors or suppliers.
3. Does the vendor have the ability to repair parts and components? Which repairs are performed in-house versus those sent to a third-party?
4. What is the turnaround time on replacement parts in the event of a system breakdown?
5. If replacement parts and components are provided by a third party, how many suppliers do you have? What is the typical turnaround time?

Without answers to these questions, you could easily purchase a system from a company that presents itself as a full-service air system vendor—but is actually an integrator with no-in house manufacturing capability. But you won't know this until something breaks down, you need parts in a hurry, and you find out that you can't get them. The money you thought you saved by choosing the lowest bidder ends up is lost—to down time, missed ship dates and angry customers.

If you want to maximize system uptime, it's always a good idea to work with a company with in-house manufacturing capability. At G.F. Puhl, we have a 51,000 sq.-ft. fabrication shop as well as skilled CAD draftsmen and degreed design engineers. This investment in equipment and talent allows us to control the quality of parts and components as well as the delivery schedule. We can react faster if there is a problem.

Even full-service pneumatically-conveyed air system vendors farm out some work and G.F. Puhl is no exception. A small number of specialized fabrication tasks—lathe work, for example—are performed by third party vendors, but we rely on multiple providers to insure consistent supply. Many of our competitors are smaller companies that lack these resources.

If you already own a trim collection system and you find that your scrap system vendor backs away when problems happen, odds are good that you're working with a vendor that doesn't have the in-house resources to solve your problems. At the mercy of subcontractors' schedules and costs, these vendors may be less than responsive when you need them most.

Want help assessing whether a prospective vendor's manufacturing horsepower is right for you? Give G.F. Puhl a call at 615.230.9500 or email us at sales@gfpuhl.com.