

Tips for Buying Equipment

Operating a large service business, we have received our share of equipment that didn't work. Whether by design, poor representation or just flat out the wrong machine, we have been on your side of the purchasing fence. When we need equipment for our shop, we look at things differently than we did a few years ago. I am going to offer suggestions, which may ultimately help in your blasting system purchase.

A little History

When I started about 10 years ago I was going to be soda blasting cars. Although I had been thrown the normal lines and sales pitches; tons of applications, endless work, \$150.00 per hour, I didn't really know what I was doing. Because of that, I fell on my sword as a sodablaster. I told the whole world, "I am not a sand blaster, I am a soda blaster". That was great; however I was turning away a lot of work. Or even worse, I was trying to do work with soda, when it was obviously the wrong choice.

Over the next few years while growing my service business, I started to manufacture my own equipment. At first I had someone else building the machines, which has evolved into us making our own equipment. Also during this time, I started to experiment with other medias. I took my sodablaster and found companies that either already had media that would run in my machine, or I had it made to my specs. So I have now turned my sodablaster into a multi-media blaster. This is where I learned that the worst kind of blaster is a guy with no options. Sandblast guys do it all the time, blast cars with sand and warp them. Unfortunately, there are sodablaster guys doing the same thing. They may not be warping cars, however they are using soda where it is not the correct choice.

The largest blast project we finished this year involved 2.5 trucks of blast media, not one bag of soda was used. Kind of odd since I make sodablasters, however

soda was not the right choice for this project. Do not get me wrong, when soda is the correct media, it is great. The reality is, about 25% of my blasting is with soda that means I would be leaving \$100,000's of blasting on the table if I had no options.

Know your blasting needs.

Whether you are looking at adding blasting to your business, or considering starting a blasting business, here are some things to consider.

1. Am I only going to do sodablasting?

If the answer is yes, there are about 4 or 5 companies that make good equipment. I would carefully consider all of them. If you would like to do other types of blasting then the list gets cut in half.

2. Am I going to be mobile?

If mobile blasting is in your plan then you need to consider a few things about the blasting equipment you are buying. How heavy is the equipment? This is very important, our business is about 95% mobile. We pull our machines off of our trailers most of the time. We very rarely leave the equipment on the trailer. So a heavy machine or a machine that is awkward to remove from your trailer might not be a good choice. An example is when we log home blast. The terrain around log homes is generally not flat. If your machine is permanently bolted to your trailer you will never be able to get around the house. If you can move the equipment, but it's heavy as a tank, then you run the risk of not being able to move the machine. If the machine you purchase is really heavy, let's say 250 pounds, and you load 100 pounds of media in it, then you are toting 350 pounds of machine. That is way too heavy, and we have seen many go toppling down the hill. This is a very small example; however it can be applied to many applications. The bottom line here is if you plan on moving the machine around, consider weight. If it's going in the corner of your shop and will never be moved then buy any size.

3. What kind of compressor should I buy?

When talking to the sodablast guys it seems that there are two compressors that seem to be popular. The airman 185 is one choice and the Sullivan-Palatek 210 is another. We sell both, so our customers have a choice. This is where it is important to know your needs.

The Sullivan has a 150 PSI option that will allow you to blast at higher pressures, or possibly work farther away from your air source. It also consumes about 1.5 gallons per hour more fuel. So if you are going to use the higher pressure 25 hours per year, is it worth burning the extra fuel for the other 755 hours? **1.5 gallon X \$2.50 per gallon X 755 hours=\$2831.25 in fuel.** If you multiply this by 4 years then you are spending over 10 grand more on fuel. This is based on working 15 hours per week to start. You can multiply that times how many hours you want to work in a week. Work every day and you are saving over 7 grand a year on fuel. You can see that the savings in fuel can pay for your complete blast system over time. You need to decide which is more important, the extra pressure, or the fuel savings. Remember, most sodablasters run #5 nozzles which flow 140 CFM, either compressor will flow this requirement. On the other side, if you run a business cleaning cooling towers on the top of buildings, I would take the bigger air. If you are always blasting 40 stories high, you will need the extra air. We have a high pressure 375 in our own shop, and I think we only cranked it up to 150 PSI, 3 or 4 times in 5 years.

I will be adding additional items as they come up through my discussions with my employees and customers. If you have questions not covered here, please feel free to email or call me anytime.

Regards,

Mark Brown
President
Surfacetek, Inc