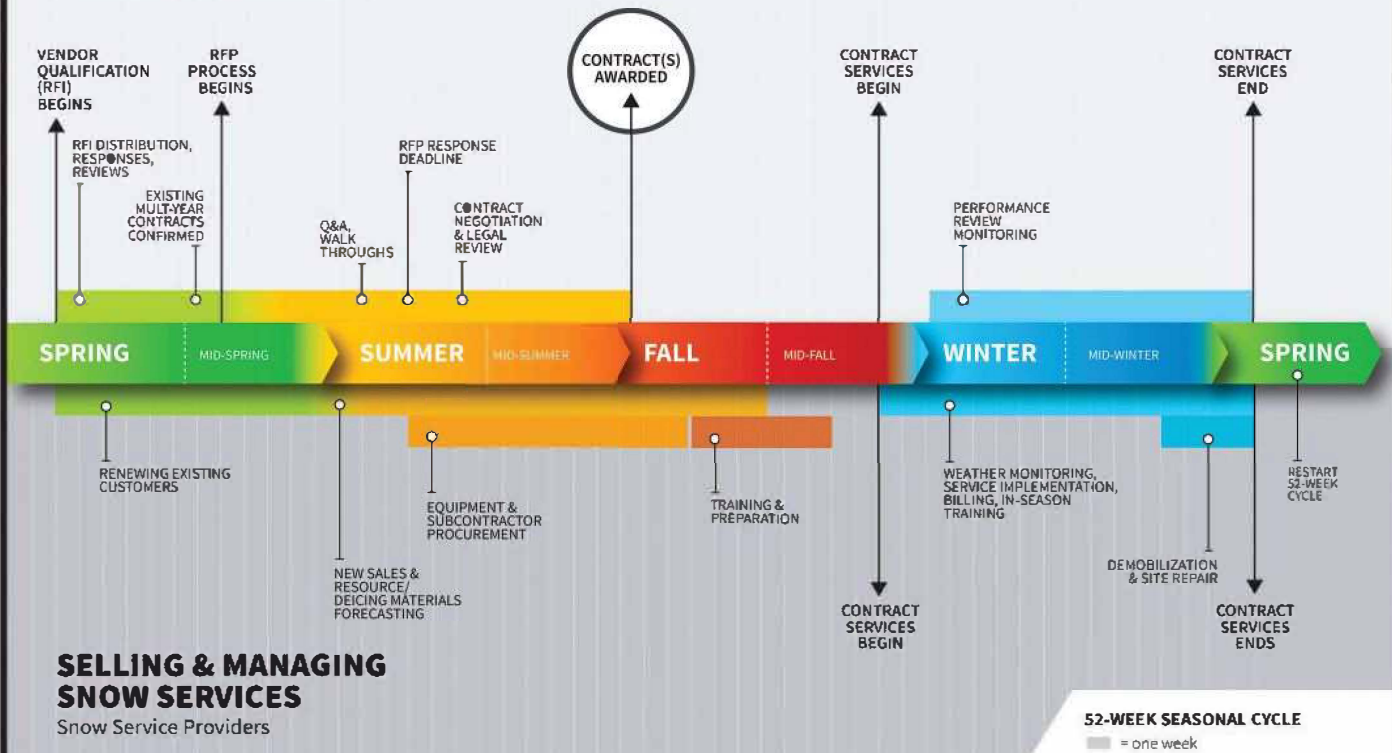


BUYING SNOW SERVICES

Facilities/Property Management



SELLING & MANAGING SNOW SERVICES

Snow Service Providers

52-WEEK SEASONAL CYCLE

■ = one week

Ready Or Not?

The 52-week snow management planning timeline.

By Phill Sexton

Believe it or not, if you haven't already put five months of planning into this year's upcoming Winter snow work, then you're already running late.

Success for any Winter management business ideally requires a 52-week focus and commitment to planning and implementing standards of practice. Essentially, this means the end of any current snow season should be viewed as the beginning of a new one.

The snow and ice management industry can—and should—organize like the retail industry which plans for the upcoming Christmas holiday shopping season the day after Christmas. Given today's economic environment and supply chain challenges, it's now important to plan even earlier than the original standard to ensure you have enough supplies and equipment on hand. Practicing standardized planning enables standardized success.

The Calendar

There are various criteria to consider as a framework for your sales and operational calendar. The timeline from the Snow & Ice Management Association (SIMA), seen above, will help guide you through the planning process. When you view snow work as a four-season business, each season has its own unique set of tasks to be accomplished. Further, each season has a corresponding series of questions—and others you can add. Answering them can help you determine seasonal timing, philosophies, and constraints.

Philosophy. Thinking about your plan requires that you first buy in philosophically to being "forward thinking." Thinking two seasons ahead and two years ahead. There are many aspects of the business to focus on in 6-, 9-, 12-, 18-, and 24-month increments. Some of those focus times are to plan for the next winter season. The other 18- to

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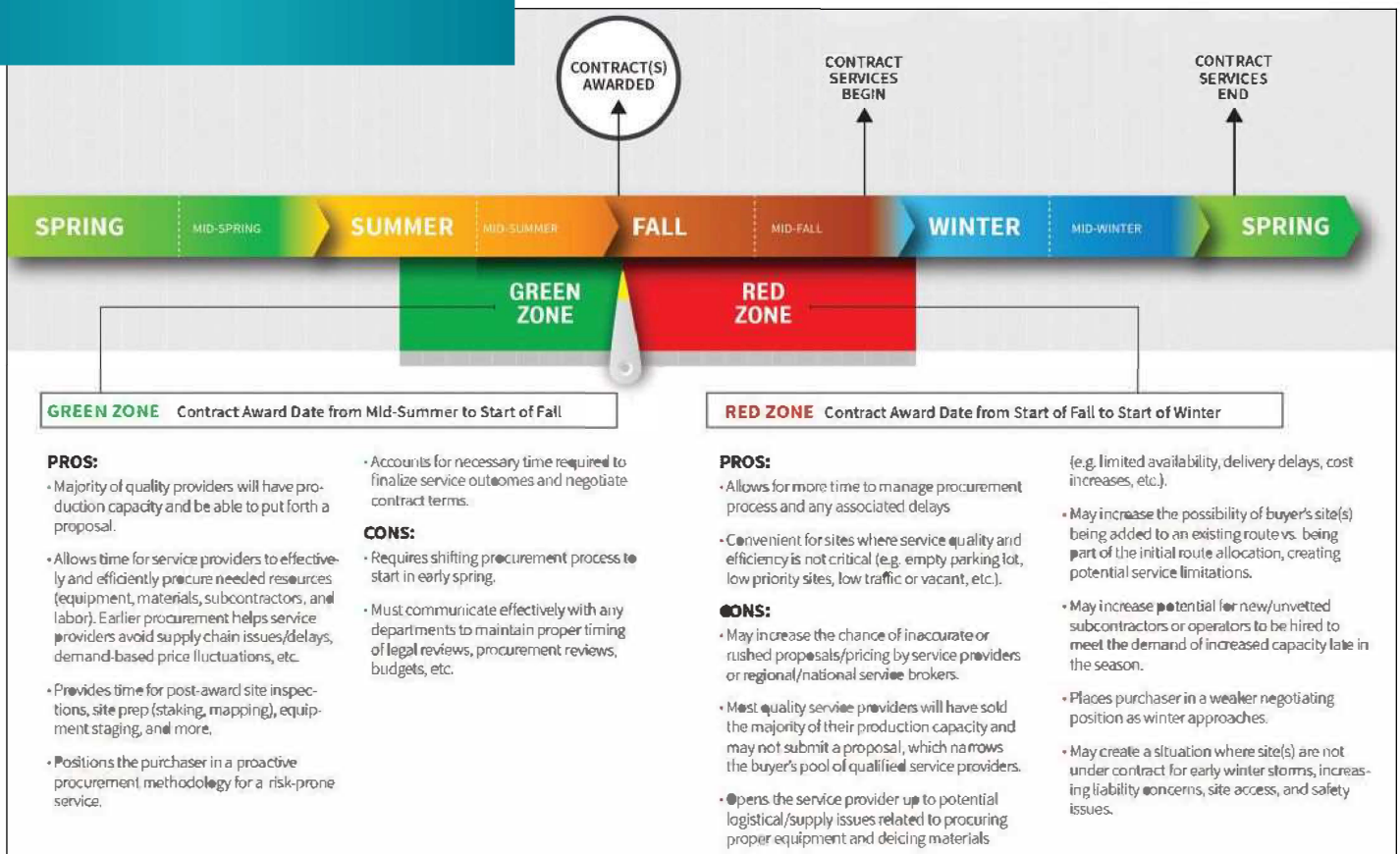
24-month timeframes are for you to focus on planning how and when to grow the business.

Winter. Winter, while actively engaged, is when you undertake specific pre-storm and post-storm reviews. Unsure what a review should consist of? See the graphic for an outline of how to organize and frame the issues, examples, and actions. Primary responsibilities include weather monitoring, service implementation, billing, in-season training, and performance monitoring.

Winter questions to consider include:

- When does the snow season begin?
- When does snow service begin?
- What does snow service include?
- What challenges and constraints have you experienced? ... and NEVER want to repeat.

Spring. Spring is for post-season review. At this time, the active season has wound down and contract services have ended, allowing more time for assessment, while experiences are nevertheless still fresh in everyone's minds. Late Winter's



demobilization and site repair is ending, giving way to: vendor RFIs, responses and assessments; an opportunity to renew existing customers (more on this later); confirm multi-year contracts; and begin RFPs. In Spring, questions to answer include:

- What challenges or constraints are your customers most focused on?
- What challenges or constraints are you and your business most focused on?
- When do your customers finalize budgets?
- When do you finalize budgets? Do you budget?
- What other things should we focus on during Spring?

Summer & Fall. Summer and Fall are all about pre-season review. Tasks to accomplish include; attending to de-icing materials forecasting; performing walkthroughs; submitting RFPs; procuring equipment; and securing subcontractors. Early Fall should entail time for training and preparation.

Questions to cover with your clients include:

- When is sales season?
- When do property owners want to 'buy' snow services? When should they?
- Why would customers purchase our service at a 'different time'?
- Also ask: When is 'renewal season'?

Answer: At the end of the current season.

Contract Awards

New contracts require a standardized start and end date. It's the responsibility of the client(s) to decide the amount of time that is needed to prepare for snow management in their respective geographic market(s). When evaluating new contract opportunities that provide less than 60 working days preparation time, it's crucial to consider if you can realistically prepare to meet that client's level of service (LOS) requirements. This requires educating the client on the amount of time it takes to procure the proper capacity of people, equipment, and materials. Given this year's current economic environment and supply chain challenges, the timeline for purchasing or renting equipment (a new vehicle, for example) could require an additional three to six months optimistically.

As to renewal contracts, the timing of awards throughout the industry is typically done from as little as a couple of weeks before the upcoming season or, the best-case scenario, a few months before the upcoming season. Rather than this haphazard timing, we should consider implementing a standard renewal timeline. It would consist of a standardized post-season review process with clients to determine opportunities to improve

next season. During this process, after any punch list items have been identified and addressed, is ideally when the renewal contract could be presented for approval.

Standardizing Success

Standardizing your sales and operational planning using a 52-week calendarized system and philosophy is sure to help you further optimize your level of preparedness and profitability. Educate your customers and your operational teams as to the importance of the timing as it relates to their own best interests. Staying disciplined to the timeline(s) you set for yourself, and your teams, is what will guarantee success. ■



Sexton is the founder & managing director for WIT Advisers and industry adviser to SIMA. WIT Advisers administers the Sustainable Winter Management (SWiM®) system and certifications. Sexton is a professor (adjunct) at the Center of Agriculture and Natural Resources of the State University of New York (SUNY) at Cobleskill. He holds degrees in agriculture, horticulture, and business economics from the State University of NY and a master's degree in Sustainability from Harvard University, where he focused his studies on corporate innovation & sustainability and researching salt use by the winter management industry.