

Fast and Flexible

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Today's rental resources aim to meet contractors' needs with convenient access to equipment and supplies.



The Cat Rental Store bills itself as a "one-stop shop" for contractors.

A variety of factors figure into every contractor's decision of how to source equipment, whether that be rental or purchase. Contractors must determine which mechanism is the best option from a financial perspective, according to Chris Gustafson, division manager for the Cat Rental Store. Today, renting equipment is becoming an increasingly popular option for many contractors. "In the last 10 years, the Cat dealers have grown their rental businesses substantially ... and we envision the industry will continue to grow," Gustafson says, citing the growth's common denominator as being customers who are "looking for opportunities to increase the utilization of their assets."

"We have noticed that customers are renting equipment more frequently," says Michael Tracy, senior director of marketing and e-business for Hertz Equipment Rental Corporation (HERC). "It just makes sense to rent, rather than having to commit significant sums of capital to purchase equipment, have a yard large enough to store it, mechanics on hand to service it, delivery vehicles available to move it, and lastly, a source to sell it for a reasonable price." He adds, "Inevitably, there is always equipment that is under-utilized and costing money as it sits in the yard. Renting allows customers to use the equipment when they need it and return it when they don't. This keeps contractors from having to worry about all the ancillary issues."

As the renting business grows, rental centers are going all-out to attract customers. Contractors will fare well to shop for a rental house that offers the right products, program and approach for their business.

Service with a Smile



Volvo Rents has 70 franchise stores in North America.

Above all, rental houses aim to be known for providing exceptional customer service to contractors. According to Nick Mavrick, vice president of global strategy and marketing for Volvo Rents, the best features of Volvo Rents are the flexibility and customer service it provides. "We aim to be perceived as the friendliest rental store in any town," he says. Volvo Rents has 70 stores in North America and 62 in Europe. Because each store is an individual franchise, Mavrick says, "the local owner is the interface to the

customer, and we can be more flexible with customers." He adds, "And contractors want that [flexibility]--especially contractors who rent often. The last thing they want to hear is, 'If we make an exception for you, we'll have to make an exception for everyone.'" Instead, the Volvo Rents approach to clients is: "If you have a problem, we'll take care of it without red tape getting in the way." Mavrick says this prevents customers from having to slow down their decision-making process and turns them into "raving fans."

In contrast to this model, United Rentals (UR) does not franchise dealers. Its more than 760 locations in North America are all corporate-owned. Steve Nadelman, senior vice president of field operations and corporate real estate for UR, notes that the company believes this model is effective for its clients because "it allows us to control the type of equipment that goes into each location and gives us an integrated network to provide the same equipment and service from one end of the country to the other." This consistent quality is especially beneficial for contractors who work in more than one state.

Ellen Steck, vice president of marketing for RSC Equipment Rental, also emphasizes the customer service offered at the 450-plus RSC locations throughout North America. "We have a 24/7 customer support line that is always answered by employees," she says. She also highlights RSC's online bill pay and other online offerings as being very customer-friendly.

According to HERC's Tracy, "A level of service that comes from more than 40 years of serving the industry's premier accounts is among the top reasons contractors choose Hertz Equipment Rental. Location is also an important factor, and HERC has that well covered with 275 locations in key metropolitan areas throughout North America." Additionally, Tracy says that HERC's experienced employees offer customized assistance to contractors. "If you know exactly what you need, HERC can certainly get the equipment you want. If your job requires a bit more planning and you'd like to work with someone who can assist in determining equipment needs, that is where HERC stands out."

"The No. 1 reason a customer chooses a rental supplier is availability," Cat's Gustafson says. "Beyond that, we carry the premium product brands. And our dealers' product support capability is unmatched in the industry."

Everything Under One Roof

To attract customers, rental centers emphasize the youth of their machines as well as the broad array of equipment they stock. "The average age of our fleet is just under 40 months ... and we have a broad range of equipment," says UR's Nadelman. He specifically notes that UR offers earthmoving equipment in its general division, but also has divisions offering aerial lifts, trench safety/underground shoring, pump/power, and highway technologies such as

traffic control and barricades. "In addition to our rental equipment, we sell supplies such as site control and geotextiles," he says. UR offers more than 20,000 separate types of equipment and services a variety of clients, including construction and industrial customers (petro chemical), utilities, municipalities, the movie industry, homeowners and others.

"The Cat Rental Store is a one-stop shop. It's part of a total solution for the customer," Gustafson says. To address the needs of the Cat Rental Store's customers, all of its locations carry "allied products," which range from aerial work platforms to plate compactors, air compressors, light towers, pumps and more. "Site prep contractors predominantly use Caterpillar yellow iron, but they need more than that to get the job done."

HERC's Tracy notes that its young fleet "not only provides customers with equipment that has fewer hours of use and less wear and tear, but ... has all the latest features and technology, which is very important when it comes to safety." HERC offers small tools and supplies for sale, specialty pump programs, aerial division, plant services and safety training programs.

Mavrick refers to Volvo Rents as a "supermarket" for rental equipment. Not only can customers rent Volvo machines but also additional pieces of equipment from more than 60 other suppliers, including such items as air compressors, lifts and trowels. RSC's Steck notes that site prep contractors most commonly rent generators, aerial lifts, earthmoving equipment, water trucks, skiploaders and backhoes.

Last Minute? No Problem!

Due to the demanding nature of the construction business, today's rental houses have specific strategies to accommodate equipment rentals with very short advanced notice. UR's Nadelman simply says, "This business is built on last-minute requests." And his company has tackled this challenge. Nadelman notes that UR offers 24-hour/7-day service at all locations. "Our typical customer calls at 5 p.m. and wants [equipment] at 7 a.m. the next day," he says. "Because we have a consistent fleet of equipment, we can respond to a customer, if not at the location they call from, [then from] somewhere close in the network."

According to Tracy, "HERC understands that last-minute needs are common in the industry--that's the nature of the business. The single most important factor in serving customers is having the equipment they need. Hertz Equipment Rental utilizes market data to ensure we stock the proper amount of fleet in the locations that serve that particular area." He adds, "A fleet of company-owned delivery vehicles means that HERC doesn't need to rely on an outside hauler to get equipment to the customer. Together with our fleet, we are able to react quickly to unplanned needs."

"RSC prides itself on quick responses to after-hours and last-minute requests," Steck says. "Our customer care center is designed specifically to deal with these types of situations...[and] will work with the customer to find a solution to their emergency situation."

"The Cat Rental Store is a full-service rental store with systems and processes built around meeting the typical needs of a contractor," Gustafson explains. "The customer's ability to reach someone from the rental store during off-hours is standard procedure at most Cat dealers."

"Customers expect and demand a high level of flexibility and service detailed to their needs," Mavrick says. "If you want all your deliveries at midnight, we can do it."

Bending Backwards

Around the country, rental centers are bending backwards to cater to contractors. The many benefits to renting include the use of young fleets and reduced concern about machine maintenance, storage and transportation. In addition to this, rental centers have expanded their offerings to make many other supplies and services available to contractors. For those seeking flexible fleet rentals, renting is an increasingly attractive option. Contractors who shop around should be able to find a rental house that meets their needs--even if those needs must be filled tomorrow.

Sidebar: 5 Ways to reduce downtime

According to Rental Service Corporation (RSC), there are five major ways that renting helps to reduce downtime:

1. Contractors get the right equipment when they need it.
2. Equipment delivery and pickup is on time.
3. A young, well-maintained fleet reduces equipment break downs and downtime.
4. Management software programs help track equipment and projects.
5. Around-the-clock service provides prompt attention to customers.



RSC's customers who perform site prep most commonly rent earthmoving equipment.