Are you being "served"…?

Maybe you have machines that have already "served you well" or you're thinking about buying a new machine! Maybe you already have! You know what you want, the salesman has confirmed how that machine will help you make those lens products you require. You place your order, complete the training, make the buy-off and finally, there it is – installed – a feature of your lens process to be proud of.

By Ken Payne

You start to reflect on what the new machine will now deliver. After all, it's only making you money when it's operational and producing those lenses you bought it for - but then it hits you! That first breakdown! Is it mechanical? Is it electrical? Is it software? Suddenly things don't seem quite so clear. You never anticipated this could happen! Everything could be a disaster!

But relief…you feel quite confident that your supplier can fix the problem with your machine. But does that meet your expectation? Do they have the spare parts needed?

Now, you start to wonder why you hadn't given more consideration to the importance of "service and support" when you were talking about that purchase.

While machine technologies have improved and are significantly more reliable than in the past, they are still fallible to a variety of external influences. It stands to reason that, the more you can do to prevent down-time, the less dependence you have on your supplier or a third-party to find a cure when it's already too late! Good compressed air systems and filtration is the key to preventing air bearing failures. Properly sized and maintained vacuum systems will keep swarf contamination to a minimum and reduce service frequency or slide damage. Stable electrical supplies are more crucial than ever as the vast majority of modern machine systems rely heavily on circuitry and wiring systems for most machine functions.

THE FIRST BREAKDOWN! IS IT MECHANICAL? IS IT ELECTRICAL? IS IT SOFTWARE?

"IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE A PROCEDURE...."

To be efficient at service and support, it's important to have a procedure that will help to "zero-in" on a problem and that aims to bring in the right expertise for any given problem. This is especially true if some time has passed between machine training and installation and the point at which a problem has occurred. A multi-level approach in the way the reported problem is handled is crucial.

The use of technology is not only in the way a machine works, but can be employed to either help yourself resolve a problem or to get your message across to your supplier about the equipment problem. DAC have machines in many countries all over the world, but do not let language differences get in the way of problem solving. You need tools to achieve this, they adopt several methods that help optimize finding the best solution for your given machine problem:

1. Help files that are incorporated in your machine software to guide you through the more common challenges.

2. Digital manuals for the machines are loaded in Windows desktop of the supplied machinery. More specialised procedures (if required) can be e-mailed for those clients who are sufficiently competent to perform more specific tasks.

3. The company's own website provides the opportunity to advise the required details of the equipment, software and the problem itself, that help their technicians to investigate your machine configurations prior to contacting you with solutions. Using their web-based service, you can make this digital submission via their "equipment problem report" facility. A real advantage of reporting in this way is that the report is seen by all available technicians, software and applications engineers, thereby maximising the likelihood of a more targeted response to get your machine up and running as soon as possible.

4. Via free applications such as, "We transfer", software and other large files can be transferred via a support e-mail, quickly and securely. As with the web based problem reporting, all of the support staff will see the information.

5. Send your machine supplier a sample product. An array of metrology and lens analysis instrumentation can go a long way to helping resolve lens issues and is another source of information for the technicians to evaluate what is happening on the machine at given points in the lens construction.

6. Video procedures are available in limited subject matter and can be e-mailed to the laboratory in order to assist with self-analysis of a machine condition or issue.

7. "Go to assist" is an online method to help diagnose software or applications related problems. Requiring only that you provide a network connection, for machines fitted with the appropriate network card and driver, you can authorize their own engineers to access your machine directly so files and error messages can be investigated in detail. The same method can be used to modify or upgrade the machines software, all while you observe the actions at every stage.

8. Let us not forget telephone support. That is always available to avoid the potential of misinformation in two-way communications; this method of reporting should be considered as a last resort.

9. Finally, service technicians and engineers are ready and willing to travel all over the world to support its customers and the products that they have put their trust and business success in the hands of. Those same technicians and engineers, when at the factory, are testing the new machines as they are released from manufacturing and training the customers who have purchased the equipment. They not only know your machine inside out, they gain an understanding of your requirements and goals.

TRAINING IS THE KEY TO EFFICIENT SUPPORT

With every machine you buy, you can expect a full and complete training package on "your" machine. Designed to suit your own skills and expertise and to equip you with the essentials that ensure you can feel confident with the complete ownership of your own machine. Nobody wants to make you a machine expert, but rather give you the means by which you can tackle some of the potential machine problems that may occur. This knowledge makes it so much easier for you to communicate with technicians and software engineers when required.

SOFTWARE ACCESSIBILITY

Without it, we simply couldn't take advantage of all that modern machine tool technology offers us. With all the visual and audio technologies around us, it's easy to take software for granted. Almost all electronic devices have some form of software driving it and if you could look inside, that software can be vast and is made up of multiple levels of control to translate your requirements into code that the machine hardware systems re-interpret into the lens products you want to make. Software in modern machines is easily accessible using online tools that allow our own software specialists to review and even potentially operate your machine remotely and all from their own office.

But you make lenses; you're not a software programmer! That's why it should be a pre-requisite to have on-line software support. Provided via an internet connection to your machines PC, where the current machine status and all files can be seen directly via a secure internet link, to help analyse and find solutions to a variety of machine problems. Working together with the lab technician by telephone and on-screen messaging (further helping to reduce language barriers), the activities of the software engineer can be observed and in some cases, can help the machine user develop a better understanding of the machine controls, parameters and conditions. All of these things can help to improve efficiency at resolving any potential future issues.

SPARES CAN BE A GOOD THING

Holding spare parts may seem a costly investment, but it's not reasonable to expect your supplier to hold spares of every conceivable part for every machine type ever built. However, you, the customer/user, will have that machine in your possession for years to come and some parts are specific to certain machine models. Although there are many courier services that can ship goods around the world in days or even hours, it still means downtime for you and your machine! Having some key parts on-site with good machine training from your supplier, you can minimize that downtime significantly.

TROUBLE-SHOOTING THAT REALLY MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Unless there's a service technician on your doorstep, it will still take time for them to arrive at your facility. Despite very efficient courier services these days, parts can still be held up due to transport issues or even customs clearance.

It's recognized that you can't carry a spare part for everything, but doesn't it make sense, that if you have on-site, a few spares of only the most critical parts for your equipment, that enable you to trouble-shoot more elusive problems or to allow you to react to a problem more quickly. In this way, the remote support offered by your machine supplier can further minimize service cost and gives both customer and supplier the best opportunity to diagnose a problem efficiently and provide possible solutions more easily.

TAKING OWNERSHIP: IT WILL REDUCE YOUR RISK!

Even if all that service and support is available to you, why wouldn't you want to have the ability to control your own destiny and limit the downtime that always ensues from equipment problems? The equipment you purchase is owned by you. The more you understand the technology you've invested in, the more you will get from it. Prevention is always going to be better than cure. Training, infrastructure, remote assistance, trouble-shooting, spare parts, regular check-up's! Taking ownership of a machine is not simply a case of buying a machine; it's likely to be one of the biggest investments you will make in your business. Alongside that, is the investments you make in the people you charge to operate and maintain such investments. The sooner you can get your machine back up and running, the sooner you're meeting your goals! ▪

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