

Model of credibility in preowned equipment

With its service staff and parts inventory, R.W. Martin builds your confidence in its resources and capabilities to support you after selling you a machine

In any business transaction it's wise to know who you're dealing with. In buying preowned equipment your first concern is probably the seller's credibility. Then you thoroughly evaluate whether a machine really meets your needs, particularly for longevity.

R.W. Martin & Sons, Inc., Kent, Ohio, markets preowned equipment under its Stoneman brand that it either owns outright or has a legal agreement to sell for the owner. Working with such a vendor means you can be confident you're talking with someone who really controls the process of fulfilling your offer.

Even if you deal with a broker, the company says, it's important to do your homework to understand who owns the machinery and how it was previously used, such as for stonewashing rather than health care.

"We act as brokers for sellers and work with these clients to provide us with the same information we would provide a buyer of equipment we own," President Shawn Martin says.

If you ever agree to purchase of equipment "as is," and without inspecting it, or reviewing the seller's test reports, or verifying maintenance records, you face the very real possibility that the initial cost savings (versus buying a new unit) may be offset by costs to correct any undisclosed problems with the machine.

With new machinery, manufacturers normally offer a limited warranty as part of the purchase price. With preowned units, depending on the vendor you use,



protection of your investment is available, although it likely won't be a true warranty.

It's more like preventive medicine. "For example, when a machine is received at our warehouse facility, it is thoroughly inspected, then shop tested to assess operational condition and all operating specifications are documented. Importantly, test results can be disclosed to prospective buyers during the sales process," Martin says.

As a buyer, you can determine fairly quickly how much protection (i.e. support) a vendor is likely to afford you. Does the company have a qualified staff with proven industry experience and replacement parts readily available? If so, you can be confident the vendor has the necessary resources and capabilities to

R.W. Martin has fabrication and welding capabilities; its reconditioning work carries specific limited warranties and agreements for onsite service.

support your purchase after the sale. This is a sharp contrast with people who work from home or who are brokers more than anything else.

At first, you would qualify a pre-owned equipment vendor as you would any other type. Ask for a resume about the company. Learn how they conduct business and how long they've been in the market. Get references; in this case, from preowned machinery customers.

You'll probably be most concerned about finding someone with a reputation for integrity, reliability, and dependability. You may want to deal with an experienced staff who's well-versed in the operation

and features of the equipment they sell.

In that case, look for evidence that the vendor invests in staying current with industry trends, by participating in continuing education programs, such as manufacturers' service schools, association seminars, and trade shows.

Here's one good indication of the degree of concern vendors can exhibit for your needs. Tell them the type and capacity of the machine you think you need: a 400-pound top-side-loading washer-extractor, for example. If your initial conversation consists simply of discussion of the list of such units now available from the vendor, think twice.

Is the machine you want the one you really need? The vendor should listen, then start asking you questions.

"Tell me about your business and plant operations. What types of textiles will you process? What types of machines do you have now?" These types of questions assure you the vendor is looking to provide solutions, not just sell you machines.

While the majority of preowned machinery is sold as-is, some of it is reconditioned. In R.W. Martin's shop, they can demonstrate machines in operation under normal loads and conditions and perform any repairs, if needed.

"In addition, we maintain extensive fabrication and welding capabilities and can professionally refinish machinery in accordance with a customer's specifications by using our industrial paint booth and spray systems," Martin says. Sometimes customers choose to make certain repairs using their own personnel once the equipment arrives at the plant.

Reconditioning work carries specific limited warranties and agreements for on-site service that range from 30 days for minor work to 12 months when equipment is rebuilt. The company offers a range of flexible terms depending on the degree of protection a customer desires.

A buyer must be fully aware of the condition of a machine being considered. That starts with confidence that the vendor is properly portraying the situation.

The most delicate part of a transaction is assuring that both the buyer and seller perceive machine condition similarly. Disappointment typically ensues when they don't. The best portrayal of equipment health usually occurs when the buyer inspects the machine in operation at an

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"The second-best alternative is probably a situation like ours," Martin says, "in which we've purchased the machine, and you visit our facility for a demonstration." If you can't travel, request a videotaped session of equipment in operation.

You usually get the process started by receiving photos of the unit. It's best to see

shots of the complete machine, as well as a variety of machine components, such as controls, panel interiors, drive assemblies, and safety guards. Users of R.W. Martin's stoneman24-7.com Web site can view images of available preowned machinery and learn about machine conditions based on a four-point scale:

Excellent. Like-new operating condition; may require repair or replacement of minor components, otherwise completely functional. Very clean appearance.

Good. Running operating condition. May require repair or replacement of minor to mid-range components. Tune-up recommended, otherwise functional. Clean appearance requiring only minor cleaning and refinishing.

Fair. Same condition and repair or replacement issues as machines in the "good" category. Tune-up required, otherwise functional. Decent appearance requiring thorough cleaning and refinishing.

Rough. Nonoperating; requires extensive component repair or replacement of components. Components may be missing. Poor appearance requires considerable cleaning and refinishing.

This scale, along with photographs, al-

Creating an electronic marketplace

In the accompanying article, R.W. Martin & Sons, Inc. espouses the need for buyers to thoroughly investigate preowned machinery before committing to its purchase. The company invites offerings for such equipment at www.stoneman24-7.com, enabling launderers to move at lightning speed in identifying prospective buys and making bids. On the seller's side, it's a way to quickly announce an item's availability.

President Shawn Martin recalls introducing the site at the Clean Show in New Orleans in 2001 as one way to make it easy for buyers to view equipment attributes and offer a price. It also created a vehicle to show the wide variety of items the company maintains in its inventory.

"Being successful in marketing preowned machinery year after year means you have to have it: a good stock of it, and the ability to obtain and offer it. After all, you can't build it!" he laughs. "Our new online auction site brings buyers and sellers together in a unique, secure way not available anywhere else in the industry."

He says it's unique in the sense that it contains business tools users need to view quality preowned machinery, list equipment to be sold, place a bid, and purchase and sell machinery, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Plus, if someone decides to jump at an offer, they do so trusting the seller's evaluation of the machine's condition. "There's a high comfort level in doing business with R.W. Martin," he says. "Our customers know the odds are in their favor that they will have a positive experience."

Looking back on the decision to launch stoneman24-7.com, Martin characterized the move as "an investment in an area new to our industry. There were no guarantees it would be successful." An unexpected result is that other machinery vendors are approaching the company about listing their machinery on the site.

lows you to establish an initial assessment of a machine's condition. The best indicators, however, are revealed through written test reports of tests of the machine's electrical, mechanical, and other relevant systems. Make sure equipment is tested and adjusted to ensure operation under normal utility use (electricity, natural gas, compressed air, water, steam, etc.).

Ask your vendor to represent machine condition by producing a comprehensive report of these tests. Machine history should be comprehensive as well. Get the basics in writing, such as the year of manufacture, model number, serial number, and electric specification.

Suppose you can't see a unit in operation in its current incarnation. Obtain documentation of exactly where the machine came from, including the date when it was taken out of operation. Someone should be able to attest, in writing, to its former use for healthcare, hospitality, industrial, or other types of work.

Verifiable maintenance records should be available. The vendor should know about any upgrades or conversions, major repairs, or replaced parts.

Suppose you have received all the relevant test and history data, but there is no vendor. The original owner is selling the machine, which hasn't been used for a while. So you have no way of seeing it in action. You might still involve a vendor.

First, vendors can be helpful in determining what machines are worth. "We often help insurance adjusters, banks, and leasing companies with preowned machinery valuation," Martin says. "As a result, when customers call to tell us about an original owner's asking price, we help them evaluate it.

"We recently assisted a customer during public auction, which can be a very fast-paced sales mode! But we got involved long before and spent the previous day examining the inventory on behalf of the customer, so we determined which pieces were in good, better, and best condition. The customer purchased several machines during the auction, we made needed repairs, and now they're in operation."

The price you pay for preowned equip-

ment isn't just the equipment's market value. It also covers the cost of the preventive medicine and support the vendor provides with the machine. R.W. Martin's process of handling preowned products is very much like the one for new machinery. They provide design and installation services, equipment manuals, operator training for your personnel, and preventative and planned maintenance support programs.

"We maintain a library of a variety of



Machinery is refinished at R.W. Martin in accordance with a customer's specifications with industrial paint booth and spray systems.

equipment manuals, so when we acquire a machine and the seller is unable to provide a manual, we almost always have the right one anyway."

Post-sale support includes supplying replacement parts in a timely manner, service technicians on staff, factory-trained field service support, and technical help desk telephone support with extended hours and prompt follow-up, he notes.

The post-sale experience with R.W. Martin can begin with a trip to their facility to pick up your machine. This is your chance to conduct operator training in their shop in addition to eventual on-site training. The latter usually only requires a single work shift for every operator.

The firm can supply parts from numerous manufacturers as well as build their own. They also carry a "new-old" parts inventory, containing hard-to-find items that may have been obtained as part of a machine acquisition.

Another option for locating and stocking hard-to-find components is to purchase a parts unit and the company can disassemble it for you. Even though a

machine is inoperable, numerous functional parts can be used as replacements on your current equipment, e.g. a drive assembly for a washer-extractor.

This type of flexibility and 35 years of experience have contributed to R.W. Martin's reputation as a leader in providing late-model, quality brand preowned machinery. They're proud of their attentiveness to customers' needs.

"We've concentrated on finding and supporting quality, late-model equipment from a variety of manufacturers, developing the myriad of services that allow us to be a single source for our customers. That's what they've indicated they want," Martin says.

Launderers often ask for one brand of washer-extractor, another of drying equipment, another of finishing, mechanical, etc. By gaining expertise in many brands and types of equipment, customers consider R.W. Martin an advisor to their operations, much like their accountants or insurance agents.

"We make it easy for customers to consult our equipment specialists and for mechanics to call our service department. We see every preowned equipment deal as the creation or continuation of a partnership. We don't look at any transaction as a one-time purchase," Martin adds.

The company recognizes that your best information sources are your contemporaries. That's one reason they're active in several industry trade associations, including their recent decision to join UTSA. As in many other industries, they see networking as critical to success in this business.

The preowned equipment business is naturally viewed with suspicion. Martin notes, "in our line of work, more so than in most businesses, it's critical that we stand behind our products."

Buying preowned machinery doesn't need to be like getting a root canal. There may be some general concerns, but the experience should prove beneficial, one in which you grow more confident each day. R.W. Martin is dedicated to assuring that the machine you purchase is the solution to what your business is trying to accomplish. 