



BY PHIL HARWOOD

How to use weather data for sales, renewals

THE SNOW BUSINESS is full of unknowns. One of the biggest unknowns is, of course, the weather. But there is one aspect of the weather that's 100 percent known: data for weather that has already occurred. Weather data are widely available for most communities in North America. It might require some digging to find, but with persistence you can track down data from a variety of public and private sources. In some markets, weather information is available for free. In other markets, free information is limited and may be unreliable or inconsistent. Fee-based weather services are an excellent source of information, especially where free information is not readily available or trustworthy.

Another source of weather data exists in the form of internal records. Snow professionals always should track their own weather data throughout the year so it's not a massive undertaking at the end of winter.

What to track

While there are many types of weather data available, this article will focus on precipitation in the form of snow. Finding good snowfall data will assist greatly during the sales and renewal process.

Regarding snowfall data, there are two types to gather, and you generally need not look further than the National Weather Service to do so. The first type is seasonal—not annual—snowfall totals, for as many years as possible. In my home market of Detroit, seasonal snowfall totals are available going back to 1880. Seasonal totals include an entire winter season (for example, November through April). Annual totals include a calendar year from January to December. Seasonal snowfall data are generally easy to locate. Seasonal totals are extremely valuable to calculate seasonal service pricing and seasonal caps, which often are based on seasonal numbers.

The second type is daily precipitation data. These reports typically show the type and amount of precipitation daily for each month. Armed with this information, it's possible to determine the number of events and the type of event for each occurrence.

The importance of accurate weather data cannot be understated. By incorporating updated and reliable data into your sales and estimating process, you'll instill a higher level of confidence

with your customers and prospects during renewal and sales processes. When you educate and inform during the sales process, you build trust, break down barriers and sell more work at higher closing rates.

How to incorporate

To incorporate weather data into your renewal and sales processes, develop a historical overview of seasonal snowfall data for your market(s). A bar chart on a single page is a nice visual presentation of this information (see "Web Extra"). Be sure to show seasonal totals on the chart. Along with this and using the same set of information, it's helpful to determine and show the average and probability of snowfall totals at various percentiles.

The average is straightforward, easy to calculate and easy to understand. It provides a guidepost or reference point for comparative purposes. Any given season may be quickly compared to the average to determine the variance, whether under or over the average. This variance is another way to present seasonal snowfall information on a bar chart.

Calculating probability is not all that complicated, although it's not quite as easy as calculating the average (see "Web Extra"). Probability is the likelihood of occurrence in terms of a percent. Information is power and statistical information equips the salesperson with enormous power going into a sales opportunity.

Daily precipitation data are equally powerful during the renewal and sales process. Knowledge of historical weather data regarding the type and number of events helps to reassure the buyer that estimating models are accurate.

So what does all of this mean? Discussions with your customers and prospects about probability, based on historical weather data, lead to discussions about risk/reward trade-offs, liability and pricing. All too often customers and prospects are uneducated about these matters and the sales process becomes very difficult for the snow business professional. Showing the above information to your customers and prospects in an educational manner will immediately position you as a professional and inject confidence into your proposal.

Now is a great time to evaluate your use of weather data in your renewal and sales processes. What are you already doing well? What needs improvement? Who is going to spearhead these improvements? What are the deadlines? The selling season for snow will soon be in full force. The time to prepare is now.

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To learn how to calculate the probability of snowfall totals or for examples of the charts Harwood references, visit the Web Extras section of [Landscape Management.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net).