Dispelling The Fear

Jim Rygiel

These are the 10 most frequently asked questions to take into consideration regarding the repair of rigid and flexible scopes and the purchasing of certified, pre-owned equipment.

1. How reputable is the vendor?
Big dollar savings can come in the form of certified pre-owned scopes and equipment if it comes from a reliable source and is backed by a company with a good track record.

Know who you are buying from. Ebay, Craigslist, and other auction sites are “buyer-beware” and equipment is sold in “as-is” condition. Remember that available equipment should be thoroughly inspected, tested, and certified by experienced teams.

Ask for references. Evaluate the vendor with referrals, number of years in business, GPO and government contracts, range of repair capabilities, and ISO certifications (quality standards). Examples of these include: ISO13485:2003 (medical devices), ISO9001;2008 Certification, ASQ Certified Quality Inspector (ASQ CQI). Not all companies are created equal!

2. What is the warranty?
Review and get the vendor’s warranty in writing. See that the warranty ensures that items will be comparable to OEM specifications and will be in ready-for-use condition. Perhaps more importantly, find out what kind of GUARANTEE is offered. A good relationship with your vendor can ensure that an item that isn’t working properly will be replaced and backed by a total satisfaction guarantee; even if an issue arises that may be outside of warranty or workmanship, such as accidental damage.

3. Are technicians OEM trained?
Unfortunately there is no school for scope repair. Technicians gain experience and proper training through original equipment manufacturers. Get a sense of who is

making judgments about the quality of components. How long have the technicians been in the field? Are there master technicians who can ensure that best practices are followed on a consistent basis?

4. What is involved in the inspection and certification process?
Different pieces of equipment naturally will have diverse points of inspection (Spectrum Surgical has up to 36). The evaluation must be thorough enough to meet the original manufacturer's standards. For example, an experienced technician will examine scopes to test the acuity of the optics (quality of the image, including crispness). Other points of inspection may include components such as: angulation, control knobs, forceps and suction channels, elevator wire, boot covers and distal ends. If any part fails during an inspection, the equipment shouldn't be sold. A technician conducting the inspection and certification must conclude pass or fail—period. All devices must go through some type of inspection and validation process.

5. What other services are available?
If equipment is purchased as-is/buyer-beware, devices may arrive at your facility with nothing more than a packing slip. Value-added services from a reputable vendor should include complete in-services with proper set-up and instruction. This will also ensure and establish that components are compatible; that a scope works properly with the camera, and the camera is compatible with the monitor, etc. The vendor should also provide value-added services such as preventative maintenance programs, educational programs on care and handling, as well as loaner programs should a device require service.

6. Is new equipment also available? Can existing equipment be repaired?
There are instances where a facility may wish to include new equipment with a purchase, depending on the nature of the device and surgeon preference. Work with your vendor to determine the range of products and the breadth of services they are able to provide. Also find areas where potential savings may be obtained through the repair of existing equipment.

7. What types of replacement components were used?
Not all parts are created equal. Know what kinds of parts are used in the servicing/refurbishing of the equipment. Traditionally, components made in Germany are of higher quality than those manufactured in other countries overseas.

8. Are reviews from other customers available?
Do your homework and seek out information online in the form of product or company reviews. Look for customer testimonials. A brief search may reveal feedback that will influence your purchasing decisions. Ask the vendor for references.

9. Will the vendor provide actual photos of equipment?
Sadly, some companies will say they have photos of the equipment available and then scramble to source (locate) the devices upon your request. Because there is most always an evaluation period, obtaining photos in advance is a must. Today, this can easily be done via email.

10. What is the vendor's return policy?
Find out in advance what a vendor's policies are. More reputable companies are going to offer more flexibility in the way of returns, and evaluation policies. Also find out what types of payments are accepted or required (PayPal or COD vs. extended payment terms). Extended payment terms will help offset the initial, upfront costs of larger, more expensive equipment purchases.

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