

| Mud System Buying: Do Your Homework



BY SHARON M. BUENO ON MARCH 23, 2011

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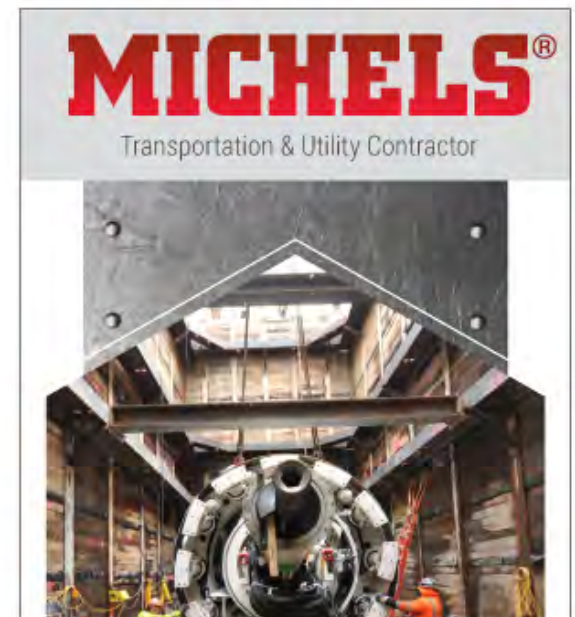
When the economy took a nosedive in 2008, contractors pulled back on their spending on equipment, deciding to maintain the pieces they already had. Now that economy has slowly headed toward recovery, those same contractors are starting to buy again, including mud recycling systems for HDD projects.



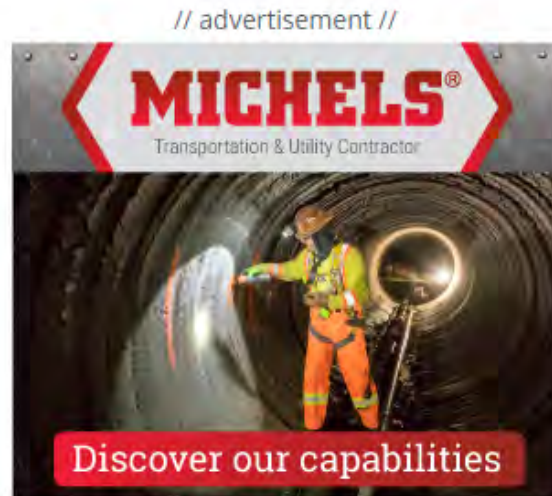
As customers head back to equipment showrooms looking to either add to their fleet or replace an aging mud system, they need to be vigilant in their homework in order to get the most bang for their buck, as well as finding the mud system that meets their long-term business needs.

After all, purchasing a mud system — whether it's a 100-gpm unit or a 1,500-gpm unit — is not an impulse buy. A piece of equipment that is critical to the overall project success, including its bottom line, a mud system must be viewed as an investment — especially when it can run you \$70,000 to \$650,000 a pop, depending on its size.

Today's customers are much more business savvy and with access to the Internet and other social media, they can get answers to their questions pretty easily, which allows them to be prepared when looking to buy.



Trenchless Technology spoke with Tulsa Rig Iron president Trevor Young about what customers need to know before making this important purchase. Established in 1987, Tulsa Rig Iron supplies drilling and related equipment both domestically and internationally, specializing in the oilfield and various trenchless industries, most notably directional drilling for utility, fiber-optic and pipeline installations. Tulsa's primary focus has been on the larger diameter directional drilling market segment.

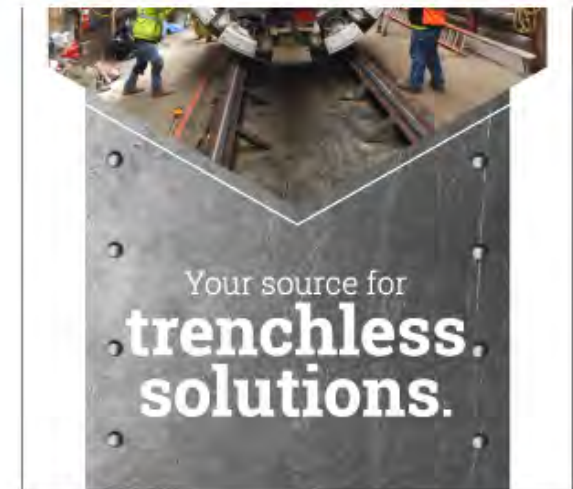


"The [mud system]market is getting better. We have definitely seen an uptick [in sales]," says Young, who also serves on Trenchless Technology's Drillmaster Advisory Board.

While mud systems can be a pricey purchase, their benefits far outweigh the initial sticker shock. "Using a mud system is going to equal more profit, which is reflected in using less bentonite and water usage and lesser disposal costs," Young says. "Using a mud system also results in less environmental impact by not having huge amounts of bentonite and cuttings being dumped."

It used to be that mud systems were primarily used by the drillers involved in large diameter projects. That is no longer the case as even the smallest rigs today use mud systems. "Fifteen to 20 years ago, you only saw mud systems on bigger rigs," Young says. "Pretty much even the smallest guys — those running 10,000-lb rigs — are using mud systems now. It just makes sense environmentally and financially."

Young advises customers to consider their long-term goals when looking to buy a mud system and not to



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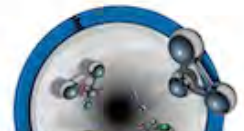
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base this decision on just one project. A mud system — made up of the tank, shakers, hydrocyclones, centrifugal pump and mud pump — can have a fairly long lifespan, if cared for properly, upward to 20 years.

If you need a mud system for just one project, then you might be a candidate to rent one — which is actually a popular option. “I get calls everyday from people asking about rental options. A contractor who is going to do one job in a year that requires them to use a bigger mud system than they already have, it’s probably cheaper for them to rent it for the project’s duration rather than buy,” Young says.

Young advises customers to look at five areas before making the decision to purchase a system.

Quality Construction and Components

Too many people let price drive their decision on which mud system to buy. A better price doesn’t always equate to the best deal. Young says price is important but customers should also consider the overall machine makeup in their decision. “It’s an expensive purchase and it should last many years,” he says. “You don’t want to find out six months later that it wasn’t built correctly or with quality parts. Now you will have to make a bunch of repairs or upgrades for it to work correctly. So the few thousand dollars you thought you were saving on the initial purchase has been eaten up.”

For contractors relatively new to the HDD market, it’s important that they school themselves on understanding how the mud system actually works. “You have to understand the piping, the flows and the pressure that are required on the manifolds and how everything works to get the proper result,” he says.

Cleaning Capacity

This is very important, Young says. “You will want to decide what your maximum gallons per minute of flow you will want to pump downhole,” he explains. “You can’t just think of just the job you have coming up but also think down the road. Ask yourself, ‘Am I going to upsize my rig and use this mud system with it?’ The systems are built to go with any rig but you need to be looking at what you are going to require for many years down the road. And that’s the amount of cleaning capacity you would want your new mud system to have.”

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Trailer- or Skid-Mounted

This is a fairly easy decision to make. Trailer-mounted units are the most common today and they are easier to transport to a jobsite. But sometimes the job necessitates a skid-mounted unit. "Let's say you are working in the swamps of Louisiana and you have terrible-to-no roads at all in and out of the jobsite. You might want to build a skid-mounted unit so you can drag with dozers," Young says.

Type of Shaker



There are three types of shakers available for mud systems: elliptical, orbital and linear motion. Linear motion are the most commonly used shakers today, as they allow you to run finer screens while still conducting most or all of your fluid through the screen, allowing you to have a drier cutting and less fluid loss. Twenty years ago, elliptical and orbital shakers were commonplace. "Customers need to know the differences between these three shakers," Young says. "Most

of our customers know what they want because they have been doing it for a long time. But whenever we get someone who's new to using mud systems, we ask them, 'What is their ultimate goal? What are the jobsite conditions?'"

Customer Testimonials

Don't be afraid to ask the manufacturer or dealer for references and other questions. Young advises customers to talk with other customers who have purchased the unit they want to buy and see how they like the equipment. "Ask how they like the company that built the equipment and what kind of service did they get after the sale," Young says. "Ask them if they got what they promised.

"Do your homework," he says. "For the bigger systems, you are looking at least a \$400,000 purchase, without any extras like a mud pump package. This is not a cheap purchase. It's an investment and a tool. You want it to do what you expect it to do."

Sharon M. Bueno is managing editor of Trenchless Technology.



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