



Protecting Operators and Agencies After the Sale is Closed



For this special section, *BUSRide* consulted with key figures from some of the foremost product and service providers in both the motorcoach and transit industries. They discussed the levels of support, customization, and service provided for their customers, demonstrating why it is often after-sale interactions between vendors and customers which are most important.

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What does “after-sale support” mean to your company?

Michael Anstead: After-sale support is very important to ABC Companies. We have an entire department dedicated to this called CustomerCare. We know that our sales department can sell the first coach, but it is after the sale support that keeps the customers coming back. ABC’s commitment to the customer carries on through our CustomerCare team. Our team is available 24/7/365 to take calls from drivers and operators to assist them where needed. This support includes technical assistance as well as training on maintenance and operations for the customers fleet.

Robert Hitt: Service is a core part of our business, with the largest service network in the industry we recognize and adapt to the customer needs. Prevost factory trained technicians help ensure the work is done right the first time. Our customer support managers and parts managers are in the field each week interacting with our customers keeping the lines of communication open to insure we are exceeding customer expectations.

Mike Grom / Jim Reaume: At Q’STRAIN we have always considered “after-sale support” as part and parcel of the original sale. That means once the sales are confirmed and complete our job as a company and a sales team is just beginning. After sales support includes follow up with our customer to make sure product performance is meeting expectations and letting them know that we are always there for them if any issues arise that need to be addressed. These are not just words we express – but rather we supply contact information for inside customer service support and for engineering and technical support. If questions arise that need dialogue between the customer maintenance department and our technical experts, we are readily available. Regional Sales Managers also offer on the job trainings where and when needed and always keep in touch with their customers to ensure our customer satisfaction is of the highest level. We let them know we are there for them not just for the order but for our reputation as well since we believe in our products and their reliability. We truly believe after-sales support is as important as the order itself.

Lucius McCelvey: When a sale is made here at Safety Vision, we view it as the beginning of a relationship between two organizations instead of the endpoint. Thus, “after-sale support” serves as the foundation of what we do. We recognize that our customers have made a significant investment in us, so we see it as our duty to make an ongoing investment in their organization as well. That means we have a continuous open dialogue with our customers to ensure we build a long-term, equitable relationship built on trust.

Safety Vision has a 28-year history in public transit, and we realize that our success in the industry is based on our commitment to understanding the challenges transit agencies face. Much of that knowledge and awareness stems from conversations with our clients about what their needs are. Our goal is to accept and act on all customer feedback/input so that questions or concerns are addressed in real-time. Live and timely support is imperative to the industry because of the important role video plays in public transit safety.

What levels of customization do you offer for customers who need to fulfill specific or niche needs?

Hitt: We receive special requests from our customers on a regular basis; if it is a short-notice request or something that is difficult to adapt to in production we can always adapt and do the install in our

service centers. Working with our business partners gives us the opportunity for specialty seating or galley arrangements.

Anstead: We focus on the solutions that satisfy our customers’ needs. Our onsite engineering department communicates to Van Hool any customer demands, market trends, as well as any customization requests a customer may have. Many customers look to us for solutions that may be integrated with their mobile systems and technologies.

Grom / Reaume: In terms of our wheelchair securement products, we offer a wide variety of products to meet all our customer’s needs.

When it comes to support and training, we also offer a variety of different options with the Q’STRAIN TRAINING ACADEMY which is a comprehensive program of wheelchair securement training solutions. From online trainings to on-site trainings, it encompasses it all.

McCelvey: Flexibility is paramount in this industry because each transit authority is unique in terms of what is most important to them. We receive a lot of feedback and customization requests from our meetings with clients, so the ability to deliver on those is simply part of the process – it is what we do. Safety Vision is an organization built on meeting the needs of our customers and therefore, we offer customization in a variety of ways.

For example, different agencies can have the same hardware but varying onsite maintenance agreements, reporting needs, analytic requirements, and viewing software options. Thus, each agencies’ system will be custom built to fit their unique operations. We not only customize for the end-user but also for the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), which can range anywhere from custom cable designs to sensor capabilities and anything in between. Further, Safety Vision is the only Mass Transit surveillance vendor that gives the customer a choice between an open platform onboard solution or one of its proprietary solutions. With the open platform, the Video Management System is independent of the hardware and agencies have endless third-party integration possibilities, allowing for the most customizable onboard solution the industry has ever seen. An open system allows the end user to access surveillance technology at a global level versus the confines of one specific proprietary vendor. We do not have a “one size fits all” approach to the industry.

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Is there a “statute of limitations” on after-sales support for your customers?

Grom / Reaume: We put the customers first and stress that taking care of the customer is our top priority. All of our products are under warranty and backed with the highest level of customer service and support.

Anstead: ABC offers support for the life of Van Hool coaches. Our technical support team is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week 365 days a year. We provide technical support for every Van Hool brought to North America. 📞

McCelvey: The short answer to this question is no. Safety Vision does not place limitations on customers for after-sale support because we are dedicated to ensuring our products and services benefit them as long as feasibly possible. Mass transit buses can have a life cycle of up to 20 years and it is common for agencies to expect support for the products on the vehicle for up to 12. Considering how often products such as cell phones and computers are upgraded – onboard surveillance systems utilize some of the same components and therefore, when these parts become obsolete, Safety Vision continues to support their customers by expanding or upgrading the services rendered on its' existing product lines.

With that being said, I am proud to say that Safety Vision is currently providing some support for products that are up to 15 years old. We have accomplished this through proper planning and continuously finding ways to satisfy our customer expectations by discussing their needs with them. We have been flexible with our clients as it is a key component of surveillance technology development and guaranteeing we are there for them and our legacy products. You cannot always put a timeline on product support, so our services are open ended.

Hitt: We offer service support for all year models of Prevost and Volvo coaches sold in North America, our Customer Support Managers are available 24/7/365 direct to our customers. We also offer emergency support through Prevost Action Service System or PASS for all year model coaches. There is only a charge if we have to guaranty payment to a third party or set up road service on a coach out of warranty. We receive calls on a regular basis for all year models ranging from 1969 to 2021; we have a support team with all levels of expertise; this insures we can answer questions and support all of our customer's needs.

How do you help your customers protect their investment in your product, ensuring their equipment or tech does not become outdated soon after it rolls out?

McCelvey: This is a great question and one that our company is constantly working to find balance with. We understand how difficult it can be for a transit agency to purchase a product, only to have it become obsolete shortly after it's been implemented. Along with other technologies on a bus, we have seen this take place with onboard video. Therefore, it is important for us at Safety Vision to pay close attention to where components are in their life cycle (especially hardware components) and take necessary steps to mitigate any potential risk.

Safety Vision takes precaution in its' approach to product life cycle so that consistency within an agency's fleet remains central to any technological developments. It is not ideal for an agency to have multiple software platforms that do not integrate effectively or different hardware versions that are not compatible. This scenario can be disruptive for both bus maintenance and those reviewing video. While we must advance our product portfolio and capabilities; everything needs to persist in a mostly uniform fashion for the agency. Mass transit customers expect some change to occur and look forward to experiencing the benefits of advancing technology, however they prefer for there to be a reasonable period between changes, for new products to be as backwards compatible as possible, and for there to be little to no change in form and fit. However, we do find that agencies are more open to broader updates or refreshing their technology once a bus is in its 6th or 7th year of service.

"We view it as the beginning of a relationship between two organizations instead of the endpoint."

Grom / Reaume: Our team of innovative engineers are always researching and developing the latest and greatest technologies' in the industry, staying ahead of the game. For example, the QUANTUM Automatic Wheelchair Securement System is a revolutionary development in wheelchair securement while still evolving to touch on the latest market trends.

Q'STRAIT also makes warranty and support top priority for all of our products in the industry. This helps to minimize maintenance and downtime. All of our products are rigorously tested for quality in our state-of-the-art testing facilities to ensure that they are exceeding the highest standards.

Hitt: Coach technology is constantly evolving; safety systems are a big part of this. Items such as Electric Fan Drive, Icomera onboard entertainment, Prevost Driver Assist are just to name a few. We have many of these systems available as kits for coaches built prior to the production change; this makes it easy for existing coaches to be upgraded to new coach technology. With today's evolution in coach electronics and ECU capability's we are sometimes limited on how far back we can retrofit new systems. However, we try to insure we give the customer as many options as possible to take advantage of these systems.

Anstead: ABC updates modules on our customers coaches prior to delivery. With the introduction of telematics, and changes in technology engine manufactures now can update ECM and ECU over the air. ABC has worked closely with these telematic system suppliers to offer them on Van Hool coaches. During the life cycle of our customer's Van Hools our Field Reps, and ABC locations are available to update their multiplex systems when needed.

What education and training do you conduct with your customers after completing a sale?

Grom / Reaume: Education and training are a huge focus for us at every level of customer interaction – before, during and after the sale. Our relationships are continual and long-term, so the education and training of our products is vital to the success of our customer



relationships. We service multiple market segments and support various product lines, so our education and training materials are vast, and we are always adding more content to our online platform, The TRAINING ACADEMY. We currently offer monthly online webinars, archived training presentations, full online classes which include certificates upon completion, onsite training for customers, customer service support, and more.

Anstead: Product knowledge and training ensure that we communicate effectively and enthusiastically, building trust and confidence in our customer relationships. Our CustomerCare Training makes it convenient for customers by offering classes at our ABC locations around the country or at the customers' location, and now ABC customers have the option of using our Learning Management System (LMS) online classes. We custom tailor the training to the customers' needs. ABC CustomerCare staff has 368 combined years of bus and motor coach experience. We employ highly trained field technicians around the country to support, train and assist our customers at their facilities.

Hitt: We have many different training opportunities available to our customers both before delivery of the coach and afterwards. Prior to delivery, we offer PTI online; Prevost Technical Institute has a wide range of training available for both the operator and the technician. Operators can get familiar with the controls and operation of the coach as well as vehicle familiarization walk around inspection, WCL operation just to name a few. For the technician we have a wide variety of training available for all systems on the coach, PTI online is constantly evolving with new material on a regular basis in order to keep up with technology. After delivery, our Customer Support Manager will be on hand to follow up on delivery condition of the coach as well to evaluate training needs. At PTI we offer both online training and live training events to meet and adjust to our customer needs.

McCelvey: Safety Vision knows that to have success with customers, we must go above and beyond to provide custom training because the relationship heavily relies on how well the

customer understands their system. Of course, we conduct initial onsite trainings with a certified Safety Vision representative, but onboard video can get very complex, especially if advanced features, such as analytics, are integrated. So, we view training as an ongoing and open dialogue relationship to ensure clients fully grasp their system.

Safety Vision's team offers years (many times, decades) of experience in the industry, which is unmatched in onboard video. We excel in knowledge of video management software, onboard hardware for maintenance, and wireless downloading and understand the depth of insight we can provide for customers. Each system deployed is unique in one way or another, and we take pride in educating clients about how to achieve the maximum benefit from their purchase.

How would you like to expand your after-sale support capabilities in the future?

Anstead: Our customers' needs are what drives the future growth of our after-sales support. This includes all areas of ABC customer care including in-house and field technicians, training, as well as engineering and product development. We continuously analyze our customers' needs to determine how we can better serve our customers and industry's needs.

McCelvey: The world is constantly changing in terms of technology and today's innovations are going to have a positive impact on onboard video surveillance. With the addition of our cloud services and the future advent of 5G LTE, we will be able to service our customers in a more robust way by moving towards automated and autonomous – which has never been more necessary given the current pandemic.

Our strength as a company has always been our commitment to visiting clients in person to build a relationship and discuss their needs. Though COVID-19 has shaken the industry, it has allowed us to evaluate our current practices and recognize that moving forward, there are limits to our in-person interactions. Thus, we are heading towards providing a stronger digital experience for clients, ranging anywhere from webinars and “how-to” videos to automated features that streamline the clients' operations. While we value and will continue to strengthen our relationships with customers, we are looking forward to the future of our services.

Grom / Reaume: At Q'STRAIT we are always looking for ways to continually improve the overall customer experience and support after the sale. Here are just a few of the things we are currently researching:

- Automatic notifications
 - Reminders for things such as maintenance, updates, add-ons, follow up
- An even more accurate and increased part availability
- Continued increased support from our local distributors/Service centers
- Additional online training courses and support

Hitt: With 18 service center locations and over 65 service trucks in North America, we are constantly evaluating our network & customer support needs, adjusting as needed. This combined with over 150 Prevost Service Provider locations helps us insure support is available when you need it. 📍