

# **Outsourcing**

## *The Right of Way Team of the Future*

**R**ecently, I conducted an informal poll of 25 right-of-way department managers/directors and asked the question, "What are the most significant issues facing the right-of-way industry today and for the next five to 10 years?" **Outsourcing** was overwhelmingly listed as a priority concern.

As a result of that survey, an in-depth, three-hour panel on "outsourcing" will be presented at the Annual International Seminar in June. The session will give right-of-way service companies, consultants and representatives from industry and government agencies the opportunity to enhance their understanding of problems faced by each other in relationship to outsourcing.

*How We Get the Job Done  
Without Killing Each Other*

As more and more right-of-way departments have moved from actually performing right-of-way work to managing right-of-way service company employees/consultants, many new issues continue to develop. One of the most pressing of these issues is the fact that there is a critical shortage of young people entering the right-of-way industry. Thus, as retiring professionals leave the field, quality replacements become difficult if not impossible at times to locate.

But why in such a growing industry is there such a lack of young, developing professionals? First and foremost, these individuals must be trained. But who pays for this training, what training is appropriate, and where is it available? Proper training is a very expensive proposition and although some service companies provide training for "new-hires," this training is inconsistent from company to company.

The fact is, many service companies/consultants are reluctant to spend large amounts of money on training because right-of-way agents working in the field have traditionally been a very mobile group, moving from company to company as projects present themselves. If the service company/consultant has spent money on training an individual that then moves on to a new project,

then that company is just out of luck.

Also, early retirements and downsizing have resulted in the creation of many new service companies/consultants that are offering services to the market. How is a right-of-way manager to select a service company/consultant from the hundreds of companies that send in brochures soliciting work? How is a manager to know if a firm has sufficient personnel and experience to manage a project or job assignment? Is the service company/consultant using independent contractors to perform work or is it using its own employees?

These issues are extremely important and affect the client's company as well as the agent/employee. Questions such as whether the service company provides general liability and workers compensation insurance as well as complying with IRS requirements must be asked!

We are now at a point in the history of the right-of-way industry where many in-house managers have very little and sometimes no experience in right of way. These managers are coming into the field with good management experience but many times no experience dealing with the issues specific to right of way. Unfortunately, in many companies, these managers are only in place for a year or so and then move along to

*Outsourcing  
The Right of Way  
Team of the Future*

•  
*Monday afternoon*

*June 29*

*1:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.*

•  
*44th*

*International  
Education Seminar*

*Minneapolis, MN*

*June 28 - July 2, 1998*

another department just about the time they get acclimated to right of way. And the cycle begins again as another manager with no experience in right of way comes along.

This presents problems not only for the right-of-way department employees but for the service company/consultants as well. Rather than acting as "contractors" providing right-of-way professionals to accomplish specific tasks under the direction of in-house personnel, many service companies/consultants are being asked to actually perform a consulting role and advise the client on everything from project estimates, planning/routing and reports to management.

The panel discussion at international will be set up with four speakers who will open the session with position statements from their various perspectives to put the issues before the audience. For example, I will be delivering a position statement from the perspective of a service company that deals with private

industry. Rick Blake with Vyvx, Inc. will deliver a position statement from the perspective of industry that uses service companies.

*One of the most pressing of these issues is the fact that there is a critical shortage of young people entering the right-of-way industry.*

Mike Hereford with FHWA will deliver a position statement from the perspective of government agencies and John Coates of Coates Field Service will deliver a statement from the perspective of service companies/consultants who provide services to those agencies. There will also be four other members serving

on the panel as well as a moderator.

A Q&A session will follow the position statements, allowing the audience to ask questions of the panel members and to hear from other members of the audience about problems they may have faced and solutions to those problems.

Some of the issues that will be covered in the position statements are:

- How the right-of-way service industry works
- Managing contract employees
- Training of contract employees
- Wage and hour laws and how they may or may not apply to right of way
- How to select the proper right-of-way service company/consultant for your needs
- Problems faced by individuals who work for right-of-way service companies/consultants
- Problems that service companies/consultants face dealing with inexperience

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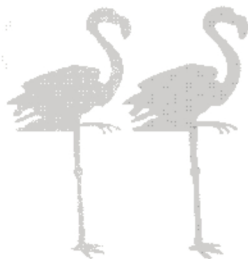
rienced in-house right-of-way managers  
• Why some right-of-way professionals  
“jump from service company to service  
company”

- How to make IRWA education courses  
more accessible to field employees
- Computerization of the right-of-way  
industry
- How can the quality of field agents  
be improved?

Obviously, a wide variety of topics  
and issues will be open for discussion,  
and I am sure not everyone will agree on  
each issue. What is hoped for is a lively,  
in-depth and comprehensive discussion  
that will increase understanding of the  
problems faced by both the service com-  
panies/consultants and those entities  
which will be using their services more  
and more over the coming years.

The session is entitled,  
“Outsourcing—the Right of Way Team  
of the Future,” and will be presented  
on Monday afternoon June 29, from  
1:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. with a break at  
3:15 p.m. Attendance is encouraged as  
the way to promote greater under-  
standing, thus increased productivity,  
through positive dialog between  
clients and those who provide services  
to them. ■

**Come and greet the  
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