

Equipment rental companies have a variety of reasons to offer discounts and promotions.

# Renting Equipment

## *When and Why It Works*

*“The right tool for the job” is a shopworn advertising slogan, true. But it’s top-of-mind for industrial hygienists whose efficiency and credibility often hinge on the reliability of their instrumentation equipment.*

BY KATHERINE L. GEORGE

The option of renting equipment, as opposed to owning it outright, is a welcome one not only for consulting hygienists but also for those on staff in a variety of employment settings. Norm Brusk, CIH, CSP, JD, says he owns only about 40 percent of his equipment. "I used to own most of my equipment and just rent specialized equipment, but I didn't want to spend the money to replace equipment anymore." Brusk is senior IH for the Redstone Group in Dublin, Ohio, an EHS consulting service.

And although it's not a matter for a small consultant, finance officers at larger companies can appreciate the way renting improves their debt-to-equity ratios, according to Jeffrey Brei, Eastern regional sales manager for Ashtead Technology Rentals in Rochester, N.Y.

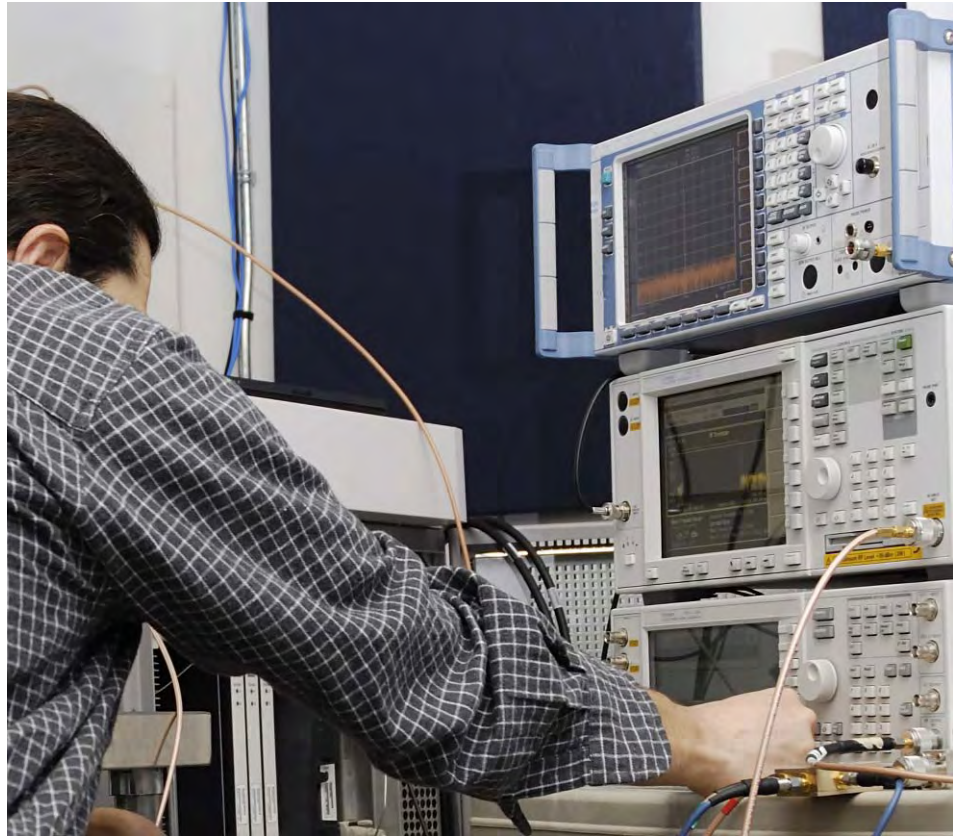
### Who's Renting?

Renters doing business with Raeco Rents, based in Frankfort, Ill., a Chicago suburb, fall into four main categories, according to vice president John Greivell: "IH consultants, environmental health and safety staff at our manufacturing customers, users looking for replacement units while theirs are out for scheduled calibration and people who have an immediate IH concern to address."

Both rental companies and rental customers cite reasons why renting is better than owning. Christopher Cole, CIH, CSP, who co-owns Labyrinth Management Group in Cleveland, is not hesitant to rent to get the best equipment. For most smaller companies, he says, after buying a piece of equipment, significant costs can follow for its maintenance and calibration.

"Recalibration of a simple instrument might be \$400 per year," says Ed Stuber, CIH, monitoring solutions consultant at Galson Laboratories in East Syracuse, N.Y. Galson is different from a typical rental company in that its primary business is to serve as an accredited laboratory. "Many of our lab clients use us to rent equipment also. But much of the equipment we rent has nothing to do with our laboratory analysis business," he adds.

"Some of our best rentals come from customers who already own equipment—then find it doesn't work when they need it," says Brei. Thus, one of the major selling points for renting is the ongoing calibration, maintenance and certification



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the equipment requires—often involving the manufacturer. Rental companies take responsibility for these costs and handle the administration and interface with the manufacturer. So for someone choosing instead to purchase equipment, those represent hidden costs.

(As an aside, rental companies believe they have "hidden costs," too. Greivell

cites excessive wear; hidden or unreported damage; missing components, instruction books and certificates of calibration; and "customers who require excessive operating assistance.")

Brusk likes renting as a way to try out the newest equipment. "The ease of operation, accuracy and reliability of equipment is increasing at an almost

exponential rate,” he says. “So I ask [the company] what’s new? Sometimes I stick with the ‘old reliable’ and sometimes I go with the new.”

Cole says his work in indoor air quality relies heavily on real-time instrumentation. Although he taps into various sources when shopping for equipment—the Internet, sales literature, trade shows—he’ll typically call the manufacturer to find out whether the item can be rented as well as who will rent it to him.

“There’s always a problem with equipment—it’s a given,” Cole believes, and a 24-hour hotline can be helpful. “Technical support people are godsend,” he adds. “They know how the equipment is going to behave and can talk you through it, without your having to drag out a manual.”

### Typical Rental Terms

After the hygienist has identified the necessary equipment to rent and the rental provider, the next step is a rental contract or rental agreement. Most of the time, the terms are interchangeable, although the rental company may use “agreement” internally in reference to the pricing component alone.

Rental terms can cover terms of days, weeks or months, but most often the instruments are needed for just a few days. Using overnight courier services—typically, but not always at the expense of the customer—for shipping and return is standard. That said, most of Brusk’s work is in the Columbus area, so by using an

instrument rental company local to him, he often is able to pick up and return the equipment in person.

Software, used to download data logs, for example, may be a part of the rental, and Cole notes that most real-time equipment will require software. Cole relies on the rental company for calibration of the instrument and says the renter can request a post-calibration on the return of the equipment. Prior to use, he says, most equipment is capable of a bump calibration. “For example, in the use of gases, the oxygen level in nature is 20.9 percent, so that’s what the instrument should read.”

### Where the Discounts Are

Equipment rental companies have a variety of reasons to offer discounts and promotions. Greivell says customers who rent online help Raeco operate more efficiently by letting rental specialists focus on new or more difficult applications, and “we think it’s best to pass that savings back to the customers.”

At Ashtead, Brei says customers with national account status—typically, customers with multiple sites—do well because of pricing breaks, free or discounted shipping and loyalty discounts.

Although Galson Laboratories promotes free air sampling pump rental when the customer uses its labs for analysis, Stuber does not view standard promotions as a significant driver of rental business. “The equipment is needed at a particular time or not, and it is hard to create an impulse rental,” he believes.

### Advice for Renters

Both renters and rental companies have advice for ensuring happy customers. For first-time renters in particular, Redstone’s Brusk advises, “Network with people you know who are consultants. Don’t guess what equipment you need. You can be surprised by what you’ve rented vs. what you really need.”

Cole says to avoid surprises, customers need to know and understand the rental terms, such as the timing on the return. “If you’ve got the equipment for ‘five working days,’ does that include the weekend or not? And it’s important to know the nearest shipping location at the end of the sampling day as well as the cutoff time to ship it back.”

Renters need to get up to speed quickly on the instrument being rented. Raeco’s Greivell says, “Time permitted, IHs should plan to receive the rental unit by 3 p.m. prior to the date they need it. That way, they can become familiar with the instrument and contact us in case we need to assist. This helps guard against a frustrated IH in front of the client.”

“It’s important, when you receive the equipment, to check it out. Read the manual. It may not be intuitive how to turn it off, for example,” says Cole. “If software and downloading data are involved, you have to get that working, too.”

Cole says he often will consult the technical support staff of the rental company first, explaining his needs, asking for recommendations on how to set up the equipment, and finding out whom to call if problems arise. “Technical support people can be specialized,” he finds.

Brei reminds hygienists who are considering purchasing equipment to look at all the costs associated with buying. “You think, ‘this’ll pay for itself in a year, why rent?’” he explains. “But sensors have a shelf life. Lamps burn out. Displays break. When any of these things happen, you not only have high maintenance costs, but you have to send it back to the factory for two or four weeks.”



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