

**UTILITY BUYER’S GUIDE**

Top Questions to Ask Intelligent Vegetation Management Software Vendors

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From the steep price of manual inspections to countless work plan meetings reviewing spreadsheets and handwritten notes, utilities have done their best with available technology and ad hoc processes. There’s a lot to juggle within limited budets.

Vegetation management is costly, with utilities’ spending rising from a reported $24.2 billion globally in 2022 to an expected $39.2 billion in 2029. Frequently the single largest item in O&M budgets, vegetation management can reach $100+ million for some utilities.

Now there’s a new way to manage vegetation management and contain costs.

A whole new software category — Intelligent Vegetation Management (IVM) — optimizes vegetation management for utilities, from analysis and planning to execution.

But not all vendors offer the same IVM capabilities to streamline, optimize, and reduce vegetation management costs. Here are the top questions to ask vendors to ensure that the solution you choose delivers the IVM capabilities your utility needs.

**TOP QUESTIONS TO ASK IVM VENDORS.**

**CREDIBILITY AND COMPATIBLITIY**

**1. Has a credible third party validated your solution model’s accuracy?**

Vendors will present plenty of product data and claims for you regarding their Intelligent Vegetation Management solutions. It is essential to verify these claims through an independent third party to confirm the vendor's capabilities and results.

**2. Does adopting your solution mean I must learn a new system for planning or field work management?  Can I keep my current systems if I like them?**

Change management presents significant challenges, especially when teams must adapt to entirely new systems. Confirm whether the vendor's software can integrate seamlessly with existing systems to avoid unnecessary overhauls.

**TOP IVM ISSUES**

**3. How does your software help to reduce not just storm restoration time but also expense due to vegetation caused outages?**

Effective software should not only predict storm impacts but also manage them efficiently to reduce both downtime and operational costs.

**4. How does your software help prevent trees from falling into the conductors?**

Preventing tree fall-ins near transmission and distribution lines is crucial for maintaining safety and ensuring uninterrupted power supply.

**WORK PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT**

**5. Can your software create a work plan with budgetary constraints we can use to manage our vegetation management operation?**

IVM software should support the operationalization of vegetation management programs, turning rich data sets into actionable plans within budget constraints.

**6. How will your software help with work planning and work management — to help me prioritize my work?**

With fixed budgets, utilities must maximize efficiency — and do more with less. Software that streamlines planning and enhances data utility can transform vegetation management.

**BUDGET**

**7. My budget is fixed, and I need to maximize every dollar we spend.** **How does your software help?**

Expect IVM software to enhance operational efficiency and ensure that every dollar spent is justified, maximizing the return on investment.

**8. How does your software help me get the best pricing and quality of work from my vegetation contractors?**

With contractor service costs rising, utilities must ensure they are getting the best value for their money without compromising on service quality.

**BUSINESS RESULTS**

**9. What business results have your customers been able to achieve?  Please show me customer results on your website, not just customer quotes.**

Tangible results from existing customers can validate a vendor's claims about their technology's effectiveness.

**TECHNOLOGY STRENGTH**

**10. How many utility miles of T&D lines are you live on, and how many miles is your AI model trained on?**

AI offers the most benefits when it is constantly ingesting new datasets and learning. This training is a key factor in AI accuracy.

**11. Can you use the LiDAR data we already have?**

The ability to integrate existing LiDAR data can save costs and leverage previous investments in high-resolution imaging technologies.

**12. Does your software have a patent that protects users from liability risk associated with patent infringement in the fast-moving AI industry?**

This is important question goes beyond just ensuring that your vendor will be around. You want to make sure the technology you choose will remain valid for use and free from legal issues.

**13. Are you SOC 2 Type 2 certified?**

Compliance with SOC 2 Type 2 is essential for affirming a system's security and reliability, safeguarding sensitive data, and adhering to high standards of privacy and operational integrity.

**COMPANY STRENGTH**

**14. How many utility customers do you have?  What’s the breakdown between IOUs and co-ops?**

Understanding a vendor's customer base, including the type and diversity of its clients, can provide insights into its market acceptance, whether it has focused expertise in the utility industry, and the applicability of its solutions across different segments of the industry.

**15. How stable are you as a company? Tell me about your funding, headcount, and who is on your Board of Directors.**

The stability of a technology provider affects its ability to deliver consistent service and support over time. Understanding a company's financial health, leadership, and growth plans can provide confidence in its long-term viability.

**16. Do you have leadership and employees who are utility veterans and understand utility problems?**

Instability in the C-suite can bring increased risk as new leaders alter directions to meet differing visions. In fact, if things are going well, shifts in the C-suite can destabilize the efforts of a successful workforce. And the heavier the turnover, the more the company’s vision, mission, and success are in jeopardy.

### **17. Do you have leadership and employees who are utility veterans and understand utility problems?**

The presence of industry veterans within a company can significantly enhance its ability to address sector-specific challenges and develop solutions that meet the practical needs of utility operators.

### **18. What are your hiring plans to keep up with growth and deliver on customer commitments?**

A company's staffing strategy, particularly in growth phases, is crucial for maintaining high levels of customer service and innovation. Ensuring that there are sufficient resources to handle expansion is key to sustaining performance and service quality.

**BUDGET IMPACT**

**Question 17. Can we capitalize our software purchase?**

Understanding the financing options available for purchasing new technology is essential for budget planning and financial management. Checking whether a vendor offers both operational expense (opex) and capital expenditure (capex) options can provide flexibility in how investments are accounted for and managed.