

Continuing Education: Usable vs. Useful Information
Michael D. Chambers FAIA FCSI CCS
michael@mcaspecs.com

Recently, a national trade association contacted education presenters to provide them with the evaluation results for their programs. This is a large association with a very strong focus on technology and its applications in business, education, worship, and industry. Their national convention offers hundreds of hours of educational opportunities for the attendees.

In general the education programs were very well received and evaluated. Attendees rated 90% of the programs at 4 (out of 5) or above for "overall quality and interest". However, it is interesting to note that the same attendees indicated that less than 10% of the programs were rated 4 or above for "applicability to daily practice". In other words, attendees thought the programs were very interesting but came away with nothing they could use in day-to-day practice.

In my experience this is true of most of the continuing education that I receive from product manufacturers' box lunches, AIA continuing education programs, and CSI Chapter presentations. The majority of them are interesting and provide USEFUL information but rarely do they ever provide USEABLE information. The concept here is much like searching the web on Google™ or Yahoo™, you end up with hundreds of USEFUL items but only a tiny fraction are truly USEABLE. If continuing education is to have a positive impact on the construction industry, developers and presenters are going to have to put real, applicable content into the programs.

To effectively use continuing education as a marketing and communication tool, the content presented must be directly applicable to the day-to-day operations of the audience. Information about a product's features and benefits is quite useful, as marketing hype, but it is rarely useable since design professionals need industry information, technical data, design guidelines, and details to effectively integrate a product or system into a building project.

In any type of presentation to design professionals, the focus must be on providing USEABLE rather than USEFUL information. I guaranty it will transform your relationships with design professionals and enhance your professional credibility. It is critical to provide continuing education information on how to specify the product and to provide examples and details of how to appropriately incorporate the product into the drawings. I am constantly amazed how few educational presentations even discuss specifying and even less, how to detail and coordinate the drawings.

The best and most effective presentations are extremely simple, no PowerPoint™ or flim flam, just product installation examples, guide specifications, and example construction drawings of successful installations. That is truly USEABLE information and HIGHLY EFFECTIVE continuing education.

Michael D. Chambers FAIA FCSI SCIP is principal of MCA Specifications, Construction Product Marketing Group of Daly City, CA. (San Francisco) MCA designs, develops, and produces guide specifications, technical data sheets, AIA/CES Continuing Education programs, and design guidelines for construction product manufacturers. MCA provides preliminary document, education program, and web site reviews to help manufacturers be more effective and strategic with their critical marketing tools. 415-239-6566
www.mcaspecs.com