

A View from the Back of the Bus

Minneapolis-St. Paul CSI *specifics* November 2001

Michael D. Chambers FCSI CCS
Contributing Editor

Marketing with Guide Specifications

In my perspective from the back of the bus, I wonder why we as product representatives do not use specifications and particularly guide specifications more in their design professional marketing calls and continuing education presentations. An excellently crafted, CSI formatted guide specification is the most effective way of marketing design professionals available to manufacturers and product reps.

It appears self-evident to this writer, that if you wish to have your product specified and the specification held by the design professional, the ability to work with specifications is paramount. Interestingly enough, I have found that very few product reps are comfortable working with specifications and design professionals. One response always seems to be "well, I not a specifier, that's the design professional's job..." In my opinion, it is impossible to be an effective product rep without basic specification knowledge and skills.

Typically, design professionals are not interested or particularly facile with specifications. This creates a very recognizable vacuum in the industry that needs to be serviced. Most design professionals I know, greatly appreciate product reps that can provide effective specification support. Many reps talk about specifications and try diligently to get specified but only a few can actually edit a guide spec or office master. Especially to the point that a design professional would be comfortable putting it out to bid. I found my specification skills were a significant factor in getting my products specified in an industry standard specifications that was relatively substitution resistant. I believe that it is not being able to write specifications as much as being able to work side-by-side with design professionals on developing industry standard project specifications.

There is another critical specification service that is often offered but rarely effectively or successfully. The ability to take an office master specification and review it for the design professional is one of the easiest and absolutely the most effective way to get specified and make sure the specification can be held. I have handed out dozens, many hundreds of office masters and basically gotten two responses. Typically the first response is no response. The second response is the rep reviews that specification to ensure that their product info is correct and ignores the rest of the competitors and specification provisions. If a design professional gives you an office master to review you must review the entire specification to ascertain the following information. Are the competitors the correct ones, do they make equivalent products, and does the specification advantage or disadvantage any of the competitors? Proprietary specifications or ones with hidden advantages are always the easiest to break. A truly competitive spec with the appropriate competitors and products can and will be held by the design professional against non-competitive substitutions.

Finally, use guide specifications as your primary marketing tool, not brochures or binders. Walking the design professional through a well written and annotated guide spec will educate them more effectively about your industry knowledge and expertise than any brochure. Use the brochures and catalogues to illustrate and demonstrate the significant specification issues contained in the guide specs. Even designers appreciate knowing the specification basics for the materials and assemblies they are incorporating into their designs.

Learn about specification organization and editing basics and key your approach to the design professionals along the lines of products and specifications. Good specs promote good products, which in turn promote good design. Good design means the design professional got the products they wanted and the product representative was able to bid competitive specifications without substitutions.

That's my view from the back of the bus, welcome aboard; come on back! Let me hear from you.

* * * * *

Michael D. Chambers FCSI AIA, CCS is actively engaged in designing, producing, and presenting continuing education programs, guide specifications, and sales training for the construction product industry. He is active nationally in AIA, CSI, DHI, SCIP, and WDMA. Michael is principal of MCA Specifications, Construction Product Marketing Group of Eden Prairie, MN and a specifier for ATS&R Architects of Minneapolis, MN. He can be reached at 952-941-2750 or at mca@isd.net.