

A View from the Back of the Bus

Minneapolis-St. Paul CSI *specifics* September 2001

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Strategic Marketing with Continuing Education

In my perspective from the back of the bus, I have observed that most manufacturers and product reps are not being very strategic about marketing with continuing education. There appears to be considerable confusion about when to offer AIA/CES continuing education or when to give a product presentation. Or worse yet, many providers are giving up product presentations and only offering so-called continuing education programs.

Generally speaking, I believe that providing AIA/CES continuing education is always preferable to presenting a product presentation. In the long run, continuing education is a much more effective marketing tool. It clearly demonstrates industry expertise, design applications, and specification knowledge far better than a product presentation. If your continuing education programs are truly non-biased and impartial (not generic and non-proprietary), you will solidly establish yourself and your firm as industry experts and critical resources for your segment of the industry. In my mind, ultimate success in marketing design professionals is being the first rep the specifier calls and getting specified. Continuing education is about expertise not products.

On the other hand, when you have an opportunity to work with an design professional on a project, consider not offering an AIA/CES program. Give them a project-focused product presentation that will help them design and build a better mouse trap. It is very important to understand the strategic difference. By policy and definition, continuing education programs are about educating the design professionals on industry standards, applications and range of industry solutions. Product presentations are clearly sales and marketing presentations, that, while educational, are not professional development type programs.

If the design professionals inquire about continuing education credit, remind them that they can self-report any type of product or educational presentation. I suggest that you have available blank copies of the AIA Form A - Self Report Form. Under no circumstances fill it out. AIA/CES's policy does not allow providers to fill out self report forms.

In the final analysis, implementing this 2-fold strategy will allow you to cover your marketing options much more effectively and with a significantly higher level of service to the design professionals.

That's my view from the back of the bus, welcome aboard, come on back, and let me hear from you.

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