

A View from the Back of the Bus

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Web Based Continuing Education

In my perspective from the back of the bus, I have noticed that many construction product manufacturers are considering or are providing continuing education through web or CDROM based distance learning. As a learning modality, it is excellent education delivery method and offers many advantages in terms comprehensive technical information, resource identification, and audiovisual presentation. However, it is not, in my opinion, a useful marketing tool to demonstrate industry expertise or to develop relationships with design professionals. It should also be noted that the State of Minnesota currently will not accept most types of distance education to satisfy the State's mandatory continuing education (MCE) requirement. *Originally articles published in Architectural Record were not but now they are acceptable.*

I am on record as stating that "continuing education is the best marketing opportunity offered to the construction product industry since the free lunch". The problem with distance education is just that, distance. Successful marketing using continuing education requires interface and relationship between presenter and audience. Face-to-face continuing education presentations allow for a much wider range of interaction, demonstration, and questions and answers than distance learning. It also allows the presenter to establish themselves, not their company, as industry experts and direct resources in the mind of the design professionals. Distance learning can only present data and hope that the recipient has understood the data correctly. Even testing distance learners for comprehension does little to verify or support the learner's ability to successfully apply or specify the educational material.

One notable advantage of distance education is its ability to attract or drive individuals to websites. Another advantage is the level of complexity and detail that can be incorporated into a distance learning program. These advantages still do not out weigh the benefits of live classroom learning and the human interface which are still critical to successful marketing relationships. It is interesting to note that even the completely online universities still require a certain amount of classroom time to successfully complete an educational program.

Continuing education for construction product manufacturers and product reps is primarily a marketing and communication tool. To successfully capitalize on state MCE and AIA/CES requirements, continuing education must be offered face-to-face, professional to professional. Distance education from construction product manufacturers is a valuable resource, but not, in my opinion, a significant marketing tool. Education and relationship are the highest and best use of continuing education and can only be successful face-to-face.

Another view from the back of the bus, welcome aboard; come on back! Let me hear from you.

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