

Handouts for Effective Continuing Education Programs

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In a recent study conducted for the AIA Continuing Education System by Architectural Research Associates¹, architects from 50 of the largest firms were asked a series of questions on their continuing education needs. When queried specifically about handouts a number of key issues were identified.

Handouts are Necessary and Critical to Success

98% of the architects indicated that a handout was an important and necessary part of the education presentation. Generally, product brochures were identified as being the most useful, with CDROMs and product samples next in line. Even more important was the finding that the majority (92%) of the architects did not find PowerPoint™ handout useful.

While the study indicated a preference for product brochures, I would suggest that is merely the architect's response to what they have been typically offered. A successful and effective handout must be much more than just a product brochure. An effective handout should be a guide through the presentation, a compilation of critical resources, and most importantly something the architect will not toss into the round file after the presentation.

Over the course of hosting, presenting, and attending hundreds of continuing education programs I have personally thrown away tons of product brochures. The brochures themselves were not bad, it just that having several sets of Sweet's Catalogues, I did not need nor did I have any way of dealing with hundreds of pieces of lose literature.

Taking the Next Step, Developing an Effective Handout

Ultimately, the challenge is how to develop a handout that is so excellent, useable, and directly applicable to daily practice that the architects will 3-hole punch it and keep it in their design reference binders.

Consider MCA's handout checklist as a guide when analyzing your current handout or developing a new one:

- Provide a basic or expanded outline of the presentation
- 3-hole punch or bind in booklet
- Provide space for notes
- Powerpoint™ handouts NOT acceptable, but may be attached as an appendix
- Include thumbnails of graphics shown by overhead or Powerpoint™
- Attach critical resources as appendices
 - Industry Standards (ASTM, ANSI, etc.)
 - Design Guidelines
 - Guide Specifications
 - Competitive product comparison matrix
 - Include competitor's data sheets or excerpts
- Product literature that is industry standard
 - SpecData® type technical literature
- Checklists
- Details
- Case Histories
- Brief Bio/Contact Information
- Business Card
- DO NOT INCLUDE
 - Company History or Capabilities
 - Logos or Other Brand Indicators
 - Marketing Brochure
 - Product Samples

¹ Architectural Research Associates, 300 Gorge Road, Suite 42, Cliffside Park, NJ 07010 908-369-8002.

Handouts Work and Keep You Visible

I have used handouts based on the above checklist for nearly 10 years worth of education and training seminars for architects, product manufacturers, and sales representatives. The handouts are always highly rated in the program evaluations, Many times I have had former attendees come up to me years later and say they still have and refer to my program handouts.

In the final analysis, a handout is what represents the quality and intensity of your presentation. Carefully and tastefully handled, a handout can be a tremendously powerful marketing tool in support of solutions rather than products.

It is critical to remember that in this business the need to stand out, to differentiate ourselves from the competition, and most importantly, to provide value, is paramount. An excellent handout will set you apart from your competitors and provide a tangible, leave behind value for your education seminar attendees.

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