

CONFESSIONS OF AN ARCHITECTURAL MARKETER

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As an architectural marketer, educator, and trainer I have tried to identify and present the most effective ways of reaching architects, establishing relationships, getting products listed in specifications, developing great educational programs, improving presentation skills, minimizing substitutions, networking, and a host of other strategies and tactics to effectively market architectural design professionals.

Marketing not Sales

I have long pounded home the notion that you don't sell design professionals; you market them. The critical strategy is how to overcome the "peddler" image of the product rep and become a key resource and industry expert. Time and time again, I have made the point that architects don't buy products; they specify them. I have offered the notion that marketing is really education; so don't sell, educate.

While marketing is a key aspect of the effective construction product representative, it still is not the whole package. Issues on specifying and specifications are integral to success. Developing and presenting outstanding continuing education programs are incredibly effective in opening doors into design professional offices are crucial. Learning to be marketer-educator instead of a salesperson is the hallmark of a successful construction product representative.

What is Missing?

What then is the missing element in highly effective construction product representative? I have found myself coming full circle in the process and am convinced that in the end, the bottom line is selling. Not selling products, no, never that, but selling solutions. Design professionals operate on the basis of identifying problems and developing solutions for those problems.

Products Rarely Solve Problems.

Products are merely elements in a solution and it is critical to being effective with design professionals to make this key differentiation.

Solutions solve problems; products are a part of a solution, but not the solution itself.

Don't misunderstand, products are critical to good solutions but are rarely the sum total of an actual solution to a problem. Solutions are made up of a series of issues, elements, constraints, and opportunities that can be simple or complex and require a range of responses to solve. A product is merely on element of a solution.

Sell Solutions NOT products

When product representatives can successfully move themselves from a product focus to a solutions focus, they immediately join the larger world of the design professional who is dealing with hundreds of issues, problems, solutions, and a vast array of products. Highly effective product representatives use all of the techniques of specification selling, continuing education, relationship, and networking to position themselves to do one thing and one thing only, selling solutions not products.

Sell, Sell, Sell

In most of my presentations to product manufacturers and representatives, I am often challenged by individuals complaining that, “If architects were as open and available as you are, then we wouldn’t have any problems. What do we do with the architects who refuse to see us or make us substitute time after time but refuse to put us in their specifications?”

This question has troubled me greatly for many years. I hate to say, “Well, try harder”, or walk away. Those are appropriate responses but not very useful or effective. Lately I have begun to see that my original approach of minimizing sales and maximizing marketing was only half the answer. In the final analysis, product representatives’ ability to sell themselves is probably the most effective tool in their arsenal. Unfortunately, sales types do not decouple sales techniques from the product they represent. When they sell, they sell product, rather than selling themselves, their expertise, and most important, solutions.

Using Your Sales Experience Effectively

Next time you run up against a design professional who is pig-headed, obstinate, biased, and generally a pain-the-posterior, sell. But don’t sell them product because they won’t buy, and they will throw you out on your posterior. Sell them yourself; be aggressive, not about products but about solutions. Answer their objections, not with products but with solutions.

As a specifier it is easy, and actually quite entertaining, to ignore representatives who are obviously trying to get their product specified by selling features and benefits. Especially when they don’t have a clue about your design issues, what kinds of problems are confronting you, and particularly, when they believe their product is the only one that could possibly work.

Hard to Ignore Industry Expertise

It is however, much more difficult to ignore someone who demonstrates industry expertise, who is knowledgeable about design and specification processes, and who can supply a complete competitive solution for the design problem. Ultimately, this is how relationships are forged between design professionals and product representatives, solutions not products.

As a product representative, I never talked to design professionals about my company or my products. I only addressed industry issues and specification problems. I think that my approach was so intriguing that specifiers forgot I was a rep and continued to listen to me as a resource and industry expert. I never mentioned that I was an architect or specifier until much later in the process. I focused immediately and solely on understanding the specifier's issues, problems, and constraints. I got my product specified almost every time, and most the specifiers had never heard of my product prior to meeting me.

So I must finally confess that my long held notion about marketing rather than selling was a cover up. Sell your heart out, answer objections, close the deal, get specified but don't sell products SELL SOLUTIONS.

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