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Constancy and Change

Last month I wrote about how customer expectations are demanding that design and contracting services be provided faster with less resources, in spite of increasing building complexities. How design and contracting sectors have responded. How national productivity indicators have risen while employment numbers have remained constant. We Americans are doing more with less. We are building faster and more efficient than ever before.

It hasn't been without some considerable pain and anxiety. Daily tasks and project strategies have changed with changed management strategies. One trend is the transfer of product selection tasks, once done by the design sector, to the contracting sector as part of a design/build contract or design/build specification. It is this trend and the effect it will have on the role and place of the product specifier that interests me.

The design/build building procurement process formalizes a process of contractor selection of product and manufacturer. The contract document that fixes scope and price between the Design/Builder and the Owner is specific to function and need, but allows contractor leeway in selecting the final solution to achieving the desired results. The Design/Builder is required to complete the design and issue detailed drawings and narrow scope specifications to solicit bids for trade contracts. In this scenario, design firms are hired by Owners to design and issue a design document to solicit proposals from Design/Builders. The specification can take on various types and formats but all are abbreviated, and less specific than the traditional narrow scope specification. Specification leeway in the selection of product and manufacturer rewards the Design/Builder who responds with the most cost efficient solution. The manufacturer and product are determined by the Design/Builder by the specification it prepares for the trade contracts, or by the trade contract proposals that are submitted by the trade contractors and accepted by the Design/Builder. The Design/Builder prepares the technical construction specifications, not the Owner's designer.

This process has one key advantage over the design-bid-build process. The selection of products by the Design/Builder now includes the experience of product cost and performance of the Design/Builder. The entity that warrants the construction also selects the products, manufacturers and subcontractors. A



new master builder is taking shape to control the building process, but this time from the contracting side. Early in this century, before the artificial separation between design and contracting developed to manage business and professional risk, the Architect wore the mantle of master builder. Now it is the Contractor.

This trend, the shift of detailed product and manufacturer specification responsibility from the building design sector to the contracting sector, was acknowledged by CSI recently when it announced that after many years of promoting a commercial master specification of narrow scope technical specifications called SpecText it would replace this effort by a performance based specification that would be used by Design/Builders and Owners to set scope and cost. The new specification is being developed by a joint effort of CSI and the Design Build Institute of America.

Although a complete definition of this new design/build master specification isn't available, its intent will be to define the program and design parameters in a building specification to allow creative and varied responses from the Design/Builders. Construction documents including specifications will be left to the Design/Builder. The user of this new CSI/DBIA commercial master D/B specification will not need product knowledge, but building systems knowledge and building engineering skills.

What may evolve will be two distinct job descriptions for specifiers. One performance and building engineering based to assist the Owner and designer in setting the program and design parameters of a building in a scope document. The other job description, manufacturer and product based, will interpret the scope documents, selecting products and manufacturer solutions for bidding by trade contractors. The performance based specifier would work closely with Owners and building designers. The product based specifier would work closely with the Design/Builder. This vision certainly isn't unique for our industry. A very similar practice split happens with estimators. Conceptual estimators have very distinct skills from detailed take-off estimators. The conceptual estimator job description share many of the requirements that a performance specifier job description requires. And so with the detailed estimator and the product specifier.

Specifiers who want the challenge and rewards of understanding the application of manufactured construction products, and who see the Design/Builder as a new client would do well to add skills of costing and conceptual estimating to their resume.

The traditional design-bid-build building process will survive. The Architect providing lump sum bid documents will continue to need the services of a product specifier. However CSI believes that the design/build process will continue its growth as the method of building procurement for an increasing share of the market. The designer of buildings using this D/B process will need the services of a "conceptual" specifier to create performance based narratives. This is an exciting prospect for anyone who wants the challenge of focusing on building engineering of architectural systems.

What hasn't changed is the basic responsibility of the manufacturer and the specifier.

A construction specifier must be able to rely on data published by construction product manufacturers and the associations those manufacturers establish. The specifier must also be able to rely on the interpretations of the data made by individuals who represent those manufacturers. The specifier



must decide who to believe and who not to believe, and on that judgement rests the quality of the final product, the building. What will change is that the manufacturer and representative will find the product specifier working for a contracting company as well. The manufacturers representative will have to distinguish between the conceptual specifier and the product specifier to adjust product information and project service.

CSI supports my efforts at raising the standard of the product representative and specifier. Through this article I have described one aspect of the changing circumstances in the building industry, and the tremendous opportunities created for the specifier and the representative. Take advantage of all that CSI has to offer. Your business can use it.

On behalf of the Board of the Construction Specifications Institute's Kansas City Chapter I want to extend a holiday greeting to our members and building industry associates, and a heartfelt wish for a prosperous and happy new year.