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## *Working Smart*

Customer expectations are demanding that design and contracting services be provided faster with less resources, in spite of increasing building complexities. Down sizing, right sizing, multi-tasking, out sourcing, team centered decision making, bottom-up organizations, partnering, are all management strategies implemented to respond to customer demands. It has worked. 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. The ranks of product representatives and specifiers have been thinned. Sales territories are expanded to trim sales forces. Specialized technical tasks once done by specifiers are devalued and transferred to the contractor as design/build takes a greater role in the building industry for delivering buildings.

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.

The manufacturer must be able to rely on the specifier to understand the product and its applicability to the problem statement and program requirement of the building and owner. The manufacturer must also be able to rely on the specifier to write a specifications that is clear, complete, coordinated and correct.

One technique that works successfully for me and others is the effort put into a relationship with a product representative who is relied on for technical assistance, application questions, contracting and construction knowledge. This ongoing relationship allows the time for both the specifier and the representative to understand in detail the product application to the particular building type of the design firm, and allow the manufacturer of the product to commit resources to



best serve the specifier on a long term basis. Not all of the product representatives I interact with have this status nor do all of the products that I am responsible for specifying warrant that kind of time and effort. There are a handful of critical elements and systems that do warrant this kind of relationship to manage the design firm's risk of building design failures and program defects. I refer to these representatives as rep/consultants. These representatives are my partners in the design specifying process.

The critical elements that may require a rep/consultant are :

- systems, or products critical to a Owner or operations staff of a building;
- systems, or products critical to design implementation of energy, environmental, image or program requirements;
- traditional high risk building systems or products such as roofing and waterproofing.

Once a critical element in the design or a reoccurring critical element in a building type is identified how do I identify a product representative to work more closely with as a rep/consultant?

The most important factors influencing a specifier's decision about who to trust should be the reputation of the product, the reputation of the manufacturer, and the reputation of the manufacturer's representative, in that order. Performance of the product is after all the bottom line of the specifier's task.

The representative must represent a product that satisfies a critical element in the design or program statement. The product's manufacturer must be competitive in the marketplace. The manufacturer must be committed to the design community by rewarding the representative for specification credit. The manufacturer must be represented at the project location and have the organization to follow-up with bidders, suppliers, and installers to deliver the promised performance of a product during bidding, contracting, award, and installation. The relationship only benefits the project if the product solves a design issue and the manufacturer is successful at winning a contract that it is specified on. The representative must be experienced, credible, and have integrity on both the design and contract side. The CDT and CCPR certificates earned by product representatives through education in CSI certification programs is one way of deciding.

As the specifier in the relationship I pledge to my rep/consultants that I will understand their product, the industry they compete in, and the specification recommendations that are made for the project. That I will be fair with substitutions, and submittals. More importantly for the representative I will provide the representative with early on project information to help the manufacturer be competitive at bid time. This is one of the benefits for the manufacturer who supports its sales representatives who work hard to become a respected rep/consultant.

I firmly believe local representation of a product by a trusted person is a must when follow-up with bidders, suppliers, and installers is critical to achieving the promised performance of a product.

Working smart by developing rep/consultant relationships for my critical product applications has helped me survive the change in design firm management while continuing to meet the clients expectation of faster and cheaper.

CSI supports my efforts at raising the standard of the product representative and specifier. Take advantage of all that CSI has to offer. Your business can use it.