

BUILT TO LAST

Specification Secrets from Industry Giants

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INTRODUCTION

Do you want to get your building products specified? Would you like to increase your ROI and market share? This book will help you go from zero to hero on your specifications journey. Whether you are a beginner or an industry veteran, this guide will teach you the most effective methods to reach the decision-makers and get your products specified.

Throughout these pages, we divulge product specification strategies that have been perfected over decades. We provide you with specification techniques that have worked for the most successful building product manufacturers in the AEC industry. Regardless of whether you run a small family-owned business or a Fortune 500 company, these solutions will increase your specifications and build stronger relationships with design professionals.

Our team will demystify the product specification process and help you get inside the minds of specifiers. We will teach you how to get on the design team and influence specifiers so that your product is specified.

The construction industry is saturated with products. How can your company command attention and market share? How can you cut through the noise? We will teach you how to leverage effective product specification tools, including AIA courses, webinars, podcasts, LEED documentation, material databases, guide specs, and direct product presentations.

Drawing on real-world case studies, we'll disclose best practices used by successful manufacturers to dominate their market niche and defeat the competition. By the end of this book, you will have the confidence and expertise to get your products specified.

CHAPTER 1

Demystifying Product Specifications

Behind every magnificent building stands a meticulously written specification. Building product specifications are the unsung heroes of architectural innovation. Like the building's DNA, specifications dictate its form, function, and future.

Building product specifications are detailed documents that outline the requirements, standards, and characteristics of materials, components, and systems used in construction projects. These specifications provide precise instructions on the quality, performance, dimensions, installation methods, and other relevant factors for each product or material to be incorporated into the construction project.

Building product specifications serve as a vital communication tool between architects, engineers, contractors, suppliers, and other stakeholders involved in the project, ensuring that everyone has a clear understanding of the materials and products to be used, thereby contributing to the overall quality, safety, and integrity of the building.

To specify something means to identify it clearly, accurately, and thoroughly. Specifications, often shortened to "specs," cover various aspects in construction. The spec book or Project Manual gathers these specifications, detailing every product, material, system, assembly, or equipment required for a project. This clarity ensures that procurement, manufacturing, fabrication, and subsequent installation or construction align with the terms of the contract.

Specification sections provide detailed descriptions and requirements. Essentially, specifications act as a link between the Owner's goals and the Architect's plans, facilitating a solution that meets both parties' needs. These specifications may include performance criteria, product standards, testing procedures, installation guidelines, manufacturer's instructions, industry norms, and other directives for successful operation and maintenance.

Building Blocks: A History of Specifications

Throughout history, humans have possessed a natural inclination towards construction. As the need for shelter grew, so did the refinement of building techniques and the emergence of skilled labor. Initially, early buildings were simple combinations of materials.

However, as civilizations progressed, buildings became increasingly sophisticated. Residences, markets, governmental edifices, and temples came to represent societal advancement. The Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, and Chinese each employed diverse building methods and materials, resulting in iconic structures such as the Colosseum, Parthenon, Great Pyramid of Giza, and the Great Wall of China.

In Medieval Europe, master builders were responsible for the construction of castles and cathedrals, serving as both architects and engineers. Unlike today, there were no standardized textbooks on building techniques during the Middle Ages. Instead, master craftsmen passed down their knowledge through apprenticeships and familial inheritance. Trade secrets were closely guarded as they were crucial for a craftsman's livelihood. This era saw a significant emphasis on craft training and education, leading to the organization of craft guilds. Three levels of proficiency were recognized within these guilds: master, journeyman, and apprentice.

During the Renaissance in Italy, trades became specialized, with master masons and carpenters directed by architects. The Renaissance architect was often an artist (a painter or sculptor) who had little knowledge of building technology but a keen grasp of the rules of classical design. The architect thus had to provide detailed drawings for the craftsmen setting out the disposition of the various parts. The technical side of architecture was mainly left up to the craftsmen.

This change in the way buildings were designed had a fundamental difference on the way problems were approached. Where the Medieval craftsmen tended to approach a problem with a technical solution in mind, the Renaissance architects started with an idea of what the end product needed to look like and then searched around for a way of making it work.

By the time of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, construction became distinguished from design. Theoretical principles from fields such as physics, mathematics, chemistry, and thermodynamics were emerging and utilized to establish building science as a distinct discipline. This period also saw the clarification of roles within the building professions, including architecture, engineering, and construction.

The London Building Act of 1844 introduced the first systematic national building standard. It mandated that builders provide a two-day notice to the district surveyor before construction. The act also enforced regulations on wall thickness, room height, repair materials, building division, chimney and fireplace design, drainage, and street construction to meet minimum requirements.

Following World War II, building construction specifications broadened with the availability of advanced materials and options. The Construction Specifications Institute (CSI) was established in 1948 by specification writers from government agencies to organize specifications using a numbering system. In 1975, a CSI publication introduced the term “MasterFormat” which serves as a standard for organizing specifications and other written information for commercial and institutional building projects.

Specification Stakeholders

Specifications are the threads that weave together the creativity of architects, engineers’ expertise, and contractors’ craftsmanship. In the world of architecture, engineering, and construction, specifications are the language that ensures every stakeholder is speaking the same dialect of quality and excellence.

Who is responsible for creating, reviewing, and requiring specifications? The process of developing specifications can vary depending on the

specific procedures within each office, the extent of work undertaken, the number of specifications necessary, and the size of the AEC firm. In smaller firms, either a principal or a project architect might be tasked with drafting specifications.

Medium-sized firms may employ a dedicated full-time specifier. Larger firms may have an entire department devoted to drafting specifications. Some firms or projects may benefit from collaborative efforts among project team members in crafting specifications. Moreover, there are third-party specialists available who provide consultation services and are adept at composing specifications.

Specifications serve as contractual documents essential for multiple stakeholders involved in a project, including building product manufacturers, specifiers, architects, engineers, general contractors, subcontractors, owners, lenders, building departments, and others engaged in project delivery. Practically everyone involved in the project, from conception to occupation, will need to reference specifications at various stages.

Office Master Specifications

Most specifiers typically rely on either an in-house “office” master specification that they have developed and regularly update, or they opt for one of the commercially available master guide specification products. Office master specifications serve as a central reference for construction projects within an organization or a specific industry. These specifications are typically developed and maintained by AEC firms to streamline the process of creating project-specific specifications.

Getting your product into the office master specifications of an AEC firm is like securing a golden ticket to success in the construction industry. It’s about becoming an indispensable part of the construction process. Being part of the office master specifications means being part of the foundation upon which every project is built.

Office master specifications contain detailed information about various aspects of construction, including materials, products, methods, and quality standards. They often cover a wide range of building elements,

such as structural systems, architectural finishes, mechanical and electrical systems, and sustainability requirements.

The purpose of office master specifications is to establish consistent guidelines and standards for construction projects, ensuring that all elements meet the desired quality and performance criteria. By using pre-established master specifications, project teams can save time and effort in developing customized specifications for each project, while also ensuring consistency and compliance with industry standards and best practices.

Product Guide Specifications

A product specification identifies a particular product or type of product to serve as the foundation for design decisions. For instance, it may specify a particular brand of window or provide a list of several options that meet the design criteria. Sole-source proprietary specifications, which mandate the use of only one manufacturer, are typically not permissible in publicly funded projects. Governmental acquisition regulations often require that at least three different manufacturers be presented as options.

Specifiers may alternatively utilize an open proprietary specification, which names three different manufacturers and allows for substitutions. Manufacturers commonly provide proprietary product specifications focusing on a single product to aid designers in specifying. These specifications offer guidelines for how the product should be specified, utilized, and installed, and they are often accessible on the manufacturer's website.

Outline Specifications

Outline specifications serve as a fundamental checklist helping the design team in progressing through various project stages. They encompass essential selections and details concerning manufacturers, materials, equipment, and components. These specifications play a crucial role in defining construction cost estimates, schedules, and value analysis studies, thereby supporting the design process.

Well-prepared outline specifications document decision-making processes, clarify construction drawings, and mitigate conflicts between drawings and specifications, ultimately reducing the likelihood of changes during later stages.

Ways of Specifying Building Products

There are four main approaches to specifying: descriptive, performance, reference standard, and proprietary. Project specifications often incorporate multiple methods of specification, and a single specification section may utilize all four approaches. There isn't a definitive rule for choosing one method over another or using a combination, but most approaches involve listing manufacturers who provide products relevant to the section.

Performance Specifications define desired outcomes without prescribing specific methods, thus allowing flexibility for manufacturers and contractors to meet minimum standards. Performance specifications are commonly used in fire ratings, lighting, energy efficiency, and sustainability requirements.

Descriptive Specifications detail product characteristics and installation requirements without specifying particular brands or outcomes. Architects or engineers ensure performance standards are met. This method requires technical expertise and is less common due to project complexity and the availability of reference standards.

Reference Standard Specifications uses industry standards, developed by professional groups, associations, and governments. This practice eliminates the need for detailed requirements in the specification text. The specification writer must understand relevant standards thoroughly and incorporate them accurately.

Proprietary Specifications may directly identify selected products. A specification is also considered proprietary even if a manufacturer's name is not mentioned, but the specified product is available from a single source. This can reduce costs, save design time, and simplify the bidding process.

A proprietary specification involves specifying specific products and processes by providing proprietary information such as the manufacturer's name, brand name, model number, and other unique characteristics. Proprietary specifications may favor certain products and manufacturers unfairly, potentially leaving contractors to work with unfamiliar products or processes. As a result, proprietary specifications are typically not allowed in public projects.

There are two types of proprietary specifications: **closed and open**. An open proprietary specification describes a single product or system but allows the bidder to suggest an alternate or substitute product. Closed proprietary specifications enable detailed completion of the design, which reduces variables and facilitates accurate pricing.

Building owners often want to avoid closed, proprietary specifications because it does not allow for competitive bidding, unless the building owner and the architect make a conscious decision to close the spec for other reasons. An example of this would be for an addition to a large corporate campus to include a closed spec for sink faucets by a specific manufacturer, so it matches other faucets on the campus, using the same repair parts which can be kept on hand by the facility manager for quick and inexpensive repairs.

A closed proprietary specification may specify a single product or offer several product options, with no substitutions permitted. On the other hand, open proprietary specifications can help address the issue of overpriced sole-source items. They allow for alternative products, such as providing alternatives that also meet the criteria outlined in the specification's descriptive or performance sections, or by defining criteria in a manner that enables easy identification of substitutions or alternatives without compromising the design intent.

Types of Specifications in Construction Documents

Construction documents can use three types of specifications: sheet, shortform, and full-length. These specifications are commonly utilized by bidders, proposers, and contractors for pricing and executing a project. Each type of specification differs slightly in terms of information, content, and format.

Sheet Specifications are concise documents that provide essential information about a construction project. They typically consist of abbreviated details, often presented on a single sheet or a few pages. These specifications offer a condensed overview of the project requirements. Sheet specifications are commonly employed for very small projects that do not require formal project manuals.

Shortform Specifications offer more detail than sheet specifications but are still concise compared to full-length specifications. They provide moderate information in a few pages, aiming for essential details without excessive verbosity. Suitable for various projects, especially small ones, and those using design-build, owner-build, interior design, and tenant improvement.

Full-length Specifications detail materials, products, equipment, systems, and assemblies with comprehensive information. They employ SectionFormat, which provides a uniform standard for arranging specification text in each of the project manual's sections using a three-part format. While suitable for most projects, they're particularly crucial for understanding complex designs depicted in drawings.

MasterFormat

MasterFormat is a standard for organizing specifications and other written information for commercial and institutional building projects in North America. Sometimes referred to as the "Dewey Decimal System" of building construction, MasterFormat is a product of the Construction Specifications Institute (CSI) and Construction Specifications Canada (CSC).

MasterFormat provides a structured system for organizing information about materials, products, and construction processes in a consistent and logical manner. MasterFormat divides a construction project into a series of numbered divisions and sections, each addressing a specific aspect of the project, such as concrete, masonry, electrical systems, plumbing, and so on. This standardized format helps architects, engineers, contractors, and other stakeholders communicate effectively and ensures that essential project information is organized in a way that is easy to understand and access.

MasterFormat comprises two main groups: Procurement and Contracting Requirements, and the Specifications Group. The Procurement and Contracting Requirements Group is located within Division 00 and encompasses the table of contents and supplementary contract documents necessary for project delivery. The Specifications Group encompasses the remaining Divisions 01 through 49, detailing the technical specifications for project installation and construction.

Division 01 – General Requirements

Division 01 encompasses the general requirements of a project and typically establishes guidelines for quality standards throughout the work. This division outlines administrative, procedural, and regulatory mandates, including project management, coordination, submittal procedures, quality assurance, quality control, substitution protocols, temporary facilities and controls, performance criteria, life cycle activities, and commissioning. These provisions govern the entirety of the project and are crucially applicable to all subsequent divisions of the specifications.

Divisions 02-49 Specifications

Divisions 02-49 cover separate work areas, each addressing specific aspects and requirements related to quality assurance and quality control for individual sections. Each section adheres to a three-part structure: general, products, and execution, as outlined in CSI's SectionFormat.

SectionFormat and Three-Part Specification

Apart from assigning a unique identity to each specification through the MasterFormat number and title, SectionFormat offers a standardized approach for organizing specification text within each section of the project manual. This structured format consists of three parts, ensuring consistency and clarity throughout the document.

Part 1 (General) serves as an introductory executive summary for the specification section. It encompasses administrative requirements, the submittal and substitution process, and quality assurance specific to that particular specification section only.

Part 2 (Products) pertains to the manufacturing and fabrication of the product. It includes information on acceptable manufacturers, assembly or fabrication tolerances, source quality control, tests, inspections, and manufacturer services during fabrication.

Part 3 (Execution) addresses the work carried out at the project site, covering installation tolerances, manufacturer's services during and after installation, as well as field or site quality control, tests, and inspections.

In conclusion, understanding product specifications is crucial for building product manufacturers and their sales representatives. By training reps about specifications, manufacturers empower them to convey product features and benefits confidently, build trust with customers, drive sales, and be a resource to design professionals and specifiers.

CHAPTER 2

Inside the Mind of a Specifier

A specifier sees beyond the bricks and mortar; they see the potential to create environments that inspire, innovate, and endure. In the mind of a specifier, every material choice is a brushstroke on the canvas of construction, shaping not just buildings, but entire experiences.

Specifiers often have significant influence in the decision-making process for material selection in construction projects. By building relationships with specifiers, manufacturers can increase the likelihood of having their products specified in projects, which can lead to increased sales and market share. Collaborating with specifiers also provides manufacturers with insights into emerging trends, industry standards, and market demands, which can inform product development and marketing strategies.

Who is a specifier? Specifiers can include architects, engineers, interior designers, and other specialists involved in the project. In addition, building owners can be part of the product specification process, particularly in projects where they have specific requirements for the construction of their building.

Building owners often have specific goals or priorities for their projects, such as sustainability, energy efficiency, durability, or aesthetic preferences. They may communicate these requirements to the project team, including specifiers, to ensure the selected products align with their vision and objectives.

Regardless of whether the individual crafting the specifications is employed within the architecture firm or acts as an independent consultant for the design team, their duties remain consistent. A specifier's responsibilities may include:

- Conducting research on building materials and products to understand their properties, performance, and suitability for specific project requirements.
- Collaborating with architects, engineers, and other professionals to ensure that the specified materials align with the design intent and meet technical requirements.
- Developing detailed written specifications that outline the types, quantities, quality standards, and installation methods of materials and products to be used in the project.
- Reviewing construction drawings and other project documents to ensure consistency and accuracy between specifications and design plans.
- Recommending alternative materials or products when necessary to achieve project goals or address budget constraints.
- Keeping abreast of industry trends, building codes, regulations, and emerging technologies related to construction materials and products.
- Providing guidance and support to project teams during the construction phase, including answering questions and resolving issues related to materials.
- Facilitating communication and coordination between project stakeholders such as architects, contractors, suppliers, and clients regarding material selections and specifications.

Crafting Effective Specifications

The project team must understand the economic ramifications of specification requirements. While some provisions may seem cost-neutral,

they could lead to substantial expenses during construction. Each specification requirement carries economic implications that should be carefully considered.

Irrespective of the author of specification sections, products must undergo thorough research, evaluation, selection, and clear coordination with drawings and other specified items. The process of product selection demands a systematic and progressive gathering of information, commencing during the early design phases. Selection criteria are derived from the owner's requirements, code specifications, and other design constraints. Various factors come into play when evaluating a product, including the product itself, the manufacturer, installation requirements, and cost considerations.

Prior to drafting a specification section, the specifier must possess all pertinent information related to the product, material, equipment, system, or assembly, along with all project-specific details. Examples of such project-related information encompass sustainability objectives, construction time constraints, the owner's budget, and whether the owner has its own product and material specifications.

Four Rules of Writing Specifications

Specifiers are meticulous wordsmiths who craft and refine the language used in construction specifications. Their role demands keen attention to detail, as they must accurately convey the requirements, standards, and expectations for materials, products, and construction methods. Writing specifications relies on four effective rules of communication, the "Four C's", which include:

Clear: Use correct grammar and simple sentences to prevent ambiguity.

Concise: Remove redundant words while ensuring clarity.

Correct: Provide information accurately and precisely.

Complete: Include all necessary information without omitting important details.

Lessons From Industry Titans

For building product manufacturers, securing specifications for their products is paramount in ensuring market success. To achieve this goal, manufacturers must navigate a complex landscape of design professionals, specifiers, and project requirements. Here are some words of wisdom from seasoned veterans who have weathered the storms and carved out paths to success in the competitive landscape. Their insights, born from years of experience and lessons learned, offer invaluable wisdom for manufacturers aiming to make their mark.

- Specifiers don't care about you; they care about how you can solve their problem.
- Show specifiers the value of what they will get.
- Specifiers need to see the difference between your product and your competition.
- Never assume anything. Ask the specifier for clarification when in doubt.
- Don't be afraid to ask "dumb" questions. But listen to the answer carefully.
- Make friends in the AEC industry, not enemies.
- Do your job and don't complain. Nobody likes a drama queen.
- Invest your efforts where you get the highest specification returns.
- Don't let your fellow product reps outwork you.
- Don't get complacent. Constantly generate ideas to get products specified.
- Be transparent with specifiers, especially about any of your product's weaknesses.
- Be visible, approachable, and accessible to specifiers.
- If you make a mistake, own it. Blame no one.

- Never forget your support staff. Getting specified is a collaborative effort.
- Build assets to get your products specified.
- Manufacturers who are winners, embrace educating their team and specifiers.
- You're selling a positive outcome, not a building product.
- Great customer service will keep specifiers coming back to you and your product.
- Rigidity restricts. Welcome new marketing ideas for products from co-workers.
- What you say about your product isn't as important as what others say about your product.

The wisdom imparted by industry giants reminds us that success is not merely measured by profit margins or market share, but by the impact we make on the built environment and the relationships we cultivate along the way. By embodying the principles of excellence, integrity, and continuous improvement, manufacturers can chart a course towards a brighter future, where innovation thrives, and quality reigns supreme.

CHAPTER 3

Touchdown: Winning the Specification Game

Legendary Dallas Cowboys football coach Tom Landry once said, “Setting a goal is not the main thing. It is deciding how you will go about achieving it and staying with that plan.” What are your specification goals? Where is your company right now, where do you want to go, and how do you get there?

American football is a widely recognized and understood sport in many parts of the world. Today, we’ll draw parallels between players, strategies, and goals in football and the various components and goals of the architectural specification process. Just as football teams and players face various challenges, so do manufacturers and product reps.

We can break down the various components of building product specification into the following parallels with football: rules of the game, building your team, developing winning plays, moving down the field, interceptions and substitutions, and the game-winning touchdown.

Rules of the Game

The rules of the game involve a set of guidelines and processes that architects, specifiers, and construction professionals follow to select and specify the materials and products to be used in a building project. The rules of the game include:

Compliance with Building Codes: All specified products must meet the building codes, regulations, and standards applicable to the project's location.

Suitability for Intended Use: Products should meet the functional, aesthetic, and performance requirements of the project.

Quality and Durability: Specified products should meet quality and durability standards to ensure that they perform well over the expected lifespan of the building.

Cost-Effectiveness: Products must be chosen with consideration for the project's budget and cost-effectiveness. Specifiers need to find a balance between quality and cost.

Compatibility: Building products must be compatible with other specified materials and systems within the construction, ensuring that they work together seamlessly. Mixing incompatible building products is like expecting cats and dogs to coexist peacefully – it rarely ends well.

Environmental Impact: If your product is being specified for a LEED project, you better have HPDs, VOC emissions testing, and other transparency documentation available or you're in trouble.

Product Testing and Certification: Products should have undergone relevant testing and certification processes to verify their compliance with industry standards and regulations.

Availability and Lead Times: Products should be readily available from manufacturers or suppliers, with reasonable lead times to meet project schedules. Materials arriving late to a construction site can make architects go from 'Zen' to 'Zero patience' really quick.

Manufacturer Reputation: The reputation and track record of a product's manufacturer or supplier play a significant role in the specification process. A reputable manufacturer is more likely to provide high-quality products and support.

Documentation: Manufacturers need 3-part guide specs, drawing details, BIM, technical literature, and samples.

Substitution Process: In case a specified product becomes unavailable or needs to be substituted, there should be clear rules and procedures for substitution, typically involving the approval of architects or project stakeholders.

Communication and Collaboration: It is crucial that there is effective communication and collaboration between architects, specifiers, contractors, and product manufacturers. All parties involved should work together to make informed decisions.

Building Your Team

Coach Landry once said, “Confidence comes from knowing what you’re doing. If you are prepared for something, you usually do it. If not, you usually fall flat on your face.” Landry built one of the most successful offensive and defensive teams of all time in the NFL. Building a team of highly talented product reps to reach architects and get building products specified requires a strategic approach. Manufacturers should build a team that can implement these strategies:

Define Your Goals: Set clear, measurable goals for your team and a timeline for achieving them.

Understand the Architect’s Perspective: What problems can your products solve for architects?

Recruit and Train: Hire product reps with a construction background. Educate your reps not only about your products but also about your competitors. Encourage them to get their CDT credential through CSI and LEED Green Associate credential through USGBC so they are at the top of their game.

Develop a Strong Value Proposition: What are the unique benefits and features of your amazing product?

Sales and Marketing Materials: Does your company have an AIA online course, webinar, and lunch and learn presentation? How do you reach LEED professionals? Are you using social media such as blogs, podcasts, and LinkedIn videos to promote your products?

Build Relationships: Encourage your reps to build and maintain relationships with architects, both in-person and through networking events. Use online courses, webinars, and tradeshow to connect with the decision-makers.

Provide Exceptional Customer Support: Ensure that architects have easy access to technical support and product information. Resolve issues promptly and maintain a reputation for excellent customer service.

Focus on Outcomes, Not Activities: Phone calls, emails, and voice messages are business-getting activities, not outcomes. If an activity like AIA courses is linked to a positive outcome, then it should be encouraged. You need to define performance, outcomes, and strategies with your team. Going to tradeshow, sending samples, and shooting off emails are activities. Getting your products specified is an outcome. Don't ever forget that.

Develop Winning Plays

The architect is on your team, and you're trying to get the ball down the field and score a touchdown. Your team includes your building product reps, marketing team, admin staff, and R&D and technical support. Your team is trying to avoid an interception, otherwise known as a product substitution. Building product manufacturers need to be innovative, passionate, and persistent to win the specifications game. There are several strategies that can help manufacturers.

- Architectural Specification Presentations
- Online CE Courses
- Webinars
- Podcasts
- Lunch and Learns
- Industry Events

Some manufacturers lose specs and lose the game because they don't innovate and adapt to the changing times. We can learn a lot about

winning strategies from Coach Landry. He introduced several groundbreaking strategies to the game, including the 4-3 defense and the shotgun formation. His innovations reshaped how football was played and laid the foundation for modern football strategies.

Coach Landry was not wedded to a single playing style but tailored his approach to the strengths of his players and the challenges posed by opponents. What winning plays can manufacturers develop to beat their competition and increase their specification opportunities?

Transforming Metrics into Winning Plays

Leveraging data to reach the decision-makers and getting your products specified is vital for your business. Metrics enable informed decision-making by providing insights into behavior and market trends, allowing your reps to target the correct AEC firms using the most effective methods. A data-driven approach ensures continuous optimization to maximize return on investment and drive overall growth and profitability. Here are critical metrics (as of 2025) to help your team understand the playing field:

- 120,000 licensed architects in the United States
- 35,000 + candidates working toward licensure
- 494,000 licensed engineers
- 46 states have CE requirements for architects
- Most states require 12-24 hours of CE annually/biennially
- 100,000 AIA members need 18 HSW CE hours annually
- 100,000+ LEED professionals need CE hours
- 50,000+ licensed interior design professionals need CE hours

There are significant opportunities for building product manufacturers to reach the decision-makers by creating engaging continuing education programs.

Interceptions and Substitutions

An interception in football can be a game-changer. Football interceptions and building product substitutions by architects share similarities because they both involve unexpected changes in a carefully planned strategy, with potential consequences for the outcome. Let's examine the similarities:

Impact on the Game: An interception can dramatically shift the momentum of a football game. It can lead to points for the opposing team and change the course of the game. Similarly, building product substitutions can impact construction projects by altering costs, timelines, and even the quality of the final structure.

Risk and Reward: Both interceptions and building product substitutions involve a level of risk and reward. In football, the reward for the defensive line is a potential turnover, while the risk for a messy play by the offensive line is the chance of the pass being intercepted. In construction, the reward for substitutions might be cost savings for the project, but the risk involves potential compromises in quality or delays.

Adaptability: Successful football teams and manufacturers must be adaptable. When an interception occurs or when building product substitutions are needed, they must adjust their strategies and decision-making to ensure a positive outcome.

Product substitutions are a common occurrence, so it's essential to be prepared to justify the choice of your product. Just as you would when introducing your product to a design professional, be ready to give a similar presentation to contractors, subcontractors, or suppliers. If they bring up a competitor's lower cost, demonstrate how your product outperforms by reducing failures, minimizing callbacks, and requiring fewer on-site meetings with design professionals and owners. Most individuals are likely to opt for a slightly higher initial cost if it means reducing or eliminating potential risks.

Scoring the Touchdown

Despite their diligent efforts, numerous product representatives may still struggle to seal the deal because they fail to truly understand the specification process. While it's important to do everything correctly when

engaging with design professionals, such as timing your visits, providing necessary information, and aiding in the development of drawings and specifications, follow-through remains critical.

Even when you do “get the specification”, your work is not done. You must follow up with contractors and suppliers to ensure that your product is included in the bidding and pricing process before a construction contract is assigned, and you must be prepared to defend the specification against product substitutions.

Building product specification shares an unexpected kinship with the world of football. Just as a team’s dedication, strategic planning, and unwavering effort can lead to victory on the gridiron, in the realm of construction, hard work, meticulous preparation, and a commitment to excellence can secure a win in the form of a product specification. Whether on the field or in the world of architecture and construction, success is ultimately achieved by those who bring their best to the game, adapt to changing conditions, and persistently chase the elusive touchdown.

CHAPTER 4

Shaping Specifications: The Project Team

During the product specification process, each participant plays a crucial role in ensuring that the project meets its objectives and fulfills the requirements of all stakeholders. Among the key participants are the Owner, Architect, Engineer, Interior Designer, Constructor, Contractor, and other important design professionals.

The Owner

Owners wield significant influence over building product selection, prioritizing durability, cost-effectiveness, aesthetics, and sustainability. As one of the signatories in a construction contract alongside the Constructor, Owners have specific rights and responsibilities, including the ability to halt work and the obligation to pay for completed tasks. Owner involvement in design and construction varies, ranging from minimal oversight to full control. While some may heavily rely on Design Professionals, experienced Owners with complex projects may influence product selections directly.

Owners can be either public or private. The primary distinction between private and public construction projects lies in their funding and oversight. Private projects are commissioned and funded by private entities such as businesses or building owners, whereas public projects are governed by rules set by the federal or state government.

Owners often enlist various services to aid them in the design and construction phases. These may include financial institutions, attorneys, insurance companies, real estate agents, and appraisers. Additionally, owners might hire another entity to represent them, such as a project management company empowered to make decisions on their behalf.

The owner's requirements guide the creation of Outline Specifications, influencing initial drawings, specifications, and product selection during the design phase. The Owner is responsible for understanding contract documents, reviewing submittals promptly, coordinating items for installation, scheduling separate contracts, ensuring architects/engineers meet contractual obligations, and adhering to project requirements.

Owners must weigh the long-term implications of product choices, considering factors such as life-cycle costs, maintenance requirements, and potential impacts on occupant satisfaction and operational efficiency. By actively participating in the product selection process, Owners can contribute to the success of the project and help achieve their desired outcomes in terms of functionality, aesthetics, and value.

The Architect

Architects have a significant influence on shaping the built environment, dictating materials and products that define city skylines. The Architect oversees overall design, ensuring adherence to the Owner's requirements, aesthetic approach, building codes, and safety. They meet program requirements, design according to codes, and deliver within budget.

The Architect reviews drawings and project data to draft and revise project specifications. They are able to provide deep comprehension of design criteria to articulate the requirements for the relevant materials, equipment, installation, certifications, testing, and methods relevant to the project. The Architect conducts product research, aids in material selection, cultivates vendor relationships, conducts assessments of quality management, and offers technical guidance to project teams.

Established relationships play a significant role in the specification of materials for construction projects. Architects mainly depend on the longstanding connections they've forged with building product

manufacturers over the years. Numerous challenges persist for innovative yet unfamiliar products and manufacturers aiming to capture the attention of architects. One such hurdle is the essential process of writing project specifications. Many architects resort to copying and pasting from past specifications due to time constraints, sometimes reusing entire sections verbatim.

Effective product manufacturers offer accessible information, conduct informative lunch-and-learns, offer online courses, and frequently assist with specification writing. Conversely, the least successful product manufacturers have unwieldy websites, inadequately updated product information, and do not invest in outreach efforts.

Architects serve as the gatekeepers of innovation in the construction industry, meticulously selecting products that align with their design vision and project requirements. Their expertise and discernment not only shape the aesthetic and functionality of a building but also determine which products gain prominence in the market. For product manufacturers, earning the approval of architects is paramount, as it opens doors to widespread adoption of their products and success in the built environment.

The Engineer

The Engineer plays a crucial role within the project team, exerting influence over product specifications. Engineering encompasses various roles such as Civil, Structural, Mechanical, and Electrical, each further specializing in specific areas. With the growing complexity of construction projects, Architects increasingly rely on Engineers for guidance in the initial design stages. Engineers, often specializing in areas like fire safety, acoustics, and sustainability, assist Architects in building design.

Engineers focus on ensuring the safety and functionality of buildings by selecting structural materials, designing structural components, and specifying electrical, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and plumbing systems. In many instances, Engineers contribute to the concept stage of a building's design, though they may not specify products outright at this early phase. Nonetheless, they typically have specific products in mind during concept development.

As the project progresses, Engineers shift focus on the detailed performance of components, often supporting the Architect but still wielding considerable influence. They ensure designs meet safety and performance criteria, closely monitoring project progress and providing guidance to contractors. Engineers are accountable should any design issues arise during construction.

Building product reps need to understand the engineer's needs, provide technical information, offer product support and expertise, and ensure that the specified products meet the project's requirements and contribute to its success.

Interior Designer

Interior designers strategically choose colors, textures, and furnishings to transform spaces into visually appealing and functional environments. Additionally, interior designers excel in creating efficient layouts that optimize flow and usability. They maximize available space, whether it's a small apartment or a large commercial building, adding value to the project.

To achieve the desired outcome, architects and interior designers must collaborate closely, with interior designers understanding the architectural vision as a crucial part of this process. Architects envision the overall structure, and it's up to interior designers to seamlessly incorporate their design elements into the construction plans. This entails carefully analyzing architectural drawings to enhance both functionality and aesthetics.

Many architects collaborate with independent interior designers, tasked with managing interior finishes and assisting in space planning alongside the architect. These designers also meet with the owner to select fixtures, furnishings, and equipment, ranging from furniture to movable partition systems.

Moreover, interior designers often undertake projects independently, such as interior finish-outs. It's important to distinguish and engage with these firms separately from the architects you're working with. For product manufacturers, collaborating with interior designers is a

strategic move that can lead to increased visibility and market demand for their products.

Contractor Team

In building construction, every role is vital to realizing the blueprint. The contractor team, as skilled artisans, executes tasks shaping the structure. Their responsibilities range from groundwork to finishing touches. Understanding their roles is key for a product manufacturer to increase their specification opportunities.

Constructor: A constructor, typically a professional or company, manages and oversees the entire construction process, engaging in planning, design, coordination, and execution. They play a pivotal role in the project's early stages, assisting in plan and budget development, obtaining permits, and ensuring compliance with regulations.

Additionally, constructors handle tasks such as subcontractor hiring, material procurement, scheduling, and progress monitoring to ensure timely and budget-conscious project completion. Remember: Design Professionals write the specifications, but Constructors control spending.

Contractor: A contractor is hired for specific tasks in a construction project, such as electricians, plumbers, carpenters, or concrete workers. They operate under the supervision of the constructor or general contractor, focusing on their expertise. Their responsibility lies in executing their part of the project per contract specifications, timelines, and quality standards. Depending on project size and complexity, contractors may work independently or as part of a larger construction team.

Contractors influence product specifications by leveraging their expertise to propose alternative materials, ensuring compatibility and cost-effectiveness. They manage budgets and negotiate pricing with suppliers, seeking competitive options that align with project goals. Additionally, their relationships with suppliers may grant access to discounted rates or special offers. Overall, contractors' knowledge, budget considerations, and industry connections shape the final selection of materials used in construction projects.

Subcontractor: A subcontractor in a building project is a specialized entity hired by the main contractor or constructor to perform specific tasks or provide certain services within the project. Subcontractors typically have expertise in particular trades or disciplines, such as electrical work, plumbing, carpentry, or concrete pouring.

Subcontractors often have extensive knowledge of the products and materials within their specialized field. Based on their experience, they can recommend specific products that are best suited for the task at hand, considering factors such as durability, efficiency, and compatibility with other building components.

Specialty Consultants: Specialty consultants on a building project are professionals with expertise in specific technical or specialized areas relevant to the project. These consultants provide specialized services or advice to the project team, typically in areas beyond the scope of the architect or engineer's expertise. They may include engineers, acoustic consultants, lighting designers, LEED professionals, and façade experts.

Specialty consultants influence specifications in building projects by leveraging their technical expertise, ensuring code compliance, addressing performance requirements, promoting innovation, considering cost implications, and coordinating with the design team. They recommend specific materials, products, and systems, ensuring they meet regulatory standards and project goals.

In conclusion, product manufacturers must closely collaborate with the project team to ensure their products get specified. Engaging with architects, engineers, consultants, contractors, and owners helps manufacturers understand project needs and objectives. This collaboration allows manufacturers to showcase product benefits, address concerns, and provide necessary documentation for specification decisions. Manufacturers ensure that their products meet the project's unique needs and contribute to its overall success by working hand-in-hand.

CHAPTER 5

Phases of Construction and Specs

Building product manufacturers hold a crucial position in the supply chain in the construction industry, where precision and strategic planning are paramount. However, manufacturers must possess a comprehensive understanding of the various phases of construction to effectively position their products.

From project initiation to completion, construction projects undergo a series of meticulously planned stages, each demanding specific considerations, and decision-making processes. For manufacturers, this necessitates a deep comprehension of the phases of construction to foster productive collaborations with architects, engineers, contractors, and other stakeholders.

Building Project Phases

There are several important phases that building product manufacturer reps need to be well versed in. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) officially lists five separate design phases. They include Schematic Design, Design Development, Construction Documents, Bidding/Negotiation, and Contract Administration.

Understanding where your product fits in within the design process is crucial. Timing is everything when it comes to approaching Design Professionals. If you present your product too early, it may not align with their current needs or projects, leading to a missed opportunity and wasted effort. On the other hand, if you wait too long, they may have already committed to using competing products.

Schematic Design: During this phase, the owner and architect engage in discussions regarding the project's scope and the owner's specific needs. The architect conducts thorough research and analysis of the property, including considerations such as building codes and zoning regulations that may impact the site evaluation. The Schematic Design phase typically accounts for 15% of the total amount of work for the design professional.

The primary goal of this phase is to establish the fundamental design parameters of the building, encompassing its form and dimensions. The architect develops a comprehensive plan and initial exterior design, providing a conceptual framework for the building's appearance and functionality. The Schematic Design phase of the architectural design process involves an iterative process of sketches, meetings, and client consultations to refine the basic design concept. This phase is particularly enjoyable for clients as it allows them to engage in envisioning, discussing, and reviewing preliminary plans.

During the schematic design phase, the team needs to start outlining which principles to prioritize to align with the owner's objectives. Protocols like LEED mandate the initiation of specific energy strategies during this phase to qualify for LEED Credits. Manufacturers focus on discussions with the project team about key exterior and interior building components, along with providing samples. Building product reps should collect project information and prepare for more in-depth assistance in the next phase.

Design Development: Following the owner's endorsement of the schematic design and any essential program or budget modifications, the design development phase ensues. Documents produced during this phase solidify and articulate the scope of the entire project, encompassing architectural, structural, mechanical, plumbing, and electrical systems.

The project team focuses on crafting site plans and floor plans, honing elevations, resolving typical construction details, and pinpointing product and material choices. The Design Development Phase accounts for about 20% of the work and fees.

A thorough depiction of all design aspects, including architecture, structure, HVAC, electrical, plumbing, and fire protection systems, is crucial for this phase. Factors like acoustics, lighting, and landscaping must also be integrated seamlessly depending on the building's purpose. Building products that will have a significant impact on the interior or exterior of the building will be considered by the project team.

The main task that must be accomplished in Design Development is the preparation of drawings and documents for the owner that detail project scope, quality, and design. Specifications and details of selected materials and systems are part of this phase, with more technical detail provided by consultants. Building product reps should help with major exterior and interior products, and items like floor finishes for critical interior spaces. Building product reps should provide product costs, details, and specification information at this early stage.

Construction Documents: The subsequent phase is the Construction Documents (CD) phase. After the owner and architect approve the documents from the Design Development phase, the design professional proceeds to generate more detailed drawings. These drawings typically encompass specifications for construction materials and intricate construction details. This phase is roughly 40% of the design professional's fee. In most cases, the architect assumes the lead role in overseeing and harmonizing the efforts of the entire project team during the construction documents phase of project delivery.

Collaborative consultant teams tasked with compiling CDs are often sizable, with members spread across various locations and possessing diverse expertise in fields such as landscape architecture, civil, structural, mechanical, electrical, and environmental engineering, acoustics, lighting, interior design, and more.

Manufacturers need to get their products in front of the design professional since all product decisions will be made by the end of the Construction Documents phase. Product reps should provide technical support, samples, sustainability documentation, testing data, warranties, and any other critical specification documentation. Later in the book, we will discuss strategies that focus on this specific phase and how manufacturers can maximize their opportunities.

Bidding and Negotiation: The bidding phase begins when a project owner or architect announces that a project is open for bids and provides bid documents to potential bidders. The owner, their representative, a construction manager, or the project architect can manage the bidding process. This phase represents 5% of the design professional's fee.

Potential bidders are selected based on their capacity to handle a project effectively. While a contractor's reputation or prior association with the owner may be adequate in some instances, verifying the qualifications of contractors before distributing bidding documents is often necessary. Should any of the bidders wish to substitute materials or services otherwise specified in the bidding documents, the architect must receive a request for approval before the submission date.

During this stage, there may be a focus on offering pricing alternatives and implementing value engineering strategies to lower expenses. Value engineering refers to the practice of presenting options that cut costs while ensuring the project's success for the owner. Value engineering can help or hinder a building product manufacturer, depending on what side of the equation they are on.

Sometimes, construction projects face supply chain disruptions, causing material shortages. When confronted with such challenges, substitutions become essential to maintain the project's timeline. In many instances, viable substitutes are available, particularly for materials with similar properties.

During this phase, the design professional solely issues addenda, limiting assistance primarily to responding to their inquiries regarding product substitutions. Overall, the bidding and negotiation phase is crucial for selecting the most suitable contractor and establishing the framework for the successful completion of the building project.

Contract Administration: During construction, the architect provides construction oversight, ensuring the building is constructed to the design specifications. The design professional approves submittals from contractors. This can include shop drawings, product data sheets, and samples. The contract administration phase accounts for roughly 20% of the design professional's fee.

Change orders are part of the contract administration phase. An approved Change Order typically involves the Owner paying additional funds, exceeding the agreed-upon Contract Sum, to compensate a Contractor for work carried out at the Project that the Contractor can demonstrate is outside their Scope of Work.

The project architect typically views change orders unfavorably, as they entail additional administrative burdens at the very least. In certain instances, change orders resulting from faulty or incomplete drawings/specifications, which the Owner covers directly, can pose financial challenges for the design firm.

Change orders have garnered a negative reputation, often implying that a change signifies an error. However, mistakes are not the main driver of change orders. Any alterations to contract terms must be formalized through a change order. Most contract modifications, including change orders, stem from owner-initiated adjustments to the project, unforeseen circumstances, weather-related delays, contractual complexities, and other factors unrelated to any party's actions.

In conclusion, understanding the various construction phases is crucial for building product manufacturers to position their products in the market effectively. By comprehending the nuances of each phase, manufacturers can tailor their marketing and specification strategies to align with the specific needs and priorities of architects, contractors, and project owners at different stages of the construction process. By providing support and expertise throughout the construction process, manufacturers can foster trust and loyalty among industry professionals, leading to increased product adoption and long-term success.

CHAPTER 6

The Road to Specification Success

Ron Blank is a well-known product specification expert in the construction realm, whose illustrious career spans an impressive half-century, shaping the very landscape of the industry. As a pioneering thought leader, Ron has not only witnessed but actively participated in the evolution of construction practices, revolutionizing outreach to specifiers, AIA education programs, and sustainability initiatives along the way.

Ron's profound wisdom and unparalleled insights serve as guiding beacons for both seasoned professionals and burgeoning talents alike. With a wealth of experience garnered over five decades, Ron stands as a testament to innovation, foresight, and unwavering dedication. Here is Ron's story and the powerful specification secrets he wants to share with you.

Building from the Ground Up

I started my company in 1985 to help building product manufacturers get their products specified by design professionals. I created the Architectural Specification Program, which has helped hundreds of product manufacturers become successful. Before I launched my company in 1985, I worked for Burke, a very large manufacturer in the concrete accessories business for ten years.

When I started out in the construction industry, I had an appetite to learn everything, from how to read plans, to figuring out how complex projects were put together. I was young, and I wanted to succeed. I started out in sales, then became a sales manager, an account manager, a national account manager, a national sales manager and worked my

way up to the top. In the process, I worked with design professionals on hotels, office buildings, commercial buildings, airports, convention centers, schools, and many other kinds of projects.

I struggled to get to the next level when I began my career. I always asked myself, “what’s that quantum leap to get to the next level? How do I increase sales?” I had a wife and young family at the time. I was traveling all the time, and I wanted to be a success. It was difficult period. How do you balance a family life and work hard to get your products specified? When I worked for Burke in the concrete accessories business, all we did is call on contractors. I would go out and sell every kind of concrete accessory, chemical, and forming system directly to the contractors. They were the low-hanging fruit. You see the contractor, make your presentation, get a sale, and then your people deliver it.

My team used that strategy for years. We rarely called on architects and only when we needed to make a substitution or an equal and get submitted by the contractor to be on the project. Eventually, we found out our competition was killing us. They had architectural reps, and we started losing some of the bigger jobs that we needed to hit our sales goals. Things were not working out. I wanted to get those big jobs, too. One day, I had an epiphany.

All those guys I’m always seeing in the project manuals are all in the specs. How come we’re not in the specs? I wanted to find out the reason. I hired my previous boss, Don Lynskey, and sent him to seven states to solve our problems. I told him, “There’s three products I need you to take on the road to build up our sales. I need you to visit with the architects.”

Every other week, Don would call on 25 architects. He would set up appointments. This was a game-changer for the company because we started noticing we were in more project manuals. After two years, we were all over the specs. In the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, this was a revolutionary approach. Very few manufacturers did this. I told all my reps at Burke to start calling on architects. Instead of visiting only contractors, my reps had to meet with the architects, engineers, influencers, and decision-makers. We still use that same approach to this day.

Driving Sales with Specification Techniques

The Architectural Specifications Program that I developed at the Burke company is simple and effective. It builds name recognition for your brand and helps get your products specified. It also educates the design professional about your products. At the end of the day, you need your products in the office master specifications. It's all about implementation. It's simple, but you need to implement the program consistently to increase your specification opportunities.

Architects don't fill out purchase orders. I knew a guy who was an architectural rep for a large international company. The guy was fired because the manufacturer called him into a meeting and said he wasn't getting any purchase orders from the architects. The company had just set up a factory in the United States and didn't understand the specification process. Architects don't fill out purchase orders. One of my favorite spec writers of all time, Tim Kirby, told me, that he only specified products from his friends. You need to be a friend with architects, and you need to be their go to guy.

When I worked for Burke, I had 120 reps in 38 branches in the U.S. and Canada. Everything was going great. I was taking the bull by the horns. However, after a few of years, I hit a wall. I lay in bed at night, wondering how to share these powerful specification strategies with every office in the country. The methods we devised were too good to not share. Burke needed to setup a program to educate every product rep about these successful methods. Management didn't go for it. The company was run by CPAs and lawyers. They were risk averse and didn't want to change the status quo. Management refused to invest in education to train the sales force and implement the specification methods I created. My Texas team was highly successful, yet the company wouldn't budge. I was frustrated and disappointed.

From Scratch to Success: Starting a New Company

I decided to share my specification strategies with other manufacturers and start my own company. I would decide my own future. It was a huge risk but worth it. I asked my wife what she thought. We were a team, and it was important to get her blessing. I was making great money and had excellent benefits. I had a company car and profit sharing. My wife

appreciated my job stability and work schedule. I was only traveling two to three days a week. That would change drastically over the next few years.

My wife and I didn't have a lot of money saved. What would happen if I quit my job? My parents were not entrepreneurs. My father was a psychologist for the Army, and my mother worked for the Boy Scouts of America. They weren't the type of people to quit their jobs and start a new company. They didn't believe in taking great risks.

What if my new business failed? What would my wife and family think about me if the company went belly up? These were all concerns that I had. Before I left Burke, I tried to create a bulletproof plan. I decided to take on a partner to help shoulder the risk and defray the costs.

My friend Johnny Peden was a product rep for a glass company, and I pitched him my plan over lunch. I told him that we would visit 1100 AEC firms annually to get various building products specified. If you told one of your product reps today that they had to visit 1100 architects annually, they would fall out of their chair or quit. Most reps can't even visit 500 firms these days.

When I started my company, I traveled coast to coast for twelve years. In the beginning, I was on the road for over 40 weeks annually. My busiest year was 1995. I was away from my family for 45 weeks, making architectural calls. I loved the job but didn't like being away from my family. My friend who helped launch the company didn't last very long and ended up returning to his job as an independent product rep. I was on my own for the next few years, except for my biggest supporter, who was my mother.

My mother Alice had retired from the Boy Scouts and wanted my company to succeed. We rented a small office in San Antonio and started with almost nothing. Armed with a Compaq Desk Pro computer with a 10 MB hard drive and 640K of RAM, we launched an empire. My mother ran the command center equipped with a fax machine, printer, and lethal doses of black coffee. This was the golden age of brick phones, Thomas Guides, pagers, and ugly office chairs.

Back in the 1980's, we used to travel with carry on cases with wheels. Each case was stuffed with manufacturer brochures, samples, and business cards. I would update an architecture firm's 3-ring product binders on every call. Dragging the carry cases through the rain in New York City up flights of stairs and through the subway was no easy task. It was tough, but that's what it took to get the job done.

I didn't confine myself to a single CSI division or product type. I repped everything from glass to bricks. I made separate presentations for every product. That was the best way to get into an architect's office. The architects wanted variety and to review several products at a time. My business was different from the traditional rep model. I took no commissions and worked on a retainer basis. This helped generate a steady cash flow and pay for travel expenses. In retrospect, maybe I should have taken commissions because some of the jobs I worked on were monumental, and the commissions would have been substantial.

Building Trust Through Transparency

It took several years before I hired more staff and started expanding into other services. I opened offices in Atlanta, Kansas City, and St. Louis. My team started helping product manufacturers develop lunch and learn presentations for AEC firms. This was back in the Stone Age before the internet. There were no smart phones, laptops, or websites. Every week my team would travel to a different city and visit at least 25 AEC firms to generate leads for clients. We became successful, and larger manufacturers started signing up for our services.

My philosophy is simple. Maintain an honest and ethical practice. Focus on the architect and specifier. And manage as you would invest. Great companies are mindful on how they allocate time, people, and money. If you were investing money in the stock market, are you going to select a successful company with a high-potential or a low-performing company? Invest your company's resources where it gets the highest return. Don't let losing situations or bad strategies drain your resources. Invest your time with winners, your best product reps for example. Invest resources into programs that get your products specified. Then, watch your investment pay.

I recommend that every product rep join their local CSI chapter. The Construction Specifications Institute offers a lot of benefits for building product manufacturers. I ended up taking the CDT exam and getting my credential. CSI helped me network with design professionals, decision-makers, influencers, and make long-lasting friends. Education and professional credentials are a big part of our company culture, and it should be part of yours, too.

Innovative Practices for Business Expansion

Starting a new company, hiring new employees, and getting my clients' products specified was like climbing Mount Everest in the early years. I couldn't have done it without my wife and mother's support. Eventually, I started new companies dedicated to other aspects of product specification. Education has always been a central part of our company. In 2000, we launched the very first AIA online course in the industry. Before then, architects had to participate in lunch and learns, tradeshow, and other industry events to obtain their mandatory AIA education hours.

In 2000, Google was barely up and running, Yahoo was the number one web portal, and YouTube didn't exist. There was no iPod, iPhone, or iPad. Significant technological, societal, and educational trends were beginning to emerge in the late 1990's, and it was apparent that online education would revolutionize the construction industry. Increased computer power, internet accessibility, and improvements in multimedia technology made it possible to create engaging education courses for design professionals. We launched the first AIA course in 2000 and never looked back. We led the shift from expensive face-to-face lunch and learn events to inexpensive online courses and webinars, which reshaped an entire industry.

When we innovate in the industry, others follow. Companies have copied our websites verbatim, cloned our education courses, duplicated our delivery systems, reproduced our webinar programs, mimicked our marketing, emulated our specification strategies, and ultimately failed to poach our employees. They say imitation is the highest form of flattery. While other companies steal, we innovate. It keeps our competitive edge and continues to transform the industry.

We offer unique and competitive services that set us apart from other companies. Every year, we launch new services, adapt to changes in the industry, and find new ways to serve our clients. After launching multiple successful companies and helping hundreds of product manufacturers get their products specified, I am still passionate about what I do. I like to leverage cutting-edge technology while still using the same tried and true principles to get products specified.

In 2002, our team attended the first-ever USGBC Greenbuild International Expo and Conference in Austin, TX. There was a sense that we were on the cusp of something significant, a fundamental shift in how we approached design and construction. In 2006, we launched GreenCE, our sustainable design company dedicated to helping building product manufacturers get their products specified for LEED, WELL, and the Living Building Challenge. Witnessing this shift has been a profoundly rewarding experience.

Innovation is a powerful driver for my company's success. It has enabled us to stay competitive, grow, and adapt to changing market conditions. In addition, we can't succeed without our talented team, who contribute ideas that lead to new products, services, and processes. Their creativity fuels innovation. Our people are the heartbeat of our business, driving its success through creativity, dedication, and commitment.

Reflecting on the future of building product specification and the next generation of innovators, I am convinced that our success hinges on more than just technological advancements and market strategies. It is about cultivating a culture where talent thrives and innovation flourishes. This approach ensures not only our business's growth and resilience but also our leadership in shaping a sustainable and successful industry. Our journey towards innovation is fundamentally about empowering people to innovate, to lead, and to create lasting change that benefits our industry and transforms the built environment.

CHAPTER 7

Unlocking Spec Secrets

How many times have you been told that sales is a numbers game? Or that you can't manage what you can't measure? Although metrics are critical for a product manufacturer to succeed, they are only part of the story. In our data-driven industry, some manufacturers only focus on what they can quantify. Metrics can reduce complex phenomena to simple numbers, which can miss nuances and decrease specification opportunities.

When building product manufacturers try to persuade design professionals to specify their products, both measurable and non-measurable factors come into play. A measurable result from sales and marketing refers to quantifiable outcomes that indicate the effectiveness of the company's sales and marketing efforts. These tangible results can be tracked, analyzed, and used to make strategic decisions.

A non-measurable factor may significantly influence the outcome but is challenging to quantify directly. These abstract factors often involve subjective experiences, perceptions, and complex dynamics that do not easily translate into numerical data. Both concrete metrics and abstract insights play a significant role in product specification, and manufacturers need to understand their implications to succeed.

Concrete Metrics

Sales figures, social media engagement metrics, and customer satisfaction survey results serve as concrete, quantifiable metrics that manufacturers

use to measure performance, gauge market reception, and assess customer loyalty across different aspects of their business operations.

Sales Figures: A manufacturer's sales figures and market share are quantifiable. Consistently strong sales figures can lead to higher profitability, allowing a manufacturer to reinvest in growth opportunities or distribute profits to shareholders. Manufacturers can track the number of products sold within a specified period. In addition, manufacturers can calculate market share for their industry and how they fare against competitors.

Specification Rates: Manufacturers can track the number of times a product is specified by architects. Sometimes determining the source of the specification can be elusive. For example, was the product specified because a manufacturer's rep visited the AEC firm the week before? Did the architect participate in a webinar about the product a month ago? Was the product recommended by a friend?

Marketing Metrics: Every manufacturer should track and assess their marketing ROI. Manufacturers can track hot leads from AIA face-to-face presentations, webinars, and industry events. Successful manufacturers will leverage dashboards, SEO optimization, organic and paid ads, and other outreach efforts.

Customer Satisfaction: Successful manufacturers measure customer satisfaction through surveys. They collect ratings from architects on product satisfaction, usability, and preference. Manufacturers can measure the likelihood of architects recommending the product to others. Surveys are an excellent way to gather market intel, and the smartest manufacturers integrate them into every webinar they deliver.

Engagement Metrics: Effective companies calculate the ROI of trade show events, workshops, and seminars. Manufacturers can track attendees who stopped by their booth at the AIA show, review registrations for workshops, and assess metrics for webinars. Manufacturers with competent marketing teams can track website visits, LinkedIn impressions and social media shares, and evaluate organic outreach and paid ads for traffic to their website.

Abstract Factors

Brand perception, social networking dynamics, consumer preferences, and inherent biases represent abstract, often intangible factors that manufacturers must carefully consider and navigate, as they significantly influence customer behavior, market trends, and overall business success, despite being challenging to quantify precisely.

Brand Perception: The overall perception of the product brand among design professionals is important, which includes aspects like reliability, innovation, and prestige. These abstract factors are often rooted in emotional and psychological connections that consumers develop with a brand, which are harder to measure but equally important. Manufacturers can help promote brand loyalty, which influences a design professional to specify the product consistently.

Social Network: Another abstract factor is the quality of personal relationships between manufacturers' sales representatives and design professionals. A product rep with a strong relationship with a design professional is more likely to have their product specified. Conversely, building product reps who have strained relationships with the decision-makers face an uphill battle. AIA lunch and learns can help bridge the gap here and establish trust and credibility.

Preferences and Biases: The personal preferences of architects based on past experiences, aesthetics, and individual biases might be quantifiable in a survey. However, these abstract factors can also be elusive. Manufacturers who build a level of trust with architects, have an increased specification opportunity. Trust is often built over time through consistent quality and service. Regular firm visits through architectural specification programs and webinars can achieve credibility and generate leads.

Design Trends and Innovations: How well the product aligns with current architectural trends and innovative practices will determine specification opportunities. Is the product innovative or behind the times? Does it meet current sustainability standards like LEED? Does the product have documentation like a Health Product Declaration (HPD)? If a specifier perceives that a product is antiquated and not appropriate for projects, then the manufacturer is in trouble.

Achieving Stability in an Unstable World

Understanding measurable factors and abstract insights helps manufacturers develop effective strategies to influence architects' product specifications. By leveraging measurable data and addressing non-measurable elements, manufacturers can better position their products in the competitive landscape of architectural design. At the end of the day, if you're bringing in money, you're winning. If you're not, something's wrong.

Do your activities create specification opportunities? Was that a success if you sent out a thousand emails and nobody opened them? If you hosted an AIA webinar with 150 design professionals and converted 5 architects to specify your product is that a success? How does your company measure success?

The temptation to measure what is easiest to quantify is always present. However, what is easily measured is sometimes the least important metric. Product specification outcomes can be complex. Focusing on just one goal can give misleading results. Some manufacturers measure their spending instead of their results, focusing on the process rather than the product.

Standardizing information can create an illusion of organization and simplicity, making it easy to compare product reps and their activities. However, this type of measurement often obscures the quality of the information, stripping it of context, history, and meaning. Time spent on reporting calls, emails, and attending time-wasting meetings leaves little time for productive activities like meeting specifiers, delivering AIA webinars, and increasing specification opportunities.

If a product rep's specification conversion rate is higher than your target conversion rate, that rep may be using specification strategies or processes that are particularly effective and can be used for the entire team. If lower, you might need to fine-tune tactics to increase specification conversions. Getting your product specified and used on a project like a school can take several years, so data can be elusive or non-existent in the short term.

Metrics That Matter: Strategic Use in Specifications

The easier something is to measure, the less important it might be. Ask yourself if what you are measuring really shows what you want to know. Sales revenue is critical. How many projects your product got specified on each year is important. But what about the metrics driving those sales and specification figures? How can you cut through the noise to determine what matters?

One of the greatest failures some manufacturers make is focusing on the short term and not the long game. Short term success is important to keep employees working, the assembly line running, and to keep the lights on. However, long term success involves building a strong foundation and sustainable practices that can withstand challenges and changes over time. Long term specification strategies promote financial stability and resilience, minimizing the risks associated with short-term market fluctuations or economic downturns.

Manufacturers that want to succeed need to focus on strategies that provide concrete metrics and non-measurable and elusive factors. Here is one of the most effective programs that leverages cutting-edge technology with metrics and powerful abstract insights:

Architectural Specifications Program (ASP)

Established in 1985, the Architectural Specification Program (ASP) is the #1 product specification service in the country. This program provides building product presentations to specifiers. The one-on-one meetings showcase a curated collection of building products. Whether you use RBA's proven system or not, your team needs to be meeting specifiers across the country to increase your specification opportunities.

Tangible Benefits:

- **Increased Product Visibility:** Through curated meetings, the ASP enhances visibility among active design professionals and specifiers.
- **Direct Engagement:** Facilitates direct interaction between representatives and design professionals, promoting product specification opportunities.

- **Structured Reporting:** Provides detailed reports in multiple formats after each presentation week, documenting project leads, discussions, and project details.
- **Regional Expansion:** Offers opportunities for engagement in selected regions, potentially securing hundreds of meetings, thereby expanding market reach to beat competitors.

Hidden But Powerful Benefits:

- **Relationship Building:** Fosters relationships between representatives and design professionals, potentially leading to long-term partnerships and brand loyalty.
- **Enhanced Brand Perception:** Positions the brand as proactive and committed to engaging with design professionals, enhancing reputation and credibility.
- **Knowledge Exchange:** Facilitates exchange of insights and ideas between representatives and design professionals, enriching both parties' understanding of industry trends and challenges.
- **Long-term Influence:** While not immediately measurable, the program's impact on long-term brand recognition and market influence can be significant.

Overall, the Architectural Specification Program (ASP) combines tangible outcomes such as increased visibility and structured reporting with unmeasurable benefits like relationship building and enhanced brand perception, contributing to comprehensive marketing and increased specification opportunities. While the adage that “sales is a numbers game” holds some truth, it is crucial for building product manufacturers to recognize that metrics are only part of the story.

In a data-driven industry, focusing solely on quantifiable outcomes can oversimplify complex phenomena and overlook critical nuances, potentially limiting specification opportunities. By integrating both concrete metrics and abstract insights, manufacturers can better understand and meet the needs of design professionals, ultimately driving success in the marketplace.

CHAPTER 8

How Education Empowers Architects

Marketing is not a battle of products; it's a battle of perceptions. A powerful education campaign can help your company get your products specified and dominate the marketplace. Manufacturers can leverage time-tested methods, guerrilla marketing, AI advancements, and insider secrets to empower design professionals to select their products. In the world of architecture, perception defines reality. If your product doesn't match a specifier's perceptions, it simply won't make the cut.

In today's competitive landscape, design professionals are inundated with thousands of free AIA education courses. How can you cut through the noise? A strategic and multi-faceted approach is essential for building product manufacturers aiming to stand out and capture a specifier's attention. By leveraging a robust proven plan, manufacturers can transform their marketing outreach into a successful juggernaut capable of locking down specifications.

A design professional will participate in your education course for three primary reasons: interest in your product, a need to solve a specific problem, and fulfilling mandatory continuing education requirements for state and professional credentials. These motivations drive their participation. How can you leverage these incentives and create engaging content to get your products specified?

Evolution of Architectural Education

Education has been a cornerstone of architecture in the United States since the 1800s. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) was founded

on February 23, 1857, in New York City by a group of 13 architects. Their goal was to promote the scientific and practical excellence of its members and elevate the profession's standing. In its early years, the AIA focused on establishing educational standards for architects, advocating for licensing laws, and promoting ethical standards within the profession. On July 1st, 1897, Illinois became the first U.S. state to require licensing for architects, followed in rapid succession by California, New Jersey, and New York.

Nearly every state mandates continuing education for licensed architects, and many states have similar requirements for engineers and interior designers. The AIA learning unit is the default continuing education hour for architects in almost all states. Manufacturers targeting architects should ensure their courses are registered with the AIA at a minimum. Additionally, manufacturers should consider registering their courses with the GBCI for LEED professionals, the RCEP for engineers, and the IDCEC for interior designers.

Education Formats Every Manufacturer Should Use

Manufacturers should leverage a variety of educational tools, including face-to-face courses, online courses, webinars, and podcasts to get their products specified. Each format offers unique benefits, and when integrated together, they form a robust and powerful specification tool.

Face-to-Face Courses: Face-to-face presentations are essential for product manufacturers because they create personal connections that other formats can't match. Manufacturers can showcase products, address questions immediately, and provide hands-on demonstrations, all of which build trust and credibility. The major disadvantage of face-to-face courses is that they are expensive due to travel and catering costs.

Online Courses: Building product manufacturers must recognize that online anytime courses are a fundamental necessity. Design professionals have demanding schedules, making it challenging to attend live sessions or in-person meetings. Online courses enable you to educate specifiers 24/7, anywhere in the world. They generate leads for your reps, educate specifiers in regions you may not travel to, and should be a foundational strategy for every manufacturer.

Webinars: Webinars offer global reach and interactive features such as Q&A sessions, fostering strong connections that make presentations memorable and impactful. Manufacturers can utilize webinars to effectively educate, engage, and persuade specifiers, leading to greater product adoption and market success. They also generate leads, gather valuable market intelligence through surveys, and increase product specification opportunities.

Podcasts: Podcasts offer a highly cost-effective way to connect with specifiers. Unlike online courses and webinars, podcasts deliver content directly to design professionals during their daily routines, such as commutes or breaks. They enable in-depth discussions, case studies, and interviews with industry leaders, positioning manufacturers as thought leaders in their niche. As the least expensive method to reach specifiers, podcasts generate leads and can be easily broadcast on platforms like Spotify, Amazon, and Apple.

Trade Secrets from Industry Pioneers

Our team has accumulated a wealth of knowledge and experience over the years, becoming pioneers in the industry by launching the first AIA online courses in 2000, the earliest LEED manufacturer courses in the 2010's, and the leading specifier podcast in the 2020's.

We have identified the most significant lessons that can transform your specification opportunities. These insights, honed over decades, are designed to save you time, money, and stress while significantly boosting your specifications.

The most critical factors of whether your education course will be a success or failure are the course content, course title, main course image, quality of the multi-media, the learning objectives, case studies, the quality of the presenter, and the marketing campaign.

Content is king. Content establishes credibility, builds trust, and positions the company as an authoritative source. By delivering valuable content, companies attract and retain customers who value reliable information, fostering loyalty and driving business growth in competitive markets. If you can't create content, then hire someone who can. Investing in a third-party consultant for content creation safeguards

against failure by leveraging specialized skills and exclusive industry knowledge.

Course Title: A bad title can sink an online course, webinar, or podcast. A great title can create an avalanche of interest and draw specifiers to your course. An engaging title can create buzz on social media. Your course title is your first interaction with your audience. Don't screw it up. Let's look at two course titles for the same course.

- Skylight and Gravity Vent Solutions
- The Profitability of Healthy Spaces: The Business Case for Designing with Light and Air

Which course title do you think design professionals will be drawn to? Boring, dry, and highly technical webinar titles are a deterrent to getting design professionals to participate in your course. Your course title should contain at least one keyword that defines your content. Architects, engineers, interior designers, and contractors want to know what they can get out of your course.

Try to create a succinct, descriptive title. Look to your company's value proposition to figure out what the title could say. Your title could pose a question, challenge, or goal. Let's review two more titles for the same course.

- How To Specify Windows for Hospitals
- Healthy Hospitals: Successful Daylighting Strategies for Healthcare Projects

The latter title is more engaging. Both titles feature relevant keywords, but only one stands out as the clear winner. We recommend brainstorming several course titles. Select your favorite three titles and send them to various team members. Based on their responses and feedback you can pick a winner.

Course Image: The course image must be engaging because it serves as the initial impression that specifiers experience. A compelling image not only captures attention but also communicates professionalism, credibility, and the quality of the course content. The course image reflects

dedication to quality and innovation, effectively convincing interested design professionals to invest time and resources in the manufacturer's education course.

Course Multi-Media: High-resolution and high-quality photos and videos are essential for showcasing building products effectively. Poor lighting, composition, and blurry images can undermine an otherwise excellent presentation. If you haven't enlisted a professional photographer to capture your products, factory, and installations, it's crucial to do so without delay.

The photos and videos featured in your course are a direct representation of your product brand, reputation, and credibility within the AEC industry. Low-quality visuals can significantly impact how design professionals perceive your products. If your course photos are bad, then it may be expected that your product is of poor quality too.

Learning Objectives: A frequent mistake among manufacturers is cramming too much in their learning objectives. It's not uncommon to encounter courses with 6-8 learning objectives, which can overwhelm and dilute your message. With too many learning objectives, the course may feel scattered and unfocused, making it difficult to grasp the main takeaways. We recommend consulting Bloom's Taxonomy when crafting robust and impactful learning objectives.

Case Studies: Engaging case studies are crucial for education courses promoting building products because they showcase real-world applications and benefits, offering design professionals insights into how the product can solve their problems. Highlighting unique features and successful outcomes can build credibility and trust, making the product stand out. This increases specification opportunities, as professionals prefer proven solutions supported by practical evidence.

Course Presenter: A course presenter should be conversational and friendly, avoiding reading slides word-for-word, to prevent attendees from suffering through a monotonous presentation. Practicing beforehand ensures a smooth delivery, fostering engagement and making the material more relatable and memorable for the audience. This approach encourages active participation and enhances learning, keeping the

session lively and effective. Death by PowerPoint is an awful way to kill a design professional's opinion of you and your product.

Polls & Surveys: In both face-to-face presentations and webinars, you can interact with your audience by posing questions and inviting them to respond. During webinars, participants often watch from their offices or homes, viewing on desktops, laptops, or iPads. Incorporating poll questions and surveys into webinars enhances engagement, transforming the audience into active participants.

Marketing: Education courses depend heavily on effective marketing campaigns because attendance directly impacts their success. Companies miss out on valuable lead generation and specification opportunities without sufficient participation.

Partnering with a platform provider boasting tens of thousands of subscribers ensures courses reach a broad, targeted audience. These providers also oversee crucial tasks like CE hour reporting, customer support, certificate management, and lead generation for sales teams. Such collaborations enhance course visibility and streamline administrative processes, optimizing the return on investment in educational initiatives.

Strategies for Driving Participation and Specifications

Boosting attendance is straightforward when you follow a simple, proven plan. Manufacturers can boost course participation by registering for coveted designations like ADA and LEED Specific Hour, attracting professionals seeking relevant credits. Scheduling webinars at convenient times ensures higher attendance, while leveraging surveys help tailor content to participant needs. These strategies enhance course value and credibility, making it more appealing to industry professionals.

Boost Participation By 50%: The most effective way to boost participation for online courses and webinars is to register the course for a LEED Specific Hour designation. This can significantly increase participation rates, potentially doubling or tripling them. Additionally, developing courses that meet Texas (TX) and California (CA) accessibility and ADA requirements can further increase participation.

Achieving Specs with Webinars: The most effective webinar schedule involves developing multiple webinar courses and offering them quarterly. Ideally, a manufacturer should have at least two webinars ready to rotate throughout the year. While three to four different presentations are preferable, having a minimum of two webinars is essential. These webinars generate leads and elevate your brand.

Leveraging Market Intelligence: Don't miss out on the power of post-webinar surveys! Many manufacturers overlook this crucial step, instead relying on webinar participation reports. However, a well-crafted survey can provide valuable insights from architects, engineers, and designers, helping you build stronger relationships and increase product specification opportunities. Make the most of your webinar investment by collecting feedback and turning it into actionable results.

Our team has developed the most successful education program for building product manufacturers in the construction industry. We've spent decades perfecting our methods to reach and influence design professionals. We've shared with you many of the secrets we've learned, what you should do, and what your team should avoid. Your call to action is to develop an effective education course to reach as many design professionals as possible to increase your product specification opportunities.

CHAPTER 9

Cracking the Code for LEED Specifications

Getting your products specified for LEED projects can feel like navigating a complex labyrinth. The process for many manufacturers can be time-consuming, and often frustrating. Several manufacturers struggle to meet the stringent criteria for LEED and catch the attention of specifiers.

But what if we told you there's a proven path to success? In this chapter, we'll reveal the insider secrets that can transform this daunting process into a streamlined, effective strategy. Say goodbye to the guesswork and discover how to get your products specified for LEED with ease.

People can't be LEED certified. Products can't be LEED certified. Only buildings can be LEED certified. Products must meet LEED requirements typically through testing, documentation, product declarations, third party certifications, and other criteria. The USGBC does not endorse or certify building products.

Proven Pathways for LEED Specification

A challenge for manufacturers is understanding indirect contributions versus direct contributions. Direct contributions can help you contribute LEED points; indirect contributions may help influence a design professional to use your product but may not apply directly to a LEED credit.

Your product's indirect contributions might include ease-of-use, low-maintenance, and durability. These are all excellent attributes; however, unless they are directly linked to a LEED credit, you will not contribute a point. LEED has a set of rules and requirements. If you follow the rules and requirements your product may contribute points. If you don't meet the requirements, your product doesn't contribute points, and you are less likely to be specified by design professionals.

Getting specified on LEED projects relies heavily on the required documentation and effective educational outreach. Below are the minimum documentation requirements for product manufacturers to be considered for most LEED projects. Each declaration, certification, and testing data apply to one or more LEED credits that can be easily achieved by nearly any product manufacturer.

Health Product Declaration (HPD): The HPD is the most requested and used material transparency document in the construction industry. In addition to LEED, HPDs can contribute to the Living Building Challenge, WELL certification, and other green building systems. The HPD provides a standardized way of reporting the material contents of building products, and the health effects associated with these materials. Manufacturers who provide HPDs will be given preference over manufacturers that don't comply with these requests.

The Declare Label is a more expensive and complex alternative to the HPD. Many prominent AEC firms will not consider a product unless they have either an HPD or Declare Label. In addition, the major AEC firms will not allow a manufacturer to deliver an AIA lunch and learn unless they have an HPD or Declare Label. HPDs are essential specification resources that every manufacturer must have. Manufacturers seeking to develop HPDs or Declare Labels should contact Elixir Environmental for a free consultation.

Environmental Product Declaration (EPD): An EPD communicates the environmental impacts of a product, including raw material extraction, energy use, chemical makeup, waste generation, and emissions. Global warming is frequently the most emphasized impact in an EPD due to regulatory demand and attention in the media. Over half of the credit weightings in LEED focus on carbon, so companies that produce

carbon-intensive products widely used in buildings should consider developing an EPD.

For smaller companies, the effort and cost of developing an EPD for less critical products may not be justified, given their relatively low contribution to a building's overall environmental footprint. Instead, sustainability efforts for these products can be directed towards other areas, such as improving manufacturing efficiency, reducing waste, and using sustainable materials.

VOC Emissions Testing: LEED offers credit for using low-emitting materials across various product categories, including adhesives and sealants, paints and coatings, flooring systems, composite wood, and furniture. Products must meet specific VOC content limits and emissions standards for low-emitting materials. VOC emissions testing offers manufacturers an inexpensive and easy way to contribute a LEED point. GREENGUARD Gold certification is a popular way to meet the LEED emission requirements.

Recycled Content: Recycled content plays an important role in LEED projects by contributing to several credits across various categories. Recycled content is a standard request from contractors for submittal forms. Manufacturers may achieve more specification opportunities with verified recycled content claims through a third-party certification.

Innovative Strategies for LEED Credit Categories

Besides the LEED strategies we've discussed, which all manufacturers can utilize, there are also product-specific strategies that manufacturers can employ. They focus on common building product types and can offer manufacturers more opportunities.

Bio-Based Materials: Manufacturers of bio-based products may leverage their products to contribute to LEED credits. These products may include bamboo, cork, crops like wheat, rice, sorghum, hemp, mycelium, and many other innovative materials. Many biobased products must be certified by recognized standards or third-party programs.

Wood Certification: FSC and SFI wood certifications play a crucial role in helping LEED-certified projects achieve their sustainability goals by

ensuring responsible forest management and promoting the use of environmentally preferable materials. Manufacturers that produce lumber, cabinetry, paneling, railing, flooring, doors, shutters, and other wood materials should leverage wood certifications to contribute to LEED.

Water Efficiency: Manufacturers of LEED-compliant plumbing fixtures (such as faucets, toilets, showerheads, etc.) commercial kitchen equipment, lab equipment, cooling towers, and evaporative condensers may contribute to LEED.

In addition to these strategies, there are numerous LEED credits that focus on indoor air quality, energy savings, social equity, resilient design, a circular economy, and renewable energy. They are beyond the scope of this book, and manufacturers should partner with a LEED consultant to learn more about these opportunities.

Strategic Tools for LEED Specification Success

LEED documentation, education courses, Health Product Declarations (HPDs), and Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) are crucial tools for manufacturers to increase product transparency, demonstrate environmental and health impacts, meet green building certification requirements, and ultimately enhance their chances of getting products specified in sustainable construction projects.

LEED Documentation: There are two types of documentation needed by design professionals to specify your products for LEED. There are the product declarations, certifications, and testing data we discussed and then there is LEED documentation. All your declarations and certifications, such as EPDs, HPDs, and VOC emissions data, are compiled into a LEED product scorecard. Design professionals use LEED documentation to identify the LEED credits your products can contribute to.

Manufacturers should work with third-party consultants to explore relevant LEED credits and potential opportunities. It is essential for manufacturers to identify every credit their products contribute to and communicate this in the language that specifiers and LEED consultants require. LEED documentation should be available on a manufacturer's

website, integrated into educational courses, and utilized by product representatives.

LEED Education: Building product manufacturers aiming to get their products specified on LEED projects must effectively reach out to LEED professionals. It's essential to communicate in the "language" of LEED professionals and incentivize them by offering education hours that help maintain their LEED credentials. These education hours are categorized into two types: GBCI General Hours and LEED Specific Hours.

At a minimum, a manufacturer should develop a GBCI General Hour course. The good news is that the course doesn't need to mention LEED; it only needs to discuss the sustainable attributes of your product. GBCI General Hour courses are like AIA courses but with added sustainable information.

LEED Specific Hour courses are more complex and difficult to develop. However, a LEED Specific Hour course can double or even triple course participation for online courses and webinars. They are the secret weapon of many successful product manufacturers who dominate the marketplace. LEED Specific Hour courses are like AIA courses on steroids that generate leads for your reps, reach the decision-makers, and help promote your product as the ideal solution to their problems.

Over 100,000 LEED professionals are required to complete mandatory education to maintain their credentials. LEED APs need 30 hours per reporting period, while LEED Green Associates must obtain 15 hours per cycle. These education requirements present a significant opportunity for manufacturers to promote their products and increase the likelihood of getting specified.

Train Your Reps: You don't need an army of LEED APs, but it's essential for your team to understand how your products contribute to LEED. Your product representatives should be knowledgeable about your HPDs, EPDs, testing data, and sustainable benefits.

If your team cannot effectively communicate your sustainability message and grasp basic LEED concepts, your specification opportunities will diminish, giving your competitors an advantage. Thankfully, there are numerous free resources available to educate building product

representatives about LEED. Companies like GreenCE offer complimentary LEED education for manufacturers.

Follow the Money: It's easy for manufacturers to get distracted and confused by the onslaught of sustainable certifications, green building rating systems, and evolving industry trends. However, it's important for manufacturers to follow the money on projects to discern the most profitable and realistic specification opportunities.

LEED is the dominant green building ratings system where you should focus your time and money. There are over 100,000 LEED-certified projects. There are less than a few dozen fully certified Living Building Challenge projects, while others have partial certification.

Manufacturers need to justify their investments based on outcomes. Although manufacturers might identify opportunities on LBC and WELL certified projects, most companies should start their journey focusing on LEED. As the old saying goes, "the best way to catch more fish is to go where the fish are." LEED is where most of the greatest opportunities exist. Steer clear of industry noise; invest in what delivers real value.

In conclusion, building product manufacturers must prioritize investments in HPDs, EPDs, testing data, and education to ensure their products are specified for LEED projects. By providing transparent and reliable information about the environmental and health impacts of their products, manufacturers can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and meet the rigorous standards set by LEED. Additionally, educating their teams and engaging in outreach efforts to communicate these benefits effectively will not only enhance their credibility but also strengthen their competitive position in the market.

CHAPTER 10

The Road Taken: Strategy and Specifications

Landon Boone, Chief Operating Officer of Ron Blank & Associates, Inc., brings over 20 years of experience to the organization, sharing his valuable insights on the specification process and strategies for manufacturers to thrive in the competitive marketplace.

As a veteran of the RBA team, I'd like to share some nuggets of wisdom from my adventures that one could think of as a treasure map for effectively engaging with design professionals, building relationships that last longer than a New Year's resolution, and scoring those elusive product specifications. As I reflect on my travels, a whirlwind of thoughts and memories comes rushing back, and I'm aiming to distill these experiences into practical knowledge that will empower your team in their product specification quests.

It's 1996, and I'm fresh out of high school, ready to conquer the world of architecture with nothing but a dream and a T-Square. Determined to avoid the classic "aimless degree" trap (and the accompanying mountain of student debt), I found my way to the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation in Houston – a place that does intense aptitude testing. After two days of mental gymnastics that would make even Einstein break a sweat, I emerged with a startling revelation: I had a knack for architecture and engineering! Who knew all those years of building precarious tree houses would pay off? Ultimately, I chose architecture over engineering, admittedly because drawing and designing spaces sounded

a lot better than endless tables and equations. Little did I know, this decision would not only shape my career but would also give me a foundation to one-day help building product manufacturers decode the enigma that is the architect's mind.

Fresh out of a bachelor's-to-master's architecture program at The University of Texas at San Antonio, where I'd become a connoisseur of historic preservation, I found myself thrust into the job market armed with nothing but dreams and a portfolio. Enter the family sage, who proclaimed, "You need Ron Blank's list - he knows every architect who can fog a mirror" So, off I went to meet the legendary Ron, half-expecting to find him guarding a sacred scroll of architectural contacts. Instead, I was gifted a printout that more than met my needs.

Ron's casual "there's more where that came from" left me wondering what else was under his hat. After a few weeks of interviews that felt more like architectural speed dating, I circled back with Ron, and we chatted about everything from the state of the industry to the intricacies of building product manufacturing. Before I knew it, Ron made me an offer to join his team, and just like that, I went from preserving history to making it at RBA, proving that sometimes, the best blueprint unrolls as a surprise job offer.

I started the job as a fresh-faced architectural specification rep, armed with nothing but enthusiasm and a newly minted business card. That was me, stumbling through sweaty-palmed marketing calls and churning out coursework. After a few weeks, Ron saw that I could "speak the language" of design professionals, paired with the fact our Specification Program was growing, provided an opportunity. Suddenly, I was jet-setting across the country 36 weeks a year, living the dream of every young, single professional who enjoys living out of a suitcase, searching out local culinary delights, and meeting lots of interesting people.

My career took off faster than I did on my first day when I forgot my wallet and nearly missed my flight - talk about a rookie move that would make this Eagle Scout BE better PREPARED moving forward. Under the wing of Jim Reynolds, the Yoda of RBA specification reps, I learned the art of not boring architects to death while presenting building products. Before I knew it, I was crisscrossing the U.S. like a caffeinated

pinball, meeting with design professionals from New York to San Diego, growing my ability to help connect them with the product knowledge they could apply in their work. Little did I know, these whirlwind tours were laying the groundwork for many future conversations and guidance sessions with some of the most influential building product manufacturers in the industry.

Forget the stereotype of architects as black-clad, bespectacled artists with egos bigger than their skyscrapers. My travels revealed that the design world is as diverse as a Frank Gehry façade. Case in point: I once met two architects who'd worked directly under Frank Lloyd Wright. One could hardly keep his ego from pushing the windows out of the room, while the other was so humble, approachable, and appreciative of the information I was there to share with him. It was a crash course in architectural personalities and a realization that no matter who you are meeting with, there will always be an opportunity for a true exchange of knowledge. So, newbies in the industry, take heart! The field is full of fascinating characters - just be prepared for everything from prairie-style pretension to modernist modesty. After all, in architecture, as in life, it takes all types to build a city.

One important lesson came through an enlightening encounter with a respected spec writer in Baltimore. It's here I learned a crucial lesson about our Architectural Specification Program (ASP) meetings. In this role, we are not commissioned sales reps; we're more like architectural matchmakers, introducing specifiers to products and the knowledgeable people behind them, which will benefit their projects. What is our goal? To engage design professionals, showcase building products, and spark conversations with manufacturers that are more exciting than just handing off the latest color chart for XYZ's products. It's all about creating opportunities for dialogue.

So, there I was, in the middle of my well-rehearsed product spiel, when the spec writer threw me a curveball question so specific and well beyond the basic to intermediate level of product detail I was prepared to discuss. A little thrown back, I went for the honest approach right off the bat. "Great question!" I exclaimed, admitting I couldn't answer his question directly but promised to connect him with the right expert quicker than you can say "change order." His response? A smile and a

firm “Good Answer!” - turns out, I’d just aced the honesty pop quiz. Lesson learned: when dealing with design professionals, it’s better to be a reliable knowledge conduit than a questionable know-it-all. This truth holds across the architectural spectrum, regardless of dress code, firm size, or the gravitational pull of their egos.

As an architectural rep for a manufacturer, your brain should be a veritable Fort Knox of product knowledge, but instead of gold bars, you’re stockpiling facts about product variants, applications, and finishes. And don’t just memorize your catalog – you need to be a walking, talking encyclopedia of building codes that apply to your products and a regional case study connoisseur. It’s also important to zoom out from your product tunnel vision and see the big picture. Your widget doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It’s part of a complex ecosystem of building components.

In the construction world, everything’s connected. If you find yourself in a meeting with a design professional and you’ve exhausted your knowledge beyond their needs, don’t panic! Connecting the design pro with another industry expert who can back you up isn’t admitting defeat; it’s your secret weapon to becoming the expert they always call on. They simply want the most accurate information and want a list of people they can call on to get that information for all types of product areas. You will often hear design professionals say things like, “Roy is my Division 7 guy” or “I fully trust Grace with all of my door hardware questions”. That is exactly who you want to become in your arena of product expertise.

Design professionals are the maestros of the built environment, orchestrating a symphony of products, team members, code conditions, client personalities, timelines, and deadlines. They’re also contending with factors like thermal expansion, differential metal issues, thermal bridging, air and moisture infiltration, and chemical reactions, which are all affected by product interactions. It’s not enough to know your product’s solo act; you need to grasp its role in the entire ensemble. Develop a broad knowledge base on your product and be ready to answer questions faster than an architect can say “value engineering.” And remember, when stumped, don’t hesitate to bring in those who have an even deeper knowledge base.

Another quick lesson from my travels: architects generally prefer scheduled appointments over surprise visits. Sure, I've occasionally pulled a ninja move and dropped in on a few who were ghosting my emails, especially when fate had us in the same building. While it's efficient, use this tactic sparingly; architects value their time. Showing up unannounced can be risky. So, while spontaneity has its moments, most of your meetings should be scheduled, and remember that in the architectural world, there is no "fashionably late". You want to be remembered as a rep respectful of their time. For perspective, most medium to large-sized projects could have anywhere from 3,000-4,000 product decisions that need to be made by a design professional. Your product is just one piece of that entire jigsaw puzzle.

If I did find myself dropping in unannounced, instead of pushing for an impromptu meeting, I'd aim to schedule a future appointment, respecting the design professional's bandwidth. After all, the goal is to build a long-term relationship. Often, just by leading off with the notion of scheduling a future meeting, I found many of them would simply say, "well, you're here, so let's jump into the conference room for a bit."

When it comes to timing and making the most of your visits to an architectural office, you need to be strategic. Your first visit might be a lunch and learn CE presentation for several of the firm's team members. It's crucial in this first meeting to remember that listening to what the team has to say is just as important, if not more important, than the nuggets of wisdom you showed up to share. Most of the time, there will be product decision-makers at the table, and the rest may be their support staff. You never know who will ultimately be the linchpin in the decision to specify your products. Try to assess who the decision makers are by doing an around the table introduction of names and roles at the firm. Typically, those with the most interest and who have the most influence will stick around at the end to ask some specific project applicable questions.

Be sure to allow time after your presentation to have these interactions after the junior architects grab their dessert and scamper back to their desks. Be prepared to answer questions and get the design professionals any resources they need right away. If their questions and needs merit a more detailed discussion than they have time for, ask if you could

schedule a follow up meeting while you are still in their office. After all, a meeting about a specific product application on one of their projects is a bridge to a solid opportunity to get your product into one of their project specs.

Once you've made it past the velvet rope and into the architect's inner sanctum for a second visit - congratulations! At this point, design professionals are looking for guidance from an expert, not a used car salesman trying to offload last year's model. Be prepared to dispense guide specs, BIM elements, and brochures. And remember, honesty isn't just the best policy - it's the only policy that won't get you exiled from the land of specifications. Integrity is your secret weapon.

Success in this industry is a marathon, not a sprint. Don't be afraid to "negative sell" your products. If the architect's application calls for a product you don't have, or where yours is not a good fit, lead them to a quality product that will solve the problem for them. A spec writer I spent a lot of time with told me a cautionary tale that outlines this very notion. A rep for a coatings company was in his office and the spec writer had an application where he thought one of the rep's coatings would be appropriate. The only reservation he had is that he could not find in the product details whether the application could be an exterior one, exposed to the elements. The rep, without referencing anything proclaimed, "absolutely, no problem". Still having reservations, the spec writer decided to contact the manufacturer and speak with one of their product engineers, and his response was, "Oh god no, don't apply it outside; it will fade and break down from UV exposure". That rep never found his way into that spec writer's firm ever again. Something tells me that rep had to find another line of work.

I've been a specification wilderness guide for nearly two decades, working with manufacturers of all sizes - from scrappy mom-and-pop shops to Fortune 500 giants who probably have more employees than some small countries. I've taken my road-earned wisdom and applied it to help these incredibly hardworking folks build relationships with design professionals, create the resources specifiers need, and advance their specification goals. Many of these meetings are just the beginning where I and the rest of the RBA team find ourselves "practicing what we are preaching," and work on the long game of building strong relationships

with our building product manufacturer clients so we can help them grow an orchard that they can continuously harvest specifications from. What this translates to is a continuous honing of their knowledge and resources so they can be nimble and move with the market, be successful with new product launches, and adapt to any conditions like new building codes or competing technologies.

Some of the challenges that were met in these meetings have included: Helping a client to expand the availability of their products in more regions, which had a bearing on their decision for the location of future production and distribution facilities. Another client was looking to move from being focused on the residential market, to expanding to more commercial applications, which meant more resources like guide specifications and commercial building-focused education courses had to be created. One client, who had recently undergone a merger with a couple of its competitors, had rebranded under a new name, which brought forth the monumental task of informing the design community about the change and at the same time, show that the new company combined all the strengths and assets of its predecessors, but none of the baggage. We were very glad to be part of a successful effort to bring that goal to fruition.

To all of you building product manufacturers out there, here's the gospel according to this reformed road warrior: Be true to yourself, your team, and your company. And for the love of all that is architecturally sound, be prepared with the resources design professionals need when they're ready to specify your product. Because in this game, being unprepared is like trekking into bear country with a pack full of candy bars and pork chops- and they will eat you alive. Just remember, think of RBA as a lodge full of guides and quartermasters who can get you prepared and ensure you have a successful journey.

CHAPTER 11

Maximizing BIM and AI in Specifications

Imagine a future where every building product specification is not just accurate but optimized to perfection. With the groundbreaking combination of Building Information Modeling (BIM) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), this vision is becoming a reality faster than you think.

AI in architecture means smarter buildings, sustainable designs, and product specifications tailored with unprecedented precision. Manufacturers who master AI in product specification strategies will not just succeed but also lead the way in delivering superior, customer-centric solutions.

How BIM Affects Building Product Specifications

BIM provides a detailed and accurate representation of building components and systems. This allows for more precise product specifications based on the exact requirements of the project. BIM enables better coordination between different disciplines involved in a project. Product specifications can be aligned more effectively with the design and construction phases, reducing conflicts and ensuring compatibility.

BIM enables simulations and analysis during design, helping evaluate products based on performance, cost, and sustainability before finalizing specifications. It incorporates environmental factors, analyzing materials' impact, energy efficiency, and lifecycle costs to meet green building standards. Additionally, BIM automates construction documents and

product schedules, reducing errors and ensuring consistent, up-to-date information.

Manufacturers should consider partnering with BIM libraries and databases to ensure their products are readily visible and accessible to architects during the design phase. BIM databases can help manufacturers generate leads, track BIM downloads, and connect with decision-makers.

Artificial Intelligence and Product Specification

Despite its immense potential, AI is still in its early stages of development within the manufacturing industry. The technology is not without its challenges and risks. AI's effectiveness heavily relies on the quality and quantity of data it receives. In many cases, AI may not have sufficient information to make accurate predictions or decisions.

You might want to pump the brakes before you let AI write your guide specs, create your AIA course, or replace your building product reps with cyborgs! Currently, AI excels at aggregating information from websites, articles, forums, and other publicly available texts. However, AI-generated content is only as good as the information it collects. What happens if the information it gathers is incorrect or low quality? Many specialized or high-value domains often have key information behind paywalls, which can limit the AI's expertise in these areas.

Free AI models have generated guide specs with the correct MasterFormat number and title, three parts with appropriate articles in each, and content similar to a short form spec. AI can assist manufacturers and spec writers by researching code compliance and regulatory issues, supplementing your efforts. However, human supervision is essential to ensure quality control throughout the project.

AI performs tasks like what we already do: it searches through available building product resources to extract requested information. However, AI can examine an enormous number of product resources at a much faster rate, albeit with a limited filter on quality. Numerous product databases and specification resources already leverage AI and machine learning, and this trend is set to accelerate.

How Manufacturers Can Leverage A.I.

Building product manufacturers can use AI to develop continuing education courses for AIA by automating research and content creation. AI can help with crafting course titles, defining learning objectives, outlining course structures, conducting content research, and creating quizzes. However, AI's limitations include challenges in creativity, adaptability, quality control, interactivity, ethical considerations, and adapting to rapid changes. Human oversight remains crucial for effectively harnessing the potential of AI in educational content development.

Course Title: AI models search extensive datasets of courses, industry trends, and architectural topics to craft compelling titles for design professionals. By pinpointing keywords and themes aligned with their interests, AI ensures titles are clear, relevant, and captivating. Consider generating 20 course titles using AI and letting your team choose the best option.

Learning Objectives: AI can swiftly generate learning objectives by analyzing vast educational content and industry standards. These objectives are crafted to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). To ensure accuracy and relevance, oversight from product manufacturers is crucial.

Content: AI transforms AIA content creation by automating data collection from diverse sources. Think of the AI model as a reporter for a college newspaper under your supervision. It collects data, follows guidelines, generates insights, reviews datasets, and automates tasks efficiently. AI excels as a data aggregator, saving your team valuable time and resources.

The output of AI for education course is heavily reliant on the quality and relevance of the input data it receives. However, if the input data are flawed, incomplete, or biased, the output from AI may also reflect these shortcomings and create a mediocre course. For example, if information regarding a building code, LEED credit, or testing data are incorrect, AI could produce content that is inaccurate, outdated, and unacceptable.

Our team has seen many poorly made courses, articles, training programs, and marketing materials created by AI for product manufacturers. Companies may be tempted to use AI for fast content creation

they perceive as excellent, but it often results in mediocre and clearly machine-generated material. This could influence how specifiers perceive your product and its suitability for their project. Manufacturers should consider partnering with skilled content developers who know how to use AI effectively and create powerful AIA education courses.

Overall, building product manufacturers can leverage BIM and AI to boost specification opportunities. AI can save time and money by automating processes like data analysis and customization in product specification. Balancing cutting-edge technology with human expertise ensures manufacturers increase their specification opportunities. Designing buildings is about understanding human needs and emotions, something that AI simply can't replicate.

CHAPTER 12

How Follow-Up Drives Product Specification

Follow-up isn't just about selling; it's about building a relationship. The best manufacturers become trusted advisors through consistent, valuable follow-up. Product manufacturers who follow up regularly are more likely to get on a design professional's go-to list. Architects, engineers, interior designers, and contractors work with hundreds of products. The ones that get specified are often those from manufacturers who follow up consistently with relevant information and support.

When manufacturers don't follow up, it signals a lack of commitment. Why should an architect specify a product if the company doesn't even care to check in? Without follow-up, manufacturers risk being forgotten. In a fast-paced industry, out of sight truly means out of mind. Follow-up is the bridge between interest and specification. Without it, even the best products can fall through the cracks.

Product manufacturers must diligently follow up on leads and review metrics from webinars, online courses, and architectural specification visitations to ensure their products are specified. It allows manufacturers to address questions, provide additional information, and demonstrate commitment, fostering trust and confidence.

Reviewing metrics from these engagements offers insights into the effectiveness of marketing efforts and the needs of design professionals, enabling manufacturers to tailor their strategies for more relevant and effective follow-ups. Ignoring these steps can lead to missed

opportunities and a competitive disadvantage, as proactive manufacturers are more likely to secure specifications.

Architectural Specification Program Follow-Up

Whether you hire a company like Ron Blank and Associates to make architectural specification calls on your behalf or use your own in-house building product reps, the same rules apply when providing effective follow-up.

- Send a personalized email expressing appreciation for their time and attention.
- Provide a concise summary of key points discussed during the presentation for your team.
- Share any promised additional information, guide specs, LEED documentation, HPDs, technical data, or resources promptly with the design professional.
- Offer to schedule a follow-up call or meeting to address any questions that may have arisen since the presentation.
- Follow up with AIA continuing education credit information if the design professional wants their whole team to learn about your products.
- Connect with attendees on professional networking platforms like LinkedIn, if not already connected, to maintain ongoing professional relationships and facilitate future communications.
- Offer to arrange a product demonstration or site visit if there's interest in seeing the product in use.
- Set a reminder to check in after a few weeks to gauge interest and offer further assistance.
- Inquire about upcoming projects where the presented products might be applicable.
- Ask the specifier to include your product in the master office specification.

Webinar Follow-Up

Follow-up for webinars by building product manufacturers can boost specifications through two key elements: the webinar participation report and post-webinar survey. The participation report provides valuable attendee information for targeted outreach to decision-makers and specifiers. The post-webinar survey offers crucial market intelligence, revealing attendee preferences and product requirements. Utilizing these tools effectively can lead to improved engagement, stronger relationships with specifiers, and increased product specifications in future projects. Here are key strategies to implement:

Webinar Participation Report

- Import attendee information into the manufacturer's sales software.
- Share detailed attendee data with sales representatives.
- Use for targeted outreach to decision-makers and specifiers.

Post-Webinar Survey

- Review survey responses to identify and prioritize qualified leads.
- Categorize respondents based on their current and future specification potential. Webinar participants will state whether they have a current project for your product or a potential future project.
- Compile and prepare requested documentation (LEED, BIM, CAD, HPDs) for distribution.
- Schedule lunch and learn sessions for interested design professionals.
- Develop tailored pricing information for inquiring attendees.
- Create personalized follow-up plans based on individual survey responses.
- Assign leads to appropriate product representatives for follow-up.
- Update the CRM system with new information gathered from the survey.
- Set up follow-up calls or meetings with high-potential specifiers.

- Create a report summarizing survey findings for marketing teams.
- Plan future webinars or content based on topics of interest indicated in the survey.

Online Course Follow-up

Here are key follow-up best practices for product manufacturers to increase specification opportunities with design professionals after they complete an AIA online course:

- Send a personalized thank-you email in a timely manner of the course completion, expressing appreciation for their time and interest. Offer additional resources related to the course content, such as technical data sheets, case studies, or white papers.
- Schedule a follow-up call or virtual meeting to discuss the course material and answer any questions if the design professional reaches out after taking the online course.
- Connect on professional networking platforms like LinkedIn to maintain ongoing communication.
- Provide access to a dedicated specification representative for ongoing assistance.

Building product manufacturers should consider hiring a consultant to optimize their specification opportunities through online courses and webinars. These experts bring industry knowledge and proven strategies to create compelling content and effective lead generation. However, the key to success lies in diligent follow-up.

Manufacturers risk losing potential specifications without strategic, timely, and personalized follow-up. A consultant can help implement robust follow-up systems, ensuring that webinar attendees and course participants are nurtured into loyal specifiers. This combination of expert guidance and thorough follow-up can significantly increase a manufacturer's chances of securing specifications and driving growth in the competitive building products market.

CONCLUSION

As we've explored throughout this book, getting your building products specified is a complex but rewarding process. It requires a deep understanding of the construction industry, strong relationships with design professionals, and a commitment to providing high-quality, innovative solutions. By focusing on clear communication, robust technical support, and strategic marketing efforts, you can significantly increase the chances of your products being chosen for projects.

Success in this field is not just about having a superior product; it's about effectively demonstrating its value to decision-makers. Embrace innovation, invest in continuing education programs, and always be ready to adapt to the evolving needs of the industry. Your ability to solve problems and make the specifier's job easier will set you apart in this competitive market.

Now, it's time to put these strategies into action. Start by reassessing your current specification efforts and identifying areas for improvement. Develop a comprehensive plan that incorporates the key lessons from this book, and don't hesitate to seek advice from the authors of this book when needed. The path to increased specifications and market share begins with your next step. Take that step today and watch as your building products become the preferred choice for design professionals across the industry.

For more information on the specification strategies outlined in this book, please visit:

www.RonBlank.com

www.GreenCE.com

www.ElixirEnvironmental.com

