

DB'S CORNER: BLOG 19 - THE SPECIFIER AND THE MANUFACTURER'S REPRESENTATIVE

By Dennis Buirge

When a manufacturer's representative (M.R.) makes a first appearance in my office, the following general spiel at some point is made during our conversation: give me one thing I am looking for and you are welcomed back and will be in my project manual, do not give me this one thing and I am not interested in seeing you again. Once explained, not one M.R. has disagreed with my premise. So what is the one thing I am looking for from the M.R.?

Let us first define an M.R. and then review the relationship between the Specifier and the M.R. For this blog, I am defining an M.R. as one who may be employed directly by a manufacturer, one who may be employed by a distributor and sells various manufacturers' products, or one who is self employed as a representative. Architecturally, each structure is a totality of building systems and individual products, which when combined into component assemblies culminates in that structure. The professional does not manufacture any physical product, but selects those available from industry or manufacturer's standards. In those instances where standard products do not meet a performance or aesthetic need, then custom products must be considered. Whether the professional selects standard or custom products, there are essentially three possible relationships between a Specifier and a M.R.: none, minimal, or extensive.

When commodity type products are selected, the interaction with an M.R. most often does not exist. These are products that can generally be easily selected from catalog cuts and where options are few to none. There are times, however, when an unusual product selection arises, when a few product details are required, or when the selected product necessitates additional information. In those instances, the professional may contact and interface with an M.R. The project architect (PA) /engineer (PE) or Specifier is usually the one from the professional's office meeting with the M.R. It is my opinion that if the PA is meeting with the M.R., it is optimal for the Specifier to also attend due to their overall knowledge base and questions that are occasionally considered from a different perspective. Lastly, there are more complicated project situations where the professional and M.R. might have multiple and extensive meetings, while the M.R. offers 'manufacturer's guide specs' and the Specifier forwards a draft review of a specification Section for technical correctness.

The aforementioned scenarios occur when the Specifier initiates the meeting. There are times when the M.R. initiates the meeting, such as setting up a meeting to:

- make a cold call to initiate contact with an architectural firm.
- update product information in their technical binder or samples library.
- introduce new products.
- introduce regional or national managers.
- seek information about upcoming projects being bid.
- give a product luncheon (or breakfast) presentation.

There is one other series of meetings between the Specifier and the M.R., those occurring during CSI events. Depending on an event, the Specifier and M.R. may be on the same 'team', while another event may have the Specifier on one side of the table and the M.R. on the other. One such event by the CSI Pittsburgh Chapter was a recent Speed Dating meeting where the M.R. remained at a table with their wares and Specifiers, Architects, and Professionals moved from table to table. Only 4 minutes were allowed at each table to discuss product related issues. This Chapter meeting allowed existing friendships to continue and new relationships to be generated.

When the project manual is complete and ready for bidding, whether being one volume that is 1/4 inch thick for a single prime contract or several volumes that are 6 inches thick for multiple prime contracts, all information must be technically correct. I know of no Specifier who knows everything about everything, i.e., Division 00 through Division 49. It is my opinion that technical correctness can be greatly improved when the Specifier and M.R. have a good working rapport, ending in a win-win relationship for the professional and product manufacturers.

Moving toward an answer to my introductory question, producing CDs that are clear, concise, correct, and complete will *assist* in a positive result for the professional should attorneys become involved. In today's litigious society that one thing I want from the M.R. is ... the truth and only the truth. To that end, it is imperative for the M.R. to also give information that is clear, concise, correct, and complete because that information in most instances will be included in the project manual. If the product does not work in the project under design, then the Specifier and M.R. should shake hands and move on to the next project. The M.R. should not give information to only 'make the sale,' which when ultimately incorporated in construction creates performance or aesthetic issues. In those situations when not giving fully truthful information, the M.R. will not be returning to my office. Over my years of practice, there are some who unfortunately meet that criterion.