

National Building News presents..
The Spec Master Handbook
A comprehensive Guide for Manufacturers of Architectural Products

Introduction

The information in this booklet has been compiled from various NBN subscribers and we'd like to thank each and every one of them for their contributions.

While every firm has its own methods and means of utilizing Spec Opportunities, there are some uniform first steps most subscribers follow. This booklet enumerates those steps and goes further in demonstrating a complete marketing system that will...

1. Insure future sales for your company.
2. Increase immediate sales
3. Enable you to forecast accurate sales projections.
4. Enable you to offer new products based on market demand.
5. Create "brand recognition" where it's needed the most – with the decision maker.
- 6. Increase your profit margin.**

These are just a few benefits you can expect to enjoy from this system. In addition, you will find that your sales force is able to work more efficiently with better results.

Who is Your Customer

The Spec Master program is designed for companies who can benefit most by having their product specified in a building, preferably with a "tight" spec. While your actual buying customer may be a wholesaler or contractor, the actual decision maker who decides that it's your product that will be in this building is the architect, engineer or building owner. The Spec Master program is designed to approach this decision maker and "lock in" your product specification. While many sales reps may say that no one writes a "tight spec" anymore, nothing could be further from the truth. Here are three reasons why it's to the benefit of the architect to have a tight spec...

1. Once the project is out for bid, there is no misunderstanding about what is acceptable.
2. The architect does not have to argue with anyone who wishes to break the spec, if the spec is written properly.
3. The architect, engineer or owner is insured to receive exactly what he wants in the building to achieve the results he anticipated.

This Spec Master program will show you how to assist the architect, engineer or owner in getting the product he wants. In addition, it will help you to achieve a "partnership" with the decision maker that will extend too many future projects.

Distributing Information

As a subscriber to Spec Opportunities, you are receiving monthly issues with approximately 300 projects listed each month.. A few of our subscribers have complained that they don't have time to address each of these projects or delegate it to a clerical person. Most of our subscribers recognize that *not all projects are appropriate for their product.*

Let your sales reps or wholesalers go after the immediate sales. Your objective is to insure future sales on large projects and this can only be done effectively by your Spec Master.

Your Spec Master

I'm sure by now you're wondering; who is my Spec Master or what is a Spec Master? A Spec Master can be one or more people who work for the company. His or her responsibility is to get your product specified. That is his only objective.

Why A Spec Master?

Your sales reps and distributor's incomes depend on immediate sales. They spend most of their time dealing with wholesalers or contractors, and, perhaps, low level architects or engineers in an architectural firm. This is to their benefit.

What is to your company's benefit, however, is to get your product specified in a building that may not come out for bid for several months to a year. A tight spec written today insures a sale at a good profit when the job is bid. In the process, your Spec Master will be creating a relationship with architectural firms. This relationship will filter down some other specifications for which your sales reps and/distributors will reap the benefits along with your company.

There are also some things that your Spec Master will be able to do that your sales reps and/or distributors just don't have the authority to do. One of the things your Spec Master can do is to help create a custom product or custom design for the architect. Let's face it, architects are designers. They love to create new and unique features into a building, to design new form and function into your product. If your Spec Master is in a position to assist the architect with this procedure, you've just eliminated all of your competition.

How Does a Spec Master Get My Product Specified?

Your Spec Master is going to personally call the architect, suggest submitting a proposal for the architect, engineer or owner to review and will ask pertinent questions to get the information he will need for this proposal.

The proposal is not a firm quote on a job. Rather it is a suggestion, based on the information given, with an estimate of cost. The proposal must also include features and benefits, which validate why your Spec Master chose this particular model, competitive comparisons, if available, and any other information that will make the reader sit up and take notice.

The Spec Master then follows up on his proposal within a few weeks to determine if there are any questions or additional information needed. He may also schedule a meeting with the architect, engineer or owner if travel is part of his job description. (Depending on your product, the Spec Master can work entirely by phone and fax, or travel as well. Some products require a face-to-face meeting, while others are more self-explanatory.)

The Spec Master continues to follow-up with the architect, engineer or owner offering to send him a “ready-to-issue” specification for his job (see example). It is important that the Spec Master work closely with the architect or engineer in writing the spec. You’re looking for a “tight spec” with no loopholes to allow your competitors to submit a product that does not meet spec at a lower cost.

Once the spec is written, your Spec Master should have the architect or engineer fax a company to him for validation. If the spec is a “performance” spec, be sure it includes all the special features of your product that your competitor does not have.

The Procedure

Let’s outline the steps that are incorporated in a Spec Master program.

1. You or your designate determines which projects are the best for your product and check them off.
2. The designated projects are given to the Spec Master who will contact the architect, engineer or owner and suggest submitting proposal.
3. A proposal is prepared and sent (see sample). The proposal is filed in an appropriate location, perhaps color coded by the file folder. (Filing in order by architectural firm will allow the Spec Master to follow-up on several proposals with one phone call.)
4. The Spec Master follows-up on the proposal and requests permission to assist the architect or engineer in writing the spec.
5. A “Ready-to-Issue” guide spec or a “Performance” spec is sent to the architect or engineer for evaluation. (Using the most current information about the project provided by the architect or engineer.)
6. The Spec Master follows-up with the architect or engineer to determine if this product is going to be specified. If it is, then he requests a copy of the spec when compete to validate it.
7. The Spec Master receives a copy of the spec and approves it or edits it and resubmits it to architect or engineer.
8. Once the job is spec’d, it is moved to a new file cabinet (and maybe a different color folder) awaiting the requests for quote.

9. If the Spec Master has done his job properly, all bidding contractors for this job will be calling for quotes on this specific product. There should be no substitutions. **THIS MEANS YOU PUT IN A GOOD MARKUP WHICH GUARANTEES THE SUCCESS OF YOUR SPEC MASTER PROGRAM.**

The War Room

It is imperative to keep your Spec Master motivated as much as your sales reps. While the Spec Master has no actual numbers to receive commission against, there is a way to track his success.

Each project is assigned a dollar value and a good mark up when a proposal is written. It is important to track these proposals and their dollar values. The success rate of converting a proposal to a spec is how the Spec Master's success is measured.

Some of our subscribers create lists of the proposals and post them on the wall in the "war room" – the Spec Master's office or department. They write "SPEC'D" on the proposal when their product is specified. It's important to keep up the aggressive atmosphere to motivate the Spec Master.

The Spec Master should also be developing good business relationships with the specifiers. He is a "partner" on the job, not a salesman. A small token of "thank you" can be sent to the specifiers if the firm allows it.

Your Spec Master should also use this relationship to make other contacts within the architectural or engineering firm. The higher he gets in the organization, the better the chance that your product will be specified in all the firm's projects. This is especially true if your product is part of a "system" product such as a plumbing system, heating or ventilating system, etc.

Writing the Spec – The Moment of Truth!

Spec writing is an art. Particularly when you're the manufacturer or representing the manufacturer. In most cases, you cannot deliberately refer to one model exclusively when you're an architect or engineer. However, there are several ways around that.

One of the most popular and easiest ways is to write a "performance spec doesn't necessarily describe your product by model number, but rather by it's features and operation. Nearly every manufacturer has at least one thing that makes his product unique. This unique item must be included in a performance spec. Below is an example of a poorly written performance spec versus a performance spec written by a Spec Master.

POORLY WRITTEN

Supply and install where shown on plans a circular drinking fountain manufactured of stainless steel with mirror finish. The drinking fountain shall have push button bubbler mounted in acceptable ADA position and include a self-contained cooler.

WELL WRITTEN

Supply and install where shown on plans circular drinking fountain manufactured of 16 ga. stainless steel polished to a #8 mirror finish. The fountain must have the following features...

- a. no manufacturer label or logo visible.
- b. stainless steel push button bubbler (chrome plated brass not acceptable) mounted in ADA position.
- c. bowl to be 14" diameter with 1/8" radius rolled edge and concealed seam.
- d. under bowl to be raised from arm by 1/2" collar.
- e. support arm to be 4 3/8" wide and 2 3/8" high throughout.
- f. Fountain must be suitable for in-wall mounting with no visible screws.
- g. All water contact surfaces must be stainless steel.
- h. Self-contained cooler must be a "no fan" model with solid access panel (louvered grill not acceptable).

See the difference? There are features written into the second spec that one manufacturer can meet as a "standard" while other manufacturers would have to provide it as a "special". This gets the architect or engineer off the hook since he didn't specify any particular model – just the features he wanted on his drinking fountain.

Unique features can include special colors, construction materials, rated performance, etc. Your Spec Master has to be familiar enough with your products to provide this type of a spec.

More Tools – Give "DO" to your favorite Spec Writer!

You may not be aware, however NBN also publishes Design Opportunities for architects. "DO" lists projects where the architect has not yet been assigned. We can customize issues of "DO" with "compliments of..." on the cover and each and every page for you to give to your favorite specifier. For more information contact us.

If you have a story to tell, a CD is an inexpensive way to get the word out. An architect, engineer or owner can listen to the CD during his morning or evening commute – you have a captured audience. Videocassettes can also be effective, but only if your Spec Master goes and shows the video. Leaving the video for someone to watch when he or she has time usually results in the video never being seen. CD's and videos should be kept short and interesting and the recipient should know the length of time it will take to listen to it. (This makes it more attractive for them to check it out.)

In Conclusion – Don't Forget the Owner!

A well-planned strategy to get your product specified will result in increased sales – now and in the future. Use your sales reps and/or distributors for the immediate sales. Use

your Spec Master to guarantee future sales. Your company's relationship with architectural firms (or engineering firms) will insure its success.

Never underestimate the importance of the building owner. Sometimes the building owner may have specific features he wants incorporated in his building. While the architect ultimately writes the spec, he will defer to the owner's request. The Spec Master should, with the architect's blessing, contact the building opener if your product offers particular benefits to the owner.

With the aid of Spec Opportunities and a well-planned strategy, your company should start to see increased sales within the first year as a Spec Opportunities subscriber, and most definitely within three years.

In addition, the Spec Master's proposals can help you predict future sales two year's away.

NBN is always open to suggestions from it subscribers. If there is any way we can provide you with more pertinent information in a format that works best for you, please ask us. We will be happy to accommodate your request, if possible.