



HOW ARCHITECTS & DESIGNERS SPECIFY BUILDING & ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTS

epiphany



Building and architectural products can be specified by architects, interior designers, design professionals, specification writers, purchasing agents and installers—**the first two being on the front lines of a sale.**

In order to get specified, speak the same language as your targets.

A pretty, branded sales package: is it just fluff, or a vital step towards getting specified? Architects and Designers speak the language of beautiful, ordered design. Brands who attempt to let products speak for themselves while ignoring design principals are speaking a language that specifiers don't understand—for them, it reads as chaotic and random.

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They are artists, first and foremost—tactile beings who not only utilize form, function and beauty in their work, but who also seek out and appreciate these characteristics in the rest of the world. They are also problem solvers. Whether they are envisioning the ways in which patients flow through healthcare environments, developing processes by which communities can grow sustainably, or contributing to institutional and social change by, for instance, reimagining a classroom for the 21st century, Architects and Designers seek a marriage of form and function—and that’s exactly what they’re looking for in products and materials.

In other words, to market building and architectural products to Architects and Designers successfully, it is imperative to understand them as professionals, where they go to discover new products, who their key influencers are and where specification is vulnerable in the sales chain.

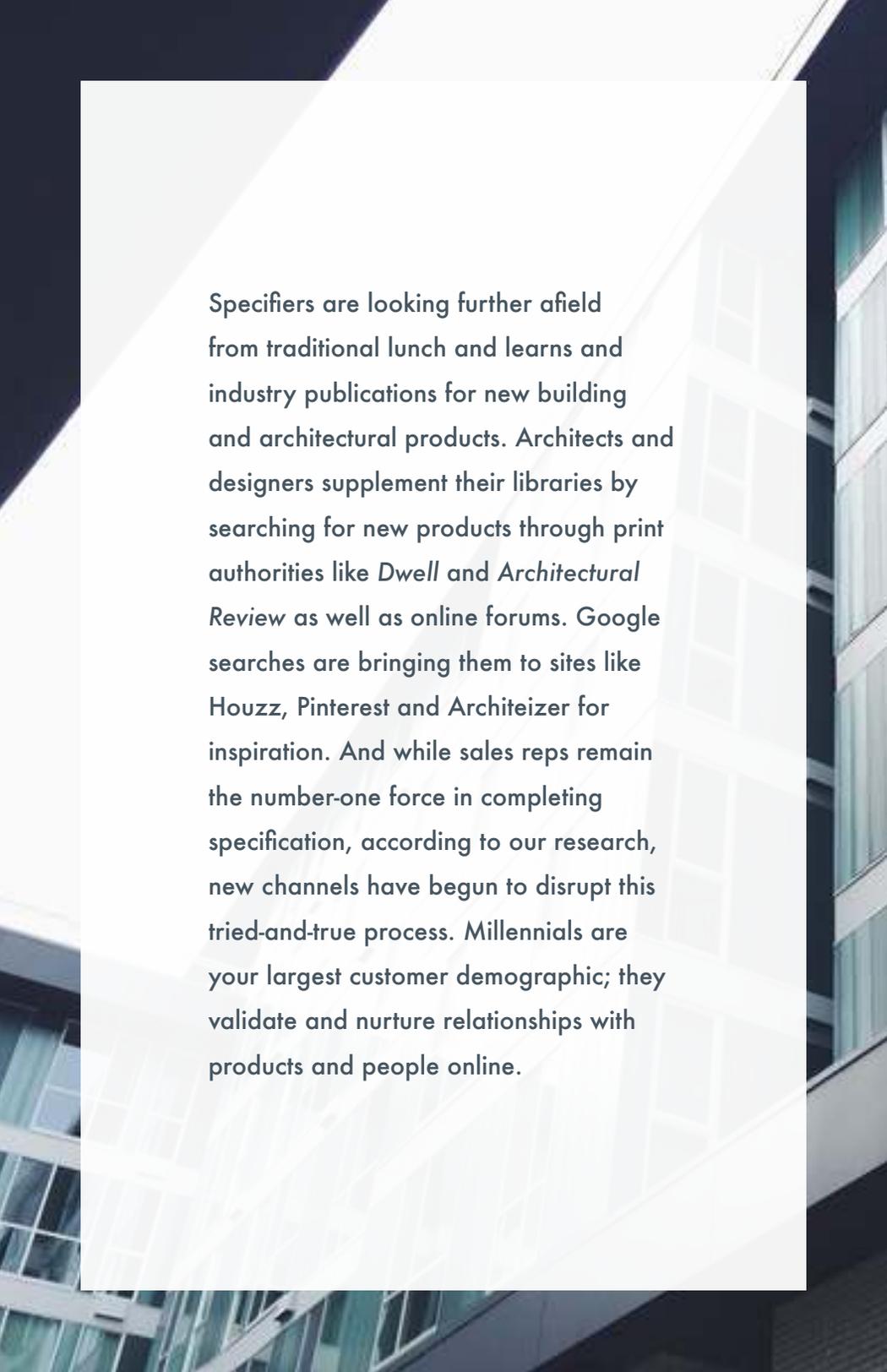
Architects & Designers are a unique group.



Many Architects & Designers have shifted from being *doers* to *seller-doers*.

Access to technology has both eased the process and increased accountability. This means that your building or architectural product stands the best chance of being specified if it can play a role in solving problems and growing sales. But that's just one of many dramatic changes the A&D community has seen in the past three years.

- Focus has turned to **outcomes**. In healthcare, lean and evidence-based design (EBD) strategies require architects to have an intimate understanding of each staff role. By reducing the number of steps it takes for a nurse to reach supplies, there is an increase in time available to be spent with each patient. Higher education has asked for zero-emission campuses to reduce environmental impact and tasked architectural teams to design student safety and connectivity into their plans.
- Clients now expect additional **deliverables** beyond specs and drawings. BIM software has allowed architects to produce datasets that can be used by facilities management teams.
- There are new **measurements** for success. Buildings have become data generators as the era of the Internet of Things (IoT) has moved in. Thermostats, refrigerators and a growing number of other building components are now connected to mobile devices. And as building performance can be quantifiably measured, performance-based contracts have become more common.



Specifiers are looking further afield from traditional lunch and learns and industry publications for new building and architectural products. Architects and designers supplement their libraries by searching for new products through print authorities like *Dwell* and *Architectural Record* as well as online forums. Google searches are bringing them to sites like Houzz, Pinterest and Architeizer for inspiration. And while sales reps remain the number-one force in completing specification, according to our research, new channels have begun to disrupt this tried-and-true process. Millennials are your largest customer demographic; they validate and nurture relationships with products and people online.

“Sometimes it’s just Google. Sometimes I get to actually look through a magazine like *Dwell* or *Architectural Record*. Both have a lot of advertisements for the latest materials. We also have a pretty good group of manufacturer reps who keep us up to date on the latest product releases.”

**Marketing Building
and Architectural
products requires
traditional offline
and online methods.**

Sales Reps:

- o Lunch and learn for new products and services
- o Restock/maintain library
- o Protect the sale from sample to specification
- o Gather client insights/industry trends



Industry publications and online forums:

- o Validate products in situation
- o Always fresh
- o Easy way to help clients "envision"
design concept

Architects and Designers, like all of us, want to be perceived as valuable to their clients.

As the industry shifts towards EBD, architects and designers are under pressure to deliver measurable results. Manufacturers of building and architectural products must create marketing that reflects that shift. The top meaningful specification criteria for building and architectural products are as follows:

- **Develop a strong relationship with a sales rep.** Sales reps should go beyond keeping products and services top of mind with specifiers and sample libraries well stocked. They should be solving problems for designers and architects. They should be able to provide working samples with a fast turn-around time and add value by providing up-to-the-minute research, industry data, CAD details and spec sheets.

- **Create content marketing that solves buyers' problems.** Working closely with targets, sales reps can provide marketing teams with valuable insights on what problems their clients have and what questions they are asking, so they can help guide content strategy.
- **Take the fear out of a new product.** Always launch with detailed case studies and research papers that prove the merits of your building or architectural product.
- **Focus educational and outreach content on your target.** If your products or services help reduce the spread of infection in a healthcare environment, write a white paper on it. Give your targets the expertise to sell your line to clients. They will be perceived as smart and valuable in their clients' eyes.

- **Be seen by and with your target audience.** Advertising in *Building Design + Construction*, *Metropolis* or other industry publications is a great way to engage with your target audience, and being featured in an editorial is even better. Partner with publications in both on- and offline capacity to reach prospects and grow your CRM.
- **Provide downloadable technical specs** in multiple formats across multiple interfaces, including smartphones and tablets.
- **Provide images of products** in situations where specifiers can see context.
- **Optimize your SEO (Search Engine Optimization).** It's not uncommon for specifiers to begin their products/services hunt with a Google search. Your website should have great SEO so targets can find your site, educational content that addresses targets' concerns, and Calls-To-Action to capture data for your CRM on top of all of the product/service resources needed to convert leads to buyers.

With so many options available at the touch of a button, it's more important than ever to lock down your sales chain and protect your specification.



The Sales Chain

It's the job of the manufacturer to protect the sale from sample to specification to install and at every point along the way. Identifying weaknesses in your sales chain will allow you to shore up your marketing efforts to protect your specification.

Sales Chain Breakdown:

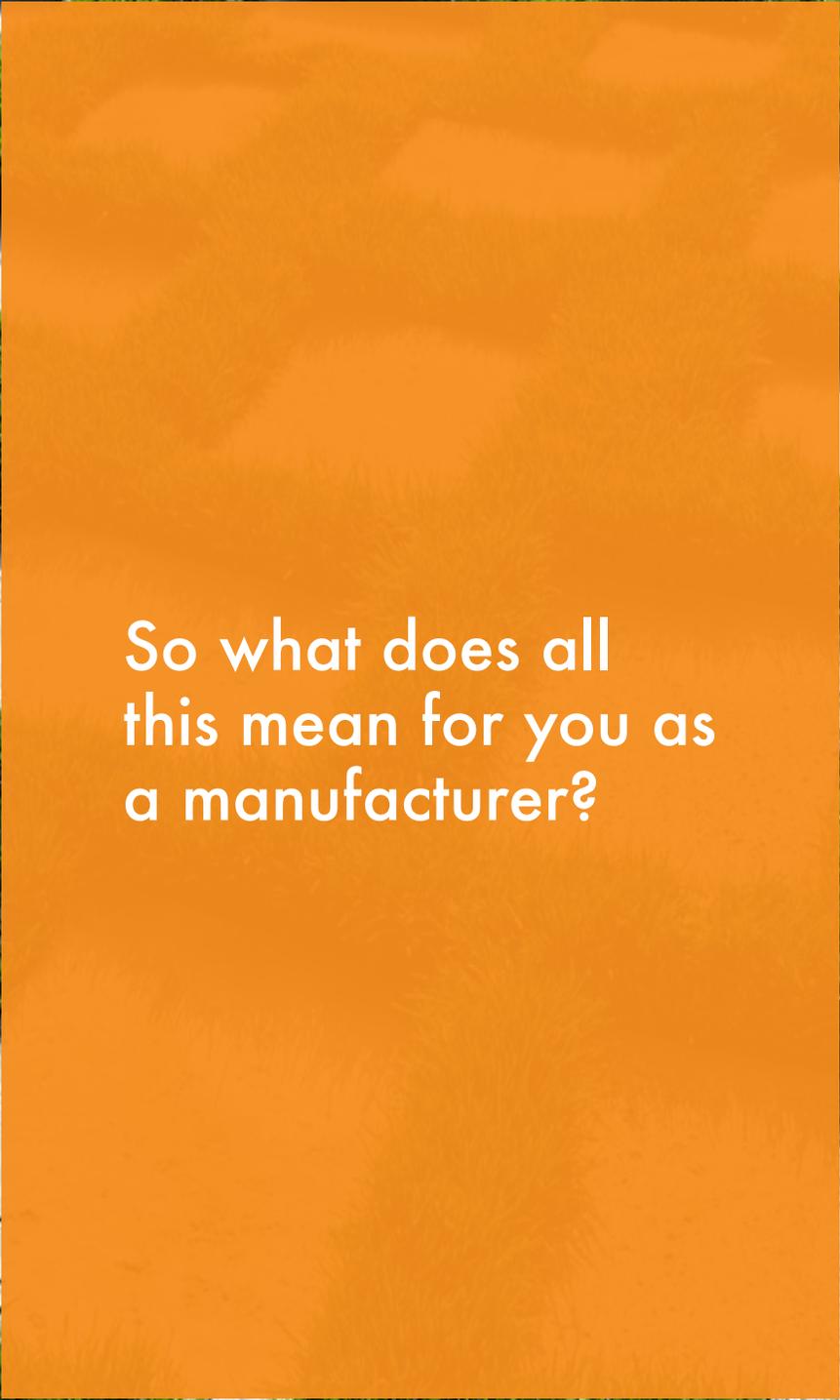
- **Problem:** Architect is busy and leaves critical specifications to interns.
- **Solution:** Rep should know all projects and every person in the firm, including the interns. Libraries should be well stocked with samples, and technical specs should be easily downloadable in any format: PDF, Word, JPEG, on desktops, tablets and smartphones.

- **Problem:** Client rejects selection due to price.
- **Solution:** Provide compelling research that shows how the building and architectural product solves problems/affects outcomes.

- **Problem:** Architect or Designer cannot provide Specification Writer with technical details and scrambles to find a parity product.
- **Solution:** Make all technical specs detailed and easy to send to the specification writer.

Other risks include:

- Installers who are unable to get clear instruction online and swap out a product for one with which they are more familiar.
- Contractors who replace specified materials with cheaper versions.
- And specification software such as MasterSpec, which makes product recommendations based on a preloaded set of manufacturers.



So what does all this mean for you as a manufacturer?

How can you leverage modern marketing techniques to get your products specified consistently in a crowded landscape? Remember the following:

- **It's not you; it's me.** Your prospects are not interested in reading more about you—they are interested in capturing information that is all about how your products/services can help them be successful.
- **Don't just tell—show.** Brand yourself as a thought leader in the industry by creating downloadable educational materials that explain the ways your products solve problems for your targets within the context of a Lead Generation Site.
- **Embrace the data.** All that educational material will boost your SEO and drive traffic—and potential leads—to your site. Capture their data as they download your content, and use it to transform visitors into leads.

- **Utilize multiple techniques.** Inbound marketing strategies can be pursued through a blog page, white papers, research reports, PDFs—a whole multitude of media. Through inbound marketing, you can track what types of materials your prospects are more drawn to and hone your content to match their needs and interests.
- **Save time.** One of the benefits of inbound content marketing is that it reduces the amount of touch time required to close a sale by doing some of the heavy lifting—establishing trust, demonstrating value, etc.—while you’re free to do more of what you do best.

It’s no surprise that Knoll is taking the expert position in healthcare design. In the study *Destination Bedside: A Design-Research Project for Effective Nursing and Patient Spaces*, Knoll empirically explored relationships between design and nursing/patient outcomes and translated those results into design concepts.

[VIEW THE FULL REPORT](#)



Best practices to sales and marketing success:

- A website evolves as your business evolves and provides a continual stream of qualified leads
- Automated lead nurturing
- E-commerce and online quote request capabilities to expand customer reach and reduce barriers to sales
- Integrated CRM and fulfillment systems to streamline sales and product operations
- Product-specific and educational content that enhances SEO and reduces the need for printed brochures that quickly become obsolete

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