

Executive Summary

2016

The Architect's Journey to Specification

Specification as a strategic exercise is making a comeback

Architects shape the vision that transforms the built environment. Their mission focuses on how buildings contribute to a better environment, human health, resilient communities and better life experiences. Nowhere is that mission better exemplified than in the choices architects make when they select products that make buildings into high-performance structures.

Architects care about specifications. More than two-thirds of architects think that specifying provides an opportunity for collaboration and discussion. Through the choices they make, the profession defines fundamental, strategic, and, most importantly, essential services for the process. Only those practiced in building design can understand how to organize and arrange all the parts to make the whole—and all the factors to take into account. Today, architects uniquely create buildings that improve the quality of life for those who occupy or use them.

Successful specifications call for both alacrity and discipline: those are the two most essential ingredients for crafting meaningful change in the built environment.

Decisions made during this process shape the opinions and thoughts of building owners and clients. They set a course of action for contractors and builders. They result in an experience for the occupant that is either positive or negative.

It's surprising, therefore, that the process through which architects and building design professionals decide to specify products remains somewhat opaque. Firm culture plays a big role, and that culture is usually defined by firm principals and owners. Each firm's own habits, tendencies and way of doing things produce consistent patterns that emerge to become best practices.

AIA and ConstructConnect – an AIA Innovation Partner and a leading construction market research company – collaborated to make this landmark report. Our two organizations share a common vision of the importance of architects in the construction ecosystem.

The report offers a window into how architects specify building products so that everyone benefits from working with architects.

The research in this report emphasizes importance of the relationship between architects and building product manufacturers in the continuing evolution of the built environment.

Understanding architects and why they specify certain products is the first and fundamental step. We believe this report helps us shed light on the journey to making specifications. The report's companion data dashboard can help you dig deeper into the data and apply that intelligence to your own business.

Learn more at aia.org/dashboard.

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Overall building product specification drivers and trends

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Recommendations based on key findings

Manufacturers have a unique opportunity to work with architects and become valued resources to them. The findings in this study provide repeated emphasis on architects' reliance of past products, trust in products that are familiar, and need for the product specification process to be as easy as possible while allowing them to maintain quality design and document work.

The findings reinforce the extreme importance that relationships have in the architecture, engineering, and contractor (AEC) industry. And the relationship between architects and product manufacturers are no exception. They want trusted partners that they can create long-term relationships with—ones who will provide additional knowledge and expertise that will help architects deliver the best service possible to their clients.

Overall recommendations to foster, strengthen, and maintain relationships with architects:

1. Improve websites. Websites are one of the most-used ways architects get product information. Architects want product websites

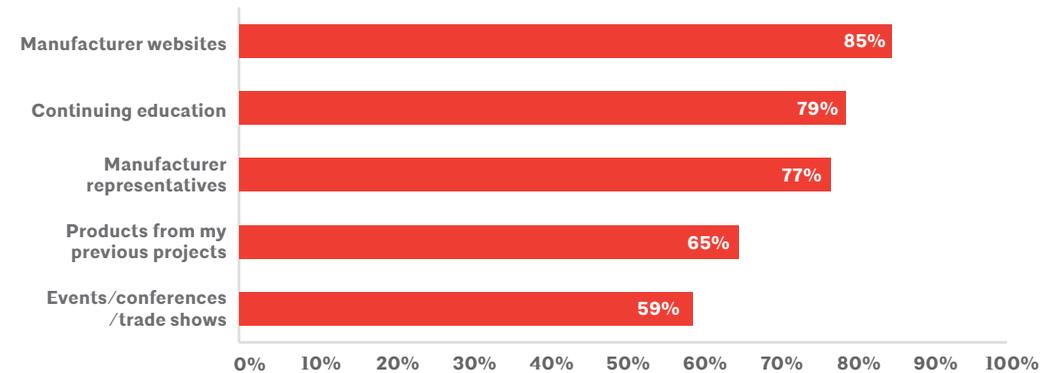
that are clear, concise, up-to-date, and easy to navigate. They also want easy access (no sign-up to view product information) and detailed information accessible, including building information models and objects.

2. Focus on education. Architects are required to take continuing education courses in order to maintain their license. It is not surprising that they use those sessions to keep up on product trends. Manufacturers can capitalize on this by creating and offering educational programming, including seminars, webinars, and lunch-and-learn sessions that qualify for continuing education credits. An important caveat is that manufacturers need to ensure their education programming focuses solely on that education—and how their products fit into that. An architect views marketing and direct selling of products services, or specific brands, very poorly. If product manufacturers try to sell within educational programming, they will undermine their relationships.

3. Be an expert. Architects don't want to talk to a sales or marketing person unless that person knows technical information about

Manufacturers and continuing education are the most used ways architects keep up on product trends

% of respondents



the product. Be sure your sales force includes people knowledgeable about how the product will be used—and has specifications available on that product.

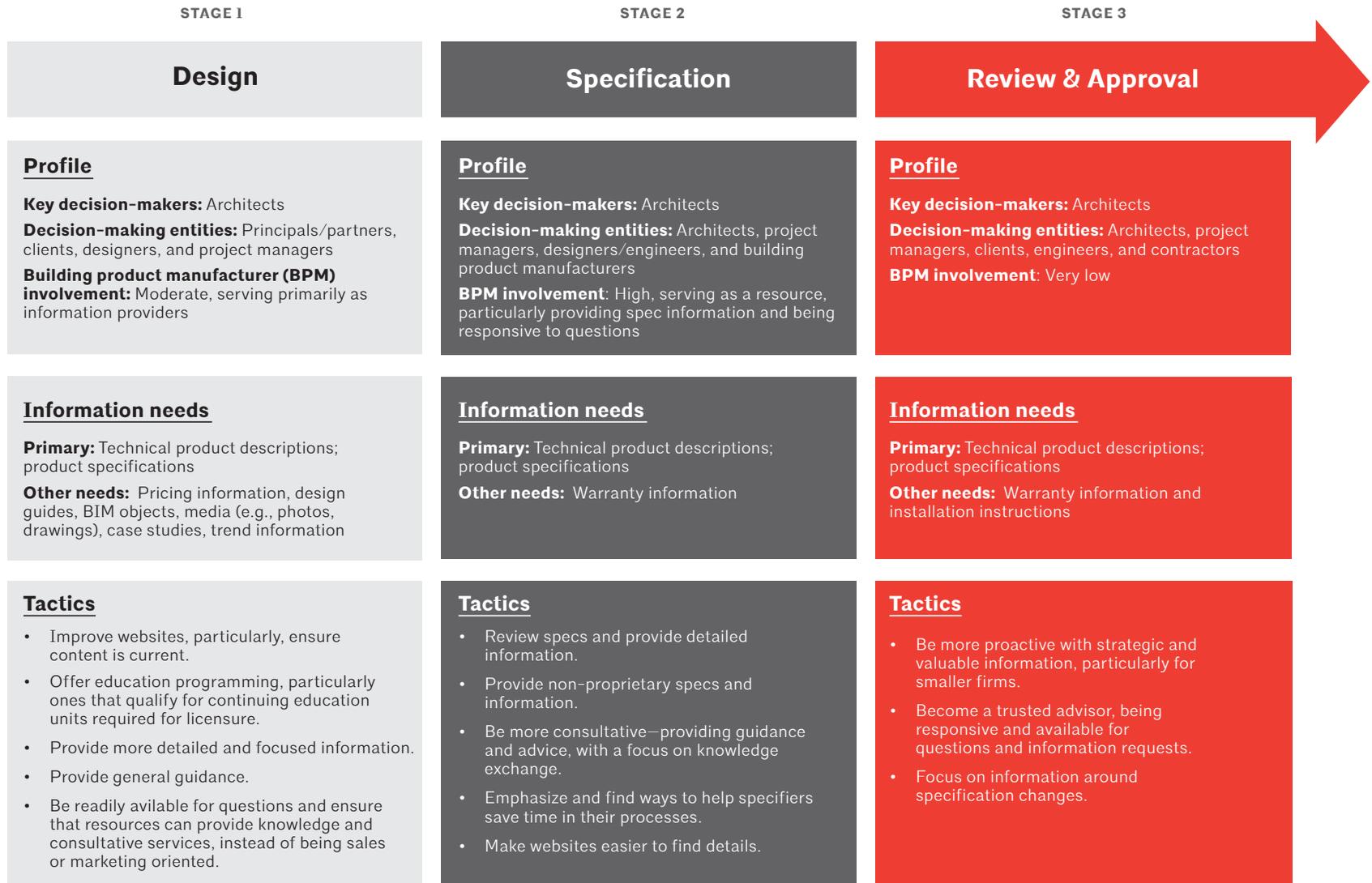
4. Be proactive. Architects report that manufacturers are important influence agents in the products they select for specification. Architects have many demands from clients, and their time is extremely limited. Manufacturers should learn about what pressure points architects have. Proactivity will also allow manufacturers to expand

their business with architecture clients. For example, architects report that product manufacturers are not very involved in the latter stages of the specification process, yet they could use assistance. This is an opportunity area.

5. Be transparent. The more open a partner is, the more loyalty and trust he/she will garner. This will translate to greater market share, as architects start to look at the manufacturer as an extension of their project teams.

Targeted approaches along the stage of specification

The data also point to specific knowledge that partners can use to build market penetration throughout the specification journey.



Architecture firm profiles

Architecture firms vary in size, specialization, and culture. Identifying the way firms operate and behave is important in order to understand how they function, the kind of employees they retain, and the ways they work with service providers and other partners. The research investigated seven aspects of firm philosophy where practitioners rated their firms along a spectrum. (FIGURE 1.0) Neither end of the spectrum is better or worse than the other; the scale merely helps define the profile of different architecture firms.

On the whole, architecture firms are very habitual in their practices. They are also very committed to sustainability in building design. But there are variations by firm size and type. With regard to product specification, most firms are fairly risk-averse, with decisions tending to lean toward products that have worked well in the past. New products and materials tend to be avoided until there is a moderate level of use in the market.

(FIGURE 1.1)

Conversely, architecture firms do tend to have a more dynamic culture that is open to new ideas, regardless of source. This orientation toward innovation reflects a profession that is open to change and willing to learn from others. The juxtaposition of these two inclinations toward risk aversion and

FIGURE 1.0 Aspects of architecture firm profiles

Source: B2B International

Experimental: “We prefer to experiment with new and different products/materials for our projects.”	APPROACH TO EXPERIMENTATION	Habitual: “We prefer to specify products/materials we have specified before.”
Early adopter: “We are among the first firms to specify products/materials that are new to the market.”	APPROACH TO INNOVATION	Laggard: “We are among the last firms to specify products/materials that are new to the market.”
Environmental: “We have a strong focus on the environment and sustainability when it comes to specification.”	ENVIRONMENTAL FOCUS	Non-environmental: “We tend not to focus on the environment and sustainability when it comes to specifications.”
Outspoken: “We have a dynamic and outspoken culture.”	CULTURE OF INTERACTION	Studied: “We have a quiet and studied culture.”
Flexible: “We keep our options open, stay flexible, and focus on the big picture.”	PLANNING CULTURE	Structured: “We focus on getting the job completed with structured early planning.”
Risk taker: “We encourage all ideas even if some of them will fail.”	RISK CULTURE	Risk averse: “We prefer to use ideas that we know will be successful.”
Open ideation: “We believe the best ideas come from working with external sources.”	IDEATION CULTURE	Closed ideation: “We believe the best ideas come from within the architecture studio.”

more conservative in trying out new products. Like all architecture firms, they are disposed toward supporting sustainable design, though not at as dramatic levels as their multidisciplinary counterparts.

Architect personas

The data overall reveal three prevailing architect personas, where architects share major traits and attitudes. These personas—drawn from their firm's profile (Figure 1.1), key influence factors (Figure 2.1 on page 15), and product information used (Figure 3.3 on page 21)—help identify those practitioners that are most likely to be open to new products or technologies, and those best targeted for increasing market share of existing products/services. (FIGURE 1.2)

The Conservative

The first persona is labeled “the conservative.” The largest share of architects, 41%, falls into this profile. This architectural professional heavily relies on past successes, and is looking for detailed product information. They are less likely to be a LEED accredited professional, a proxy for personal dedication to sustainable design practices. While the gender of conservatives is mixed, the group is more likely to be older and work for firms with a risk-adverse attitude.

The Dynamist

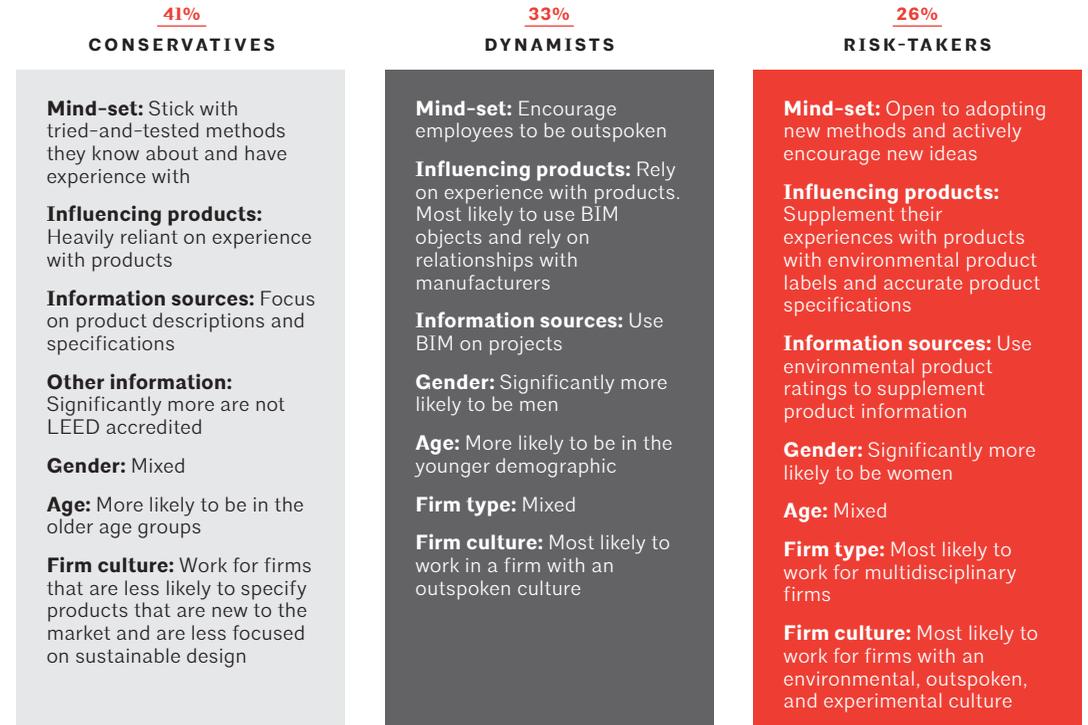
The next largest share of architects can be defined as “dynamists,” and represent 33% of all architects. They tend to be more outspoken, and while they also rely on past experience with products, they find relationships with manufacturers important. They are more likely to be influenced by access to building information modeling (BIM) objects for products they specify given that they often use BIM in their work. In terms of profiling, dynamists tend to be male, younger, and work in a firm with an outspoken culture (which more often occurs in larger firms). Dynamists are also less likely to be dissatisfied with product manufacturers.

The Risk Taker

The third persona, representing 26% of architects, are labeled “risk takers.” These architects are most open to new products and methods of design, and they actively engage in new ideas, often independently researching information on products. They are more committed to sustainable design and actively look for products that are environmentally preferable. The risk taker is significantly more likely to be female and more likely to work in a multidisciplinary firm. They are often located in firms that align with these attitudes—committed to sustainable design, experimental, and dynamic.

FIGURE 1.2 Architect persona attributes

% of respondents



Methodology

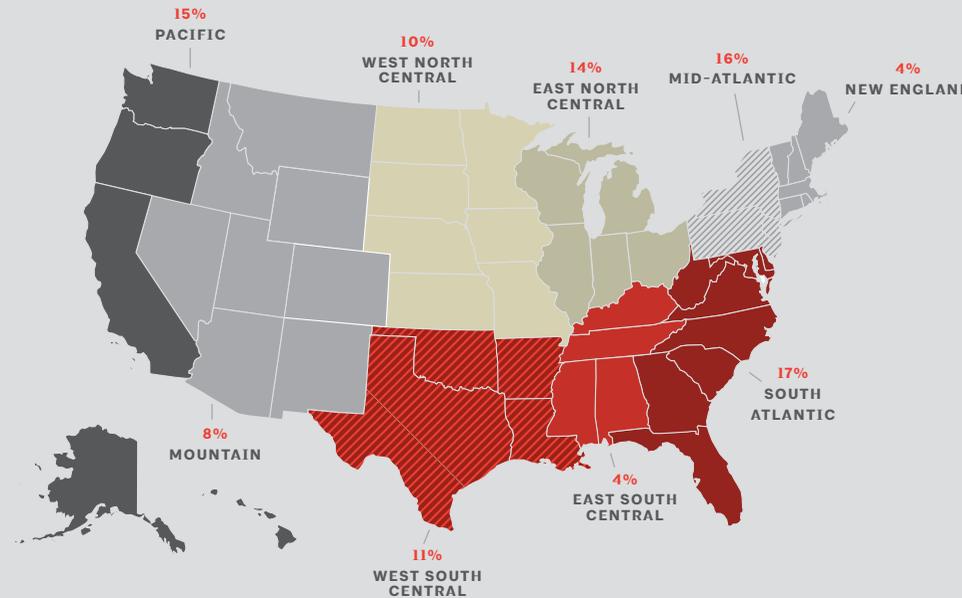
This report is an initiative of the AIA, drawn from a study AIA developed in collaboration with B2B International (B2B), an independent research company. Survey questionnaire development was done in partnership between AIA and B2B. B2B managed survey programming, data collection and tabulation, and raw data analysis.

The research contained in this report was conducted in April 2016 using an online survey methodology, drawing from a representative sampling of AIA's membership, which comprises approximately half of all registered architects in the US. The survey yielded 330 completed responses, 90% of which were from licensed architects. All respondents were involved in researching and specifying products and materials, a prerequisite to taking the survey.

The sample was fairly representative of the industry (as compared with AIA's **2016 Firm Survey Report**, a quantitative census of the architecture profession). Some differences included a larger share of multidisciplinary firms (42% nationally), lower share of single discipline architecture firms (51% nationally), and a slight overrepresentation of small firm practitioners (25% nationally).

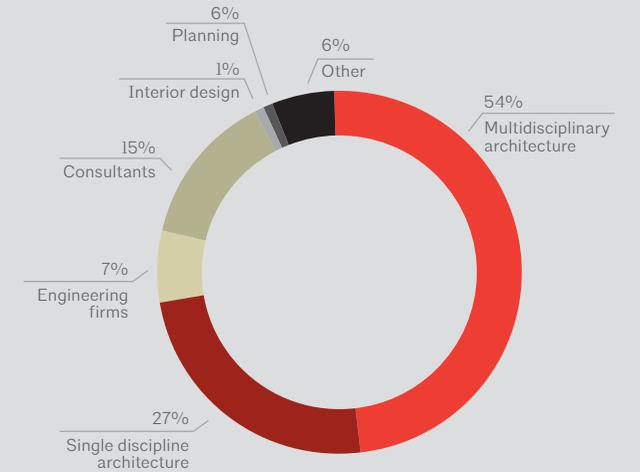
The gender split was 25% women and 71% men; and the majority of respondents were architects, at 59%, with firm principals/partners (16%), project managers (12%), and specifiers (7%) making up the majority of the respondents' job roles.

Geographic distribution of respondents



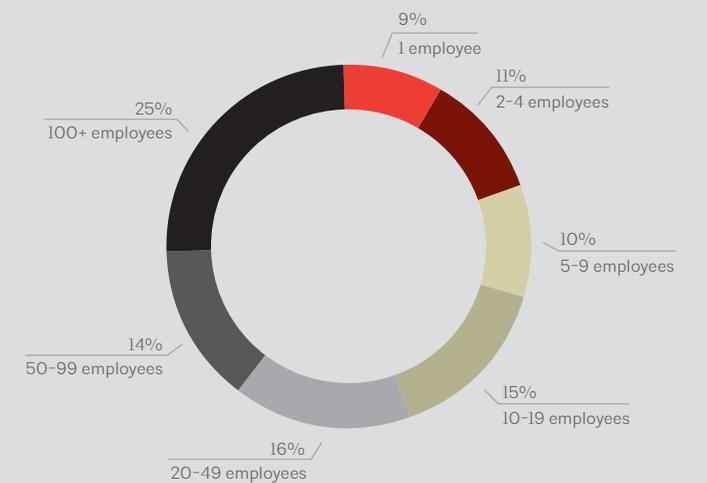
Survey respondents by firm type

% of respondents



Survey respondents by firm size

% of respondents



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