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Conspectus's Tech Tips received the national Communications Award from the Construction Specifications Institute September 2011.

ABSTRACT:

For product sales representatives, the key to getting products included in specifications during the Procurement (Bidding) Phase is understanding the substitution process and having a product that meets the specifications.

FILING:

UniFormat™
3030 - Instructions for Procurement
Z1010 - General Requirements

MasterFormat™

00 26 00 - Procurement Substitution Procedures
00 40 00 - Procurement Forms and Supplements (may include substitution request form)
00 43 25 - Substitution Request Form (During Procurement)
00 63 25 - Substitution Request Form (During Construction)

KEYWORDS:

Bidding, Construction Product, Meets Specs, Meets Specifications, Procurement, Product Rep, Product Representative, Product Substitution, Sales, Salesmanship, Substitution, Substitution procedures, Substitution Request, Substitution Request Form

REFERENCES:

CSI Project Resource Manual™
CSI Project Delivery Practice Guide

Succeeding with Substitution Requests

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So the product you represent did not get spec'd. Now what? Package up all your promotional material and send it along with a real nice letter to the A/E telling them how wonderful your product is?

WRONG!

1st Thing To Do:

READ the specifications!

Start by carefully reading the spec section(s) that apply to your product. Determine if your product REALLY meets the specs; if it just comes close to meeting the specs; or if it does not meet the specs.

Assuming your product meets the specs or at least comes close, next read the Procurement and Contracting Requirements (A.K.A. *Division 00*) and the General Requirements (A.K.A. *Division 01 - not to be confused with General Conditions*) to determine if substitution requests are allowed and how they are handled.

There are several different places where information regarding substitution requests can be placed, and each A/E and each project is different. Therefore, you need to check carefully. However, [MasterFormat®](#) does provide some help. Look for the following sections in the Project Manual:

00 26 00 Procurement Substitution Procedures
00 40 00 Procurement Forms and Supplements (may include substitution request form)
00 43 25 Substitution Request Form (During Procurement)
00 63 25 Substitution Request Form (During Construction)
00 70 00 Conditions of the Contract for substitution requirements.

01 25 00 Substitution Procedures
01 60 00 Product Requirements
Depending on the project, some or all of these sections may be included in the Project Manual. The titles and numbers may be slightly different on each project, depending on the Owners' requirements and the level of understanding the person preparing these documents has in MasterFormat®.

Substitution Requests

Whatever procedures are required, follow them to the letter. Whatever forms are required, fill them out completely and honestly. A/Es, like everyone else, will gravitate to those things that can be accomplished quickly and easily. Therefore, the quicker and easier you make it for the A/E to review and approve your product, the more likely your product will be approved - assuming, of course, that it meets the specs.

Make It Easy

If a Substitution Request Form is included, be sure to provide ALL information required. Be as specific and accurate as possible. DO NOT use general statements like "meets specs." Explain exactly how the product meets specs. Provide documents to support your claims, but don't just provide the literature expecting the A/E to search for the few facts that are pertinent. Highlight those bits of information, so the A/E can find them quickly and easily. HINT: Technical data sheets are far more useful than slick ads. This may take some work, but whatever work you do is work the A/E will NOT have to do. This will improve your odds of having your product

approved. You are making this submission for your financial benefit and for the financial benefit of your company. The A/E makes no money by reviewing or researching your product. The A/E's interests are to the Owner and to their A/E firm. If it takes too long to review your product, the A/E is likely to move on to review another product.

The A/E is NOT required to review and approve YOUR product. The A/E is only required to review products for the Owner's benefit. A/Es will review only as many products as they have time to do, and they will only approve those that meet the specs. If the A/E has reviewed 2 of your competitors' products and skips your product, the A/E has done their job.

Extra Mile

Whatever you can do to distinguish yourself and your product will help either to get your product request approved; to get your product included in the specs for the next project; or (better yet) to get your product listed in the office master guide spec.

How can you distinguish yourself and your product through the Substitution Request process?

If there is no requirement in the specs to submit a standard Substitution Request form or the form prescribed seems inadequate to evaluate your product, voluntarily provide a completed CSI Substitution Request Form 13.1A; BUT only if it is permissible to make such a voluntary submission. It is important to read Divisions 00 & 01.

Provide the A/E with a copy of the spec section(s). Yes, of course, the A/E already has a copy; but if a copy is included with your submission, the A/E will not have to take the time to look it up. In the section(s) you provide, highlight all of the salient characteristics for the product and highlight the same salient

characteristics in the supporting documents. This way, the A/E saves time and effort by not having to go on a "treasure hunt."

Product Doesn't Meet Specs?

If your product does not meet the spec, do NOT bother the A/E by requesting a substitution. You are only wasting your time and the A/E's time. The A/E will not be happy about that, and you will be leaving a bad impression of yourself and your product.

However, this is an opportunity to make an appointment with the A/E to learn why the product was specified the way it was and how your product might fit into a similar project in the future. Don't challenge their decision. Listen. Learn. Offer assistance.

Horseshoes & Hand Grenades

What if your product "almost" meets the specs? It depends. Often things get into the specs that were not intended or are more restrictive than the A/E realized when writing the spec. This typically occurs when an A/E relies too heavily on a guide spec provided by a manufacturer. If this is the case, you may have an opportunity.

Contact the A/E and make an appointment to discuss the situation. If there is no time for a face-to-face meeting, discuss it over the phone.

Provide the A/E with whatever supporting evidence is appropriate, again highlighting the salient characteristics. Point out where your product differs from the specs and why you think it should be included. Don't expect any favors. The A/E is looking after the interests of the Owner and those of the A/E's office.

CA Opportunity

If your product does not get approved, there is still opportunity to make a good impression for the next project.

Offer to assist the A/E in the review of your competitor's submissions during the Contract Administration (CA) phase of the project. You should be able to point out where your competitor's product may fall short of the spec requirements more readily than the A/E.

This accomplishes a number of things:

- It saves the A/E's time.
- It helps assure the specs are met and the Owner gets what they are paying for.
- It keeps the system honest.

When providing this service, be honest and accurate to a fault. It will enhance your credibility. Never exaggerate; never be vindictive; these will undermine your credibility. Remember, there is nothing preventing your competitor from providing the same service.

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