STEEL FRAMING:

Prospects Are ‘Up’

The Advantages of Light Gage Structural Steel Framing Are Becoming Increasingly Apparent to Designers and to Contractors

By Durward Humes,
Managing Director
Metal Lath/Steel Framing Association

The advantages of light gage structural steel framing are becoming more apparent to architects, engineers and developers with every passing year—light weight, strength, ease and speed of fabrication and erection, versatility, resistance to termites and rot, non-combustibility; the list goes on and on.

But what’s in this growing trend for the interior systems contractor? In a word: Profits.

Profits from expanding your business to an area that’s a lot more compatible with your current business than you may be aware of—after all, a wall is a wall, whether it supports the building or simply separates interior units. With light gage steel framing, the main difference lies in the strength of the steel and—perhaps—its method of attachment.

To put it simply, if you can screw a drywall partition together with steel drywall studs, you’re well on your way to becoming a load-bearing framing contractor.

Basic Components

The basic components of a steel framing system—studs, track and joists—are manufactured in a broad range of widths, lengths and thicknesses to meet virtually any job requirement. Both galvanized and painted finishes are available. Here are the main types:

Channel Stud — This is the mainstay of many steel stud/lath and plaster curtainwall systems. With widths of up to six inches and a one-inch flange, it is used primarily in curtainwall panels designed to resist wind load only. As with other types described, punch-outs in the web allow for runs of pipe and conduit.

Wide-flange Channel Stud — Similar to the regular channel stud, but with a 1-3/8-inch flange, this versatile member can be used for curtainwalls and as the building’s main structural frame.

Nailable Studs and Joists — By far the most popular members for load-bearing work, these components offer the highest load capacity-to-weight ratio of any building product on the market. Widths range from 2½-inches for the smallest stud to 12 inches for the widest joist. Narrower joist sections—six and eight-inch, for example—are often used as studs in certain applications.

Nailable Studs and Joists — Also available in a wide range

(Continued on Page 36)
STEEL FRAMING:
(Continued from Page 8)

of sizes, these members are fabricated by welding two channels together, resulting in a nailing groove for attachment of collateral materials.

System accessories—track, bridging and bracing—are available to complete the frame. And material thickness varies from 20 all the way up to 12 gage—so that you never have to “settle” for any but the right component.

Insist on Quality

While sizes and gages may vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, the members of the Metal Lath/Steel Framing Association—Alabama, Bostwick, Ceco, Inryco, Keene, Western and Wheeling—do subscribe to stringent quality standards. These are outlined in the Light Gage Steel Framing Specifications you’ll find bound in this issue of Construction Dimensions. Among the more important are:

- All 16 gage and heavier members are formed from high strength steel with a minimum yield of 50 ksi.
- Section properties are computed in accordance with the published standards of the American Iron and Steel Institute.
- Also each ML/SFA manufacturer provides accurately calculated load tables—both axial and wind—for the components they sell.

Market is There

Almost any low-rise structure can be designed with light gage steel as the main structural frame, such as apartments, town houses, stores, offices, schools, libraries, nursing homes, warehouses, farm buildings, manufacturing plants, franchise outlets.

All of these and more have been built with light gage steel, and many more will be in the future as the advantages inherent in the system become obvious to more and more architects and builders.

We all know that the construction market has been depressed for the last couple of years. But we also know that it’s making a recovery that will continue and grow in the months ahead. For example, multi-family housing — an ideal market for light gage framing — is up almost 80 percent over last year! And other categories are also showing healthy increases.

Industry manufacturers intend to get an increasing share of this growing market. Their advertising and promotion programs—supplemented by the efforts of the Metal Lath/Steel Framing Association and other industry groups—are educating architects, engineers and developers on a daily basis to the advantages and economies of steel framing. And not only in the major architectural magazines, but to specific markets as well.

On their own, and through ML/SFA, they are also reaching their customers face-to-face at special presentations and trade shows. All of these efforts can benefit you as a contractor if you decide to expand into load-bearing framing work. The work will be there and your experience uniquely qualifies you to do it.

For Example

Recently, an apartment developer in a Southern state became dissatisfied with the scheduling problems he was facing with load-bearing masonry construction. He asked the architect to look into other structural systems for future buildings in his growing development.

The interior systems contractor suggested he look into light gage steel framing and asked an industry manufacturer to review the plans and make recommendations.

The result?

The developer switched to light gage steel framing for all future buildings after the prototype came in faster and at less cost than previous buildings. Who got the business? The interior systems contrac-

(Continued on Page 40)
tor who suggested the change in the first place.

Of course, he had to learn a few new skills. Prefabrication (and the necessary welding skills) was one. Even here, though, he could depend on the framing manufacturer for advice on building jigs, getting the right welding equipment, setting up his shop for maximum production, etc. He did learn. More important, he expanded his business in a logical direction, building on a vast storehouse of knowledge and simply taking it another step further.

You can do it too. Ask a manufacturer to show you “Light Gage Steel Framing—Tomorrow’s System Today,” a sound/slide film that will give you a basic introduction to this growing system and market. Then ask his advice on how you can be a part of the growth picture in load-bearing framing. While you’re at it, ask him about steel stud/lath and plaster curtainwall systems—a similar system, with equal growth possibilities.

And, of course, feel free to contact ML/SFA at any time. Better yet, write us now for additional copies of the steel framing specs bound in this issue, or for our complete Technical Information File. It includes the steel framing story and, of course, the complete metal lath story as well. Write Metal Lath/Steel Framing Association, Suite 2026, 221 N. LaSalle St., Chicago, IL 60601.