The “Archie Rep” of Today Has to Have Product Knowledge and a Battery of Electronic Gadgets to Succeed

By S. Steve Blumenthal

The days of “Archie Rep” are quickly declining. It is extremely costly maintaining people who just converse with the design professional. Calling the design professional today requires the sales professional to also call the distributor, contractor and customer. The marketing person may be expected to be on site at the start of the project in addition to being a trouble-shooter or diplomat until the project’s completion. The marketer is also expected to call the design professional and present the products with specific information and fact.

Today’s sales or marketing people are well-trained professionals. In most instances, they are college graduates who have chosen this industry because of its challenges. There is a feeling of accomplishment knowing you had
some involvement in the design of a building, no matter what the product.

**MORE WELL-ROUNDED**

Salespeople not only have academic knowledge but in most cases they also have gone through extensive employer-provided training programs and seminars. Attending a company training session is not just sitting in a room listening to an experienced person lecture about the product, or about how to call on the customer and the design professional. Depending on the product, today’s training is far more demanding and quite extensive. Like the design professional, the education of the marketer never stops, especially since systems and materials are improved and new products continue to be introduced.

Practical product knowledge is gained by experience in the field. Archie’s “Don’t worry. We tested it. ... It will work!” is meaningless today. Depending on the product, testing and backup information is mandatory.

With this in mind, the sales professional must know how to present materials and systems to the design professional utilizing his or her design
concept. The design professional is equally concerned about material, its function and performance. Material selection is not based on the “nice guy” syndrome; it is based on a straightforward presentation.

THE PRESENTATION

A presentation must be specific and objective as it relates to the product, its function and its design. When called upon, the sales professional must be able to discuss the appropriate standards and codes germane to the product.

Aesthetics are important to all—especially the owner, but life cycle is considerably more noteworthy. The environment also is a major concern—both exterior and interior—when selecting materials. And products must meet codes and standards as they relate to life safety. The design professional is constantly aware of life safety as the structure is designed, and a knowledgeable sales professional should be as aware, as it pertains to the materials.

The training of sales professionals, in most instances, is state-of-the-art. They are continually alerted to changes and modifications. The Archie Reps of today must know where and when to use their materials, as well as know the product limitations. In addition, they must be aware of competitive information and be prepared to illustrate comparisons. Today, in order to properly specify materials, more information is required and demanded by design pro-

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fessionals. There is no “hand off” to the sales department, as in the past. Today, field personnel must “touch all bases.” Selling the design professional does not stop when you leave the design professional. It actually starts at that point as illustrated.

RIDE THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY

Aside from making all the calls and doing their job properly, sales and marketing people must also be able to communicate. It was simple for Archie; he had a scissors and knew how to cut and paste. Today, one has to be conversant with computers, as the laptop has become the message center and office.

Archie used the telephone. Today’s salespeople use the same phone from office to site to automobile via a cellular phone or modem. These, too, have become a sales working tool.

With territories expanded, the latest sales tools are necessary for all concerned. The design professional can “speak” to the salesperson quickly. Suggestions are transmitted by computer or fax machine within minutes, and all parties are informed at the same time. Should a change be made in either design or material, all those involved can make a knowledgeable decision quickly. The field salesperson must have the answers or know-how to get them. The design professional must be knowledgeable about materials to assure proper selection and installation.

Archie did his thing and set the ball in motion, creating the professional, knowledgeable salesperson we know today.

About the Author

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