

MAY | JUNE 2001

THE MAGAZINE FOR SUCCESSFUL BUILDING - ECONOMICALLY AND ENVIRONMENTALLY


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From Innovation To Market Reality: The Manufacturer's Perspective

By Steve Hoffman

Patience, cooperation and support are essential for successful development and integration of renewable products. Reaching this goal requires a foundation of trust and partnerships along the supply chain. Here are a few points for consideration:

Product selections need to be based on factual criteria, not emotion or marketing communication. Understanding environmental terminology adopted through international consensus and supported by the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is a starting point. As universal definitions are adopted, a dialogue is established that reinforces trust, facilitates clear communication, and establishes consistent standards of measurement.

Seek clarification and understanding by asking the manufacturer about their product claims. This practice will ensure that your specification will meet the project's environmental and performance requirements. It also adds credibility to your organization and helps all manufacturers reinforce the accuracy of their claims.

Get involved in the development process. Remember that you are a partner. Your constructive feedback is a necessary requirement for continuous improvement. Apply creative problem solving to each phase of the product lifecycle.

Many of today's sustainable products are in a state of evolution that eventually will lead to standard offerings with reduced complexity, streamlined execution and fulfillment.

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In dealing with manufacturers, ask questions to stimulate creative thinking. Even if you don't see an immediate response to your idea, your comment may spark a future innovation or improvement.

Manufacturers have made substantial investments moving toward the cutting edge of sustainable product development, and in most cases with limited to no initial ROI. Nonetheless these initial investments fuel continued business development. Accept invitations to visit the manufacturer and gain insights to a specific project.

Current offerings require support through specification to create the market demand necessary for future

R&D and to build out the business platform. It is critical that customers reward through specification and orders. Support the manufacturers whose products represent the highest level of environmental consciousness. This approach allows the competitive forces of the free market system to drive demand and increase R&D spending on product development by the manufacturers.

The use of alternative raw material sources may require huge shifts in manufacturing and production. While persistently pushing the envelope, be patient with the manufacturer's ability to implement change. As you support what is currently available and continue to ask for more, you drive the market.

Reasonable and realistic procurement guidelines must be established and updated as new product developments are introduced. Commit to periodic reviews. How do guidelines match the latest capabilities of the manufacturers in the product category? Do they provide reasonable stretch goals? Or has the bar been raised beyond the capabilities of current technology and available products? Does the framework in which the guidelines were developed parallel the latest mainstream rating systems, terminology and available tools?

As new concepts evolve, pledge to be realistic regarding the capabilities of existing products and open-minded about the possibilities that may be available in the future. A pragmatic attitude enables the specifier to properly integrate the product or service offering into the project requirements.

Creating realistic expectations and consensus eliminates confusion, costs and disappointment. This credibility reinforces continued support for sustainable products. Successful product development and market breakthroughs are the key to the future. Charles F. Kettering sums it up nicely: "My interest is in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there." **EDC**

About the Author: As market manager for Milliken Carpet's Earth Square carpet renewal program, Steve Hoffman serves as liaison with corporations, academic institutions and government entities. An accomplished speaker, he addresses sustainability and environmental issues at regional, national and international conferences.