

You're Only As Good As Your Manufacturer or Supplier

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by Heather Martin

The success of any construction project hinges on the ability of your supplier or manufacturer to meet your construction needs.

Nothing can affect a construction schedule, or the quality of work installed, more than the manufacturers and suppliers used on your project. While many products used are standard items in the construction trades, there are often specialized or customized products that will require a little more due diligence on the part of specifiers and contractors.

Engineers and architects will typically review test data and, where possible, use similar products as a benchmark or standard for evaluating a similar product that is new to market. This process is generally boilerplate when it comes to standard products and design. When it comes to products that are new to market or variations on familiar products, the evaluation process becomes more in depth. In this situation, it is important to discuss locations of manufacture, lead times to get products to the jobsite, as well as accessibility of tech support and QA/QC procedures.

Contractors, of course, bid out the products once the specifications and drawings are finalized. While general contractors and construction managers need familiarity with all trades, they cannot possibly have expertise in all products. It is therefore up to the subcontractor to ensure that they have a full understanding of the product, lead-time, shipping, weath-

er restrictions, shelf life, installation requirements, and QA/QC procedures.

Some suppliers or manufacturers will be more difficult to deal with than others. Often times a manufacturer is really just a supplier in disguise. Some products are actually existing products that are private-labeled under a new name and brought to market under a different distribution system. This can sometimes cause delays when looking to get material to a site under a tight deadline - which is often the case on construction projects! Check with your supplier or representative so that you know required lead times prior to getting material on a site.

Additionally, some suppliers are great for support and added value services. One manufacturer EAI works with, CETCO Liquid Boot(r), provides all submittals for projects directly to the client. All a subcontractor has to provide them is shop drawings. This ensures all data will get to the owner on the first submission, which can be critical, particularly for fast-track public agency work. The other side of this is response time. If a manufacturer will respond to your questions or submit requested data to you within 48 to 72 hours, you have a winner. Often getting the required data can be a challenge, which can create delays for submittal approvals, and therefore delays to construction.

Storage is another key factor to consider when bidding and ordering materials. Many products have shelf lives or weather restrictions that will hinder storing materials on sites or in local warehouses. For example, some epoxy flooring systems have a shelf life of 45 days. A subcontractor would not have a lot of these materials around their warehouse, nor would the supplier, as the product would be manufactured closer to the time of shipping.

Weather considerations are critical as they



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can limit the ability to store materials on a site and also can cause delays in construction. Some products are weather sensitive and cannot be stored or installed on sites in winter, which is typically when the weather gets below 45 degrees. This temperature must often be maintained for 24 hours, not just when a product is being installed. If the job proceeds in winter, different methods for heating the building, and maintaining the temperature of the material will have to be determined.

Stored materials also face challenges when there are construction delays. If a product is stored on site in anticipation of installation within a few weeks, and the product has a shelf life of 3 months, a job delay of a few months could lead to liability issues and unusable material.

Of course specifiers should ask for budgetary numbers when reviewing products, and contractors should be able to rely on the accuracy of the costs when dealing with a manufacturer or supplier. But delays in submittals, delivery or storage can have a significant impact on your profits as a contractor. Keeping some of these key factors in mind when pricing out the job can help you eliminate some headaches and increase your bottom line.

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