

Creating demand through specification

Building specification selling is now more important than ever for building product manufacturers and service providers.

Securing specifications on construction projects is essential for the growth of a business.

Not only are you securing sales and converting your pipeline, but you are building relationships with key specifiers who will be more likely to buy from you again for future projects.

To create demand and be the go-to brand for specifiers, you must market your building product or service company as providing solutions to problems that directly affect specifiers, the build project, and the long term operation of the building.

By focusing on the benefits, availability and easy application of your product/service rather than price, you add value which prompts interest, builds trust and develops relationships over time.

This is specification selling.

Read our guide to see how you can create demand through specification, build relationships with specifiers, and ultimately grow your business.

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What is specification selling?

Specification selling is a very complex sales process with many influences on the final product or service selection. Essentially you are communicating your brand and building relationships with key specifiers involved in early stages of a project.

The 'specifier' is a broad term which covers various roles and responsibilities – including clients, developers, engineers, architects, design managers, quantity surveyors, consultants, and interior designers.

However, you can usually consolidate the extensive list to:

- Architects – responsible for design and technical specification, and standards
- Contractors – responsible for Performance specification

The most important factor to bear in mind at this stage, is that each of the specifier types above have different requirements on a build project.

Architects are known to be driven by innovation, design/aesthetics, sustainability, and whether a product or service complies with relevant UK Building Regulations.

Contractors are known to be concerned with performance engineering and consider factors such as cost and how well a product or service performs on a build project.

The above statements may be generalisations, but what we are getting across is that if you understand the different dynamics and influences on your targeted specifier, you have the greatest chance of specification sales success.

What are the benefits of a specification sales strategy?

You will more than likely already have experience in getting your products or services specified, and understand it is a complex and long-term process that poses many challenges.

One of the biggest challenges and frustrations is when a product or service is replaced with a competitor's option. Generally, the main reason for a swap in specification is down to price. Performance sometimes is a factor, but usually if the correct due diligence is carried out, it means the product or service is fit for the purpose intended.

The benefits of developing a specification sales strategy include:

- You increase your business' sales and profitability
- You develop long-term relationships with specifiers
- You reduce the risk of being swapped out in a specification
- You gain more control over the sales of your product/service

Specification selling increases brand loyalty that gives you a competitive advantage over companies that are selling purely on price. When a specifier chooses you mainly on price, they don't value your product or service, and see you more of a commodity.

When you build loyalty and relationships with key specifiers, if the project goes well they will be more likely to work with you and buy from you again. This converts a one-off customer into a long-term customer, and ultimately increases your return on investment for your specification strategy.

At a time when sustainability is influencing the tightening of building regulations, on-site benefits and long term operating costs are influencing specifiers to consider benefits over price. This puts a construction company that has adapted a specification sales approach firmly in the driving seat.

As a manufacturer you gain more control over the sales of your products than when tied to the pricing agreements made with distributors.

Where do you start with specification marketing?

First and foremost, your specification marketing strategy starts with a plan. If you have a clear direction with a defined set of goals, you are much more likely to succeed.

You are more likely to raise turnover with increased sales. And not just that, increase profitability too. This is because when you have a specification strategy in place, you are less likely to waste money on ad-hoc advertising later down the line.

If you have a marketing strategy and plan in place, you will be able to keep to a schedule that clearly outlines your marketing investment.

With your specification strategy, it will need to outline:

- **Goals:** what do you want to achieve from the campaign.
- **Timeframe:** how long will the campaign last (this helps to set expectations).
- **Define your audience:** understand who you are communicating to and building relationships with.
- **Competitors:** research where your competitors position themselves.
- **Your strengths:** clearly define how you help your clients and why they buy from you. By understanding this it will make your communications clearer and more effective.
- **Tactical marketing activities:** which marketing elements will help you to achieve your goals – content writing, website development, social media, SEO, email marketing, and CPD presentations.

Create your sales specification strategy using the guidance above, in a clear 12 – 18 month plan.

It is about building for long term success, but aiming for short term wins along the way.

If you set this as your main focus, it will set you apart from over 80% of the construction industry, where many businesses strive for quick wins and constantly aiming for the low hanging fruit. This short-termism reduces your chances of marketing success, and indeed business success.

Examples of this include ad-hoc spending on Google Advertising or advertising on social media platforms, thinking by just getting in front of their audience it will bring some return. We are not against advertising, and it has a good place in any marketing strategy, but spending your marketing budget on advertising doesn't work.

There is a lack of trust in advertising compared with organic marketing activities. Specifiers, such as architects and contractors, want to be educated and inspired with your brand content, not to be sold to in poorly executed adverts.

The uncomfortable truth is that it takes time to deliver growth. There are rarely quick wins in specification.

Due to the complex nature of the decision-making process, you are more likely to build trust, influence, and relationships with specifiers with carefully considered content. Good examples of content include:

- Writing case studies of projects where you have helped your clients, which shows the specifiers how you help clients in a real-life application.
- Writing thought leadership articles, where you are giving value to specifiers and giving answers to questions or problems they may have.

We often hear the phrase “*content won’t sell my products*”, but this couldn’t be further from the truth.

Content will help to start conversations with new and existing customers. Tell your story and tell your audience how you can help solve their problems. That’s what they want to know and hear. They don’t necessarily want to hear about a new product or a new service, they want the value and what it brings to them.

This done on a consistent basis will ensure long-term growth, as it will strengthen your relationship with new and existing customers. But how do you achieve short-term wins and sales success? Focus on your audience’s pain points and problems, then create a schedule in how you can help.



An important consideration for your specification sales strategy

It is important to realise that differentiating yourself has never been more important, for the specification process. This can be difficult in a crowded marketplace, and sometimes it is difficult to determine what sets you apart from your competitors’ products and services.

But there is a way, here are 3 tips to help:

Make sure you are clear in your communications

Don't confuse your audience with clever or technical language. Obviously with the technical nature of specification you have to demonstrate your expertise, but don't overload your communications with technicalities.

Also don't focus on your product/service features, focus on what problems it solves for customers.

Your audience wants to know how your product or service will benefit them as a business and how it will help their project.

Buying decisions are made by emotion and justified with logic. And by writing about how you can help solve your audience's problem will start to build trust.

Consistency is key

There are thousands of marketing messages out there in the construction sector every day fighting for attention.

If you're posting over social media every now and again, writing new blog posts every few months, or sending out emails whenever you have time, this isn't going to work.

To get noticed by your audience or customers you need to be consistent

Trust is a major barrier to a sale. The best way to build trust with your audience is by being consistent with how often you communicate with them, while also making sure your message (e.g. tone, language, benefits) is consistent too.

Don't focus on price

Price matters in business, but don't make it the main reason why a customer chooses you. It doesn't do you any favours and doesn't promote loyalty.

When your communications are price driven, your business will be looked at much more of a commodity rather than a valued supplier/partner.

Your plan to give a new customer low pricing on the basis that they'll become a long-term customer just won't work. What you're actually doing is setting low expectations with your new customer, and more often than not they will be disengaged with their level of service or product quality.

Not just that, but constant price undercutting will erode profit margins.

Focus on the value that you bring to your audience's project. Tell your audience how you can help solve their problems, whether through your products or services, and this will help position you in the market much better.

Time54 can help you increase sales with a specification sales strategy

Time54 is a specialist marketing agency that works exclusively with construction industry clients. We can build your brand awareness through strategic marketing that leads to specification inclusion.

Time54 works with and has helped many building and interiors companies raise their awareness in the marketplace and increase their specification inclusion on numerous projects.

We are a specialist building and interiors marketing agency and help brands to:

- Increase specification.
- Influence architects and interior designers.
- Build authority.

If you are interested in how we can help your business grow with specification led marketing, get in touch to organise a Power Hour zoom meeting.

This is a one hour zoom meeting where we listen to your plans and ambitions to understand your products, services, and route to market. It is aimed at directors, marketing managers and business owners within the construction and interiors sectors who are looking to raise awareness of their business, generate leads, and improve sales.

The Power Hour is free to all building and interiors based businesses looking increase awareness, leads and sales through effective, long term marketing strategies with experienced building and interior marketing specialists Time54.