

CSI FORWARD

TO OUR CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY COLLEAGUES:

A year ago, discussion between several parties revolved around the increased influence of the Construction Specifications Institute (CSI) within the context of new programs, new outreach, and new approaches.

The following paper was drawn up from the grassroots comments collected through the discussions. At this time, and with continuing and renewed vigor, we are re-publishing the paper as an indication that our resolve remains as deep as ever, quite active, and it is anticipated that the newly elected officers of CSI (taking office July 1) will embrace many, if not all of the ideas and suggestions contained here.

In this we seek the understanding, the appreciation, the comments from all readers, and the direction that all construction professionals can, do, and must continue to work in unison for better projects. It is our desire to approach more professionals and other groups, including academics, to provide the proper level of communication and education that is appropriate to the groups, so specifications, specifications writing, and use of specifications is as widely understood and utilized as their associated drawings.

A compilation of thoughts:

Perception is the subject of this discussion; and it is presented not as an indictment or accusation of our organization but as a collective voice of many CSI members, active, inactive and somewhere in between. The originators of this document are small in number but represent a significant percentage of the membership with concerns, ideas and insights with regard to identifying "WHAT IS CSI?" and how should we promote our organization not only to our industry and ourselves but to the public at large.

From time to time, every organization needs to look at itself, at what it is doing and most importantly, what it can do. That is what we are trying to say – CSI needs to look beyond the current status quo.

CSI needs to look, see and move beyond its membership in promoting the ideals, concepts and initiatives it does so well. Currently, CSI is often not perceived as an organization of great value in the public eye, mainly because the public doesn't know who we are and what we do. Sometimes, this problem even occurs within our own membership and industry. Some of us in this discussion have reported encounters where a person in the industry had no idea that there is a difference between MasterSpec and MasterFormat!

Peter Jordan made some very good observations on the 4specs.com forum where this discussion began:

- CSI is a technical organization serving the construction industry, not just specifiers. They have been quite successful, in my view, in their goal of increasing the quality of technical documentation (specifications, product literature, bidding and contract documentation, etc.). There is more to do in this area.
- CSI needs to understand that what it has been historically good at is not "creating knowledge for the built environment", but creating the structures for organizing knowledge for the built environment.

CSI is currently making alliances with a number of other professional organizations, and this effort needs to be continued; as Doug Frank stated, "We absolutely must stop preaching to the choir [i.e. active CSI members] and begin speaking to the masses." We need to evaluate what we do, so we can do it better

and establish the importance of well-written construction documentation. In doing so, we identify CSI, through its standards and unique broad view of the AEC industry, as the catalyst to help the industry cope with change to the emphasis on the life-cycle of facilities. MasterFormat 2004, a wonderful tool, now being implemented, will influence the construction industry just as the original 16-Division format did in the 60's. It is built to include not just the life cycle of today's building projects but is broad enough to include projects that weren't considered in previous editions to projects we haven't even begun to imagine: a Space Station, a moon base, or an undersea city. As design and delivery change, the PRM helps us understand our roles and responsibilities; and because project teams are ultimately made of people, CSI events help us make personal connections in the industry that might be the key to the success of our next projects. CSI is helping us to keep talking to each other. CSI is looking into the future and building standards that are ready for change. Are we ready?

One of the suggestions and recommendations has been made to include a public area of our website, highlighting permanent articles on the need for good construction documentation (including specs), design and construction quality and how the role of the specifier, the product representative, designer (architect and engineer), construction administrator and owner contribute to that goal. Specifically, where training and organizational materials developed by CSI play an important element in that goal. Promote this type of information to design firms, other professional organizations, code officials, and owners. We know it's hard to sell "creative" people the idea that standards are good and helpful. However, they are a necessary part of how we communicate.

Another idea is an Ombudsman at the highest level of Institute to speak for the members to the Executive Board and staff: a person with the facility and authorization to express the thoughts of members where that information would do the most good to produce results. The Member Service department is great to find some answers, but is perceived as having no power or ability to resolve some of the issues that are addressed to them.

There are more ideas and issues that were discussed within our forum; too many for the short expression of grass roots insight offered here. But, if WE are proud of what we do, then we need to put it out there; and if we value what we offer, then other people will value it too. CSI and "WE" have much to offer, it just needs to be made visible with more flair to the packaging.

Thanks to the many contributors to the 4specs forum on CSI Public Relations and to the ad hoc committee that contributed to the writing of this article: Lynn Javoroski, CSI, CCS, LEED AP; Mitch Miller, AIA, CSI, CCS; Ron Geren, RA, CSI, CCS, CCCA; Vivian Volz, RA, CSI, CCS; Margaret Chewning, FCSI, CCS, CCCA; Sheldon Wolfe, FCSI, CCS, CCCA; Doug Frank, FCSI, CCS; and Ralph Liebing, RA, CSI