

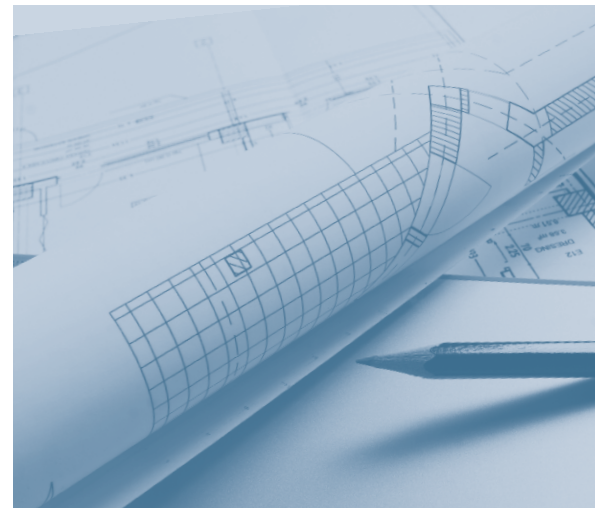
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Advice for Avoiding Construction Pitfalls

IN *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens opens with, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

This story could be a parable for today’s business climate. The pressure to cut a corner here or there to stay profitable, or to find creative ways to get more work done with fewer people, is testing the mettle of many companies. Knowing this, it is more important than ever to be on the lookout for pitfalls that can derail your flooring project. You can’t foresee every possible construction predicament, but you can, as the Dickens classic concludes, do a “far, far better thing” for your flooring projects by focusing on a few key areas.



Choose the Best Product

A recent survey in *Engineering News Record* reported that six out of seven product failures were due to selecting the wrong product for the job. Starnet Members live, eat and breathe flooring products of all types and are excellent resources you can tap for advice. Here are some tips for choosing the right flooring material:

- **Put a product, not a budget figure, in the spec:** Specifying a dollar per sq. ft. amount in lieu of specifying a product opens the door to a host of problems. Contractors may lowball the bid to get the job before they know if they can find a product in the price range that meets the aesthetic and/or performance requirements. If the contractor chooses an inferior product to meet budget or to keep his margin higher, the end user surely won't get their value. The Starnet "Code of Ethics" precludes our Members from recommending products that won't meet customers' expectations or needs.
- **Specify known manufacturers and brands:** Companies build their brand over time and have a lot at stake in protecting their image and reputation. When you specify a branded flooring product from a reputable manufacturer, you have a high assurance of quality and consistency.
- **Include precise descriptions:** Be sure the flooring you specify meets all the needs of the space by specifying expectations for aesthetics, performance, installation and maintenance. Include style names, numbers and a copy of the manufacturer's product specification. Failure to designate exact products in the specification increases the probability that the flooring actually installed will not meet your expectations and invites post-bid disputes.

Insist on Proper Subfloor Preparation

One of the most common reasons for flooring failures — and certainly the most expensive and time-consuming to remedy — is improper subfloor preparation. No one has more experience prepping problem-free subfloors than your Starnet Member. To help prevent subfloor issues and disputes, you can do the following:

- **Write concrete requirements into the specs:** Detailed subfloor specifications are every bit as important as other material specs. Be just as rigorous about clarifying subfloor performance requirements and expectations as you are about other construction products and procedures.
- **Have the concrete contractor or an independent firm conduct moisture and alkalinity testing:** Concrete subfloors that are too wet, or haven't cured, or have too high a pH will not support a successful floor installation. Most flooring manufacturers state the acceptable moisture emission and pH levels for their products and acceptable test methods for installation and warranty protection. (See Starlog Vol. 7 Iss. 2 for more information).
- **Limit fly ash content:** While adding fly ash to concrete as a "sustainable" filler has LEED benefits, adding too much can have an adverse effect on the adhesive bond between the subfloor and floorcovering backing. To be safe, ask the concrete contractor to conduct an adhesive bond test on a representative subfloor sample before the actual concrete formula is mixed and poured.
- **Think ahead about job site temperature:** Concrete, adhesives and many floorcoverings have an acceptable temperature range for acclimation, workability and installation integrity.

The building's internal temperature needs to be taken into consideration well in advance of, during and after installation to assure a fault-free finished floor.





Draft Current and Comprehensive Specifications

Today's software programs allow for fast and easy ways to generate project specifications. Yet, state of the art technology doesn't necessarily equate with being fail-proof. The human factor is essential for double checking specification content on these critically important documents. Your Starnet Member will gladly take the time to review your flooring specifications to help you confirm that all your information related to flooring and installation are both current and accurate. Here are some tips for better spec writing:

- **Keep the Office Master updated:** This traditional "bible" for approved materials should be reviewed on a regular basis. You need to ensure that it has incorporated new information over time, is not perpetuating errors and does not include obsolete products or procedures.
- **Use industry-accepted construction resources:** AIA's MasterSpec, CSI's Manu-Spec, Construction Science Research Foundation's Spectext® and ConsensusDOCS are standard resources that are constantly updating their content. Be sure you have the most current version to reference, which can be downloaded from the Internet.
- **Tap manufacturer and product compendium resources:** Many companies post their prescriptive, descriptive, brief and full guide specifications online. You can find current, individual, product-specific information on manufacturers' web sites and from multi-product resources such as McGraw-Hill's www.products.construction.com.

Be Realistic About Costs and Change Orders

Tight, well-written specifications will go a long way in eliminating surprise costs and/or change orders that aggravate specifiers and infuriate end users. Even so, because every job is custom, some estimates may need to be revised and some change orders may need to be issued. Your Starnet Member has the experience and commitment to estimate fairly and keep change orders to a minimum. Here's how you can help:

- **Know that an estimate is not a binding quote:** Two seemingly identical jobs may have highly different variables even if they're using the same floorcovering. Everything from the subfloor preparation to the building's workspace conditions can affect the floor installation cost. Since no one has a crystal ball, even the best estimate may need to be adjusted to accommodate job-site conditions.
- **Aim for accurate take-offs:** Accurate materials estimating is a learned skill, not a guessing game. Contractors who are inexperienced or unfamiliar with the products they are installing may over- or under-estimate materials on take-offs. Both scenarios are equally bad, leading to extensive change orders, time delays, shipping and storage issues, wasted material and unhappy end-users.
- **Be available for site visits:** A site visit is an invaluable "show and tell" for all parties working on a project. It can demonstrate why costs have changed, why a change order is needed or why there may be a time delay.

Work with the Best

Because tough times bring out the best and worst in any industry, don't risk working with a flooring contractor who may be here today/gone tomorrow, or one who is likely to create construction pitfalls. Work with a professional who has the financial stability and track record to weather the storm. Starnet Members have these qualities. You can count on them to assist you on the "front end" with specification advice and to deliver at the "back end" with a quality installation that ensures customer satisfaction. Be sure to include your workmanship requirements and expectations in your spec documents as an extra measure of protection.



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