

The Preferred Route

By Howard 'Kamau' Stanford, Guest Author -- Foodservice Equipment & Supplies, 8/1/2005

When it comes to facility design and all the wonderful, gut-wrenching and enjoyable experiences we share with our design team, I think the professionals within the foodservice industry would prefer every project making it to completion without a hitch. Anyone who would rather have the headaches, I will gladly give you mine.



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In the past it seemed everyone involved in a project knew their role, what to do and when to do it. These days I have noticed how little people really do know and find myself explaining the basics to those I'm working with: the why, what, when, where and how of a job. Defining and communicating the roles, responsibilities and their execution falls on each team member and the parties they coordinate. Unless these fundamentals are in place, and followed, the project will fail. When everyone is not on the same page, it exposes the entire team to risks and additional coordination, not to mention extra costs and delays for the person we are hired to protect — the client.

In a coordinated effort, a few industry-wide initiatives are in the works that may help provide knowledge, information and basic "best practice" principles to resolve some of these issues.

One subject that has gained momentum among industry associations is creating a way to monitor the responsibilities of the project team members: MAS (management advisory services) consultants, facilities design consultants, manufacturers, manufacturers' representatives, kitchen equipment contractors (KEC) and installers, etc. Accountability and structure are the keys and here is an example.

Depending on the extent of programming a project requires, I prefer to have a MAS consultant as the first one involved with the client. They develop the parameters by clearly defining the client's needs and goals, establishing the direction to take and determining how to best achieve those goals. MAS consultants tackle issues regarding meal delivery systems, menu items, staffing, staff retention and equipment to name a few. Though design consultants offer a number of these services, when it comes to working with extremely detailed information I prefer to rely on the experts. Besides, they make my job a lot easier.

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As a facilities design consultant, I begin the schematic facility layout development based on the information gathered by the MAS consultant with input from the client. It is important to meet with both to establish a team comfort level. This creates an understanding of how information transfers from MAS to design. Once the project is in my hands and a layout is approved, I provide a full set of contract/bid documents consisting of brochures, plans and specifications.

The reality is that some problems always come up at this point. We can address mistakes like typographical errors, model numbers changing, manufacturers and products disappearing, etc., with minimal effort. Other mistakes can cause a tidal wave of revisions.

Substitutions represent the perfect example of a mistake that can launch a tidal wave and can make or break a client's confidence in their consultant and project team. Non-approved substitutions create added costs for our client and extra coordination for everyone else. This alone can kill a project and destroy a great reputation — another headache I can do without.

That is why it is vital for design consultants to ensure the KECs bidding on and awarded our projects stay true to the specs and contract drawings we coordinate with the project team. This provides the client with the project they entrusted us to provide while keeping costs to a minimum.

Another important part is coordinating the responsibilities of instructing and educating the client's operators and maintenance teams about the foodservice equipment. Though design consultants' general specifications require kitchen equipment contractors to schedule all demonstrations with the client's personnel, it still leaves the responsibility on KECs without anything to verify follow-through.

An industry-wide initiative is investigating this loophole and associated issues. The North American Division of FCSI, its North American Allied Member Board of Advisors, MAFSI, CFESA and NAFEM are collaborating to develop a best practice protocol to outline the definitions and responsibilities associated with equipment installation, start-up, demonstration, repair response time and scheduling.

One portion referred to the common problems manufacturers and their reps experience: the lack of coordination with field locations. Quite often when they are requested to perform an equipment start-up or demonstration, they find: the equipment is not on the site, set in place or connected to utilities; or perhaps the utilities are not on, the demonstration has not been scheduled with the client or the client had not been advised of the date and is not available.

This lack of coordination and accountability not only costs the manufacturer and representatives money and multiple site visits, it also costs our client money and could delay the project. This is not to imply all kitchen equipment contractors do this, but unfortunately some do.

This document is intended to generate a procedure to ensure these tasks are satisfied prior to start-up and demonstration. Once the KEC completes these tasks and signs the form verifying their completion, it receives approval to schedule all required start-ups and demonstrations.

Manufacturers, manufacturers' reps and clients, when required, will sign-off on the same form verifying they performed and completed their task, then return them to the design consultant and the client for their records. This allows the design consultant to better track the overall status of the project from the first phase to the last.

We could do more to smooth-out the process by expanding on the ideas noted here, but this shows how we all play a part in every project. We need to find the best way to work together efficiently. As we re-educate ourselves, become more involved in our profession and the organizations associated with our industry, we realize how much our piece of the pie connects to the next.

We need to complete the circle to understand who is responsible for what task, ensure all members of the team accomplish their tasks and provide a means of being held accountable. While we create best practice tools, we need to make them available to others in our industry for feedback. The better we understand each other and the things we bring to each project, the smoother the progression is to completion.

If my preferred project route was on MapQuest, it would take my clients from point to point in the most direct, cost-effective and safe route. If every segment of our industry could come together to achieve this for all of our clients, it would be a wonderful thing.