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Article

The future of spec writing

Aaron McCullough, Vice President of specifications and fulfillment for Allegion

We live in an age of increasing complexity. It is frequently noted that the cell phones we carry in our pockets today are significantly more powerful than the computers used to put the first man on the moon. But while technology is advancing at an exponential pace, the architectural openings industry continues to lag behind.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the specification process. "As a spec writer, your job is to ensure that the right pieces of hardware end up on the right door every single time," says William Lawliss, DHT, DAHC/CDC, CCPR, regional specification director for Allegion. "But in reality, a lot of your time is spent tracking down and managing information and searching for the doors on the plans."

And the problem is only getting worse. "Access control and security systems have become standard on most commercial buildings, which means openings are increasingly complex," explains David Fouché, registered architect, LEED AP BD+C, AEC platform manager for Allegion. "The time limit involved in new construction just keeps getting shorter and there are more people involved. Also, many spec writers are nearing retirement, so architects are relying more heavily on manufacturers and information that's available on the web."

But although these problems have been plaguing the construction industry for years, the solution may finally have arrived. Not surprisingly, the key to fixing these problems involves new technology, but the real solution lies in the collaboration that it enables.

Collaboration is key

Collaboration requires communication. The importance of communication is an idea that everyone involved in the construction process—architects, designers, owners, specifiers, installers—is quite familiar with, in theory. However, the realities of doing so frequently prove to be incredibly challenging.

"There can sometimes be a communication barrier between architects and door hardware consultants," explains Lawliss. "We speak a different language."

Fouché agrees, "You're dealing with architects and designers who are very visual, and the specification process isn't visual at all. The challenge has always been, how do you allow them to understand the data in specs more easily, and graphically?"

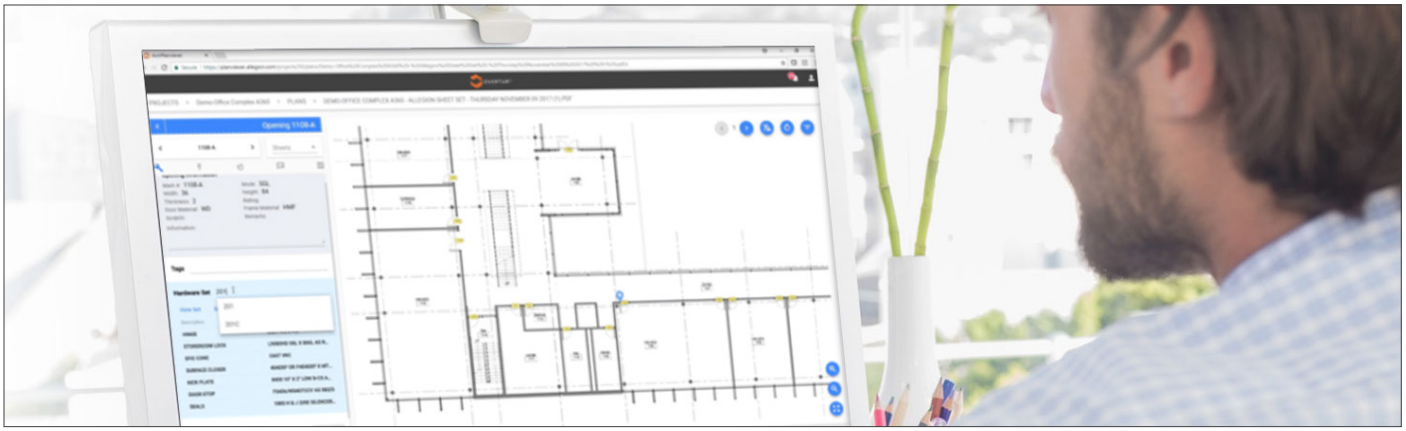
Compounding this problem is the fact that there isn't an easy way to access the information, particularly for people on the design side of the process who may not be very familiar with hardware.

"The creation and utilization of specifications is a time-consuming and difficult process that almost seems to guarantee mistakes and oversights, particularly as the pace of construction continues to accelerate," says Fouché. "It's time for the industry to streamline this entire process and make it more usable, efficient and accurate for everyone involved."

Bridging the gap

The most effective way to foster communication and collaboration is by harnessing recent advances in technology to create tools that will allow architects and hardware consultants to work together more easily and effectively when creating specifications and the security design of architectural openings.

"Any interaction with specifications currently feels like a chore," says Fouché. "To find anything, first you have to grab your floor plan, locate the door number, then go to the door schedule and find that number. Then you have to find the hardware set number associated and open up the right version of the spec that has the product associated with it. Maybe the product number is written in a cryptic manner. Maybe you don't even have the most current



version of the spec. How are you going to make sure it matches the requirement?"

The solution to this problem lies in the utilization of a single platform that will eliminate the process of searching through various documents at different stages of design and construction. Having a single, centralized platform enables everyone involved to skip all of those steps, pull up the plans on a computer, click on a door and immediately see all the information associated with that particular door. And with the advent of cloud-based computing, any changes made appear in real time, ensuring that everyone involved always has the most current version of the specifications.

"Advances in technology have enabled the creation of a collaboration site where data is both live and accurate," explains Jason Kornaker, business leader—project based business BIM and technology. "This allows us to bring together key stakeholders—owners, architects, integrators and more—and have everyone be on the same page, reducing the number of errors, oversights and omissions that have historically caused so many problems."

Sharing a common platform not only eliminates the potential for common mistakes, it also effectively bridges the communication gap that has previously existed between architects and specifiers.

"A picture really is worth 1000 words," says Lawliss. "Especially when we're talking about the very technical terms used in hardware spec writing. Architects and designers are obviously very visual people. If you can show them a picture and allow them to see a lever design, for instance, and interact with it within this platform, they get it. Instead of just product numbers that don't mean anything to people outside the hardware industry. It saves time and streamlines the entire process."

Embrace technology

Although there's no doubt that technology is rapidly transforming the construction industry, Lawliss is quick to point out that this type of technology will by no means replace specification writers.

"Technology is a tool to enhance the job, not replace it," he explains. "It's just taking away some of the grunt work. If 20-30 percent of their time is currently spent tracking down doors, manually retyping data and cross referencing door schedules with hardware catalogues, adoption of this technology would enable them to use that time for other tasks like quality control or keeping up with the onslaught of new products and code changes that are so vital to their work."

And this is only the beginning of the technological revolution that will fundamentally change the construction industry. "We already do so many things with

our phones," says Fouché. "Imagine walking up to a door and have your phone know where you are in the building and using it to access a cloud-based survey. You take a picture, upload it, and it's part of the survey. Later, an architect does a punch list. He stands in front of a door with his phone and it tells him what is supposed to be on that door. He can make notes that are immediately uploaded to the cloud and become part of the database. Later, an installer can ask where he is supposed to install closers and the system can tell him which doors get those closers."

It's easy to see how even the most mundane aspects of construction can be transformed and simplified just by streamlining these processes and facilitating collaboration. A single platform allows everyone involved in the project, from designers to integrators, to interface with the same system, in real time. The amount of time and money that ultimately can be saved through the elimination of errors, delays and oversights is simply staggering.

As programs like BIM have already illustrated, technology is having a dramatic impact on the construction industry, and the adoption rate can be swift, leaving those who fail to adapt to the new model at a distinct disadvantage. "It's vital that this industry embrace technology," says Lawliss. "Our expertise and knowledge is needed, but if we don't make these changes ourselves, quickly, the larger construction industry will make the changes for us."

For more information about how this new technology can streamline and simplify your business, visit discover-overtur.allegion.com.

Aaron McCullough is the vice president of specifications and fulfillment for Allegion. He brings over fifteen years of lean and process improvement experience in both manufacturing and service industries, preceded by service in the United States Army as an Air Defense Artillery officer. At Allegion, he leads the specification writing team that supports architecture customers across the country.

About Allegion

Allegion (NYSE: ALLE) is a global pioneer in safety and security, with leading brands like CISA®, Interflex®, LCN®, Schlage®, SimonsVoss® and Von Duprin®. Focusing on security around the door and adjacent areas, Allegion produces a range of solutions for homes, businesses, schools and other institutions. Allegion is a $2 billion company, with products sold in almost 130 countries. For more, visit **www.allegion.com.**

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