



Delivering excellent continuing education for architects

A guide for manufacturers

Why should manufacturers invest in LUs?

According to recent data¹, 87 percent of architects say they rely on manufacturers to advise them about their product categories. Further, 9 in 10 architects are looking to build strategic relationships with manufacturers. However, less than 60 percent of manufacturer sales and marketing leaders recognize these needs.

Architects want to hear from you. Well-executed educational offerings are an ideal way to connect with them while providing education about the product categories you sell and they specify. In fact, most architects indicate that face-to-face opportunities such as “lunch and learns” are one of their favorite ways to interact with manufacturers.

To successfully deliver courses that offer Learning Units (LUs), rely on resourceful, helpful content that ensures value for both the architect and the manufacturer. As you craft your educational programs, consider these best practices and strategies that lead to quality content and engaging presentations.

In a survey of manufacturers with the highest-rated AIA CE courses, most indicated that presenters receive some level of formal training.

Selecting the right topics

An effective LU helps architects learn something new that they can apply to their projects or their business. And while this includes product knowledge, product information should focus on how the product applies to the work, how it is properly used, and how it contributes to project goals. Consider these strategies when choosing a topic:

- **Know what architects need to know about.** Do your research. Consult with customers to determine what topics they’re struggling to understand. What do they need to know about your product category to specify it more effectively? What are the common questions or misconceptions related to the use of the product category?
- **Understand your audience.** Ensure your approach to the topic references how architects apply your product and product category.
- **Dig deeper.** Hundreds of workshops exist on introductory topics. Find a deeper, fresher approach that designers haven’t yet seen or that will take their practice to the next level.
- **Focus on new and emerging trends.** Architects identify manufacturers as a resource for new innovations and technologies. Your CE content should update them on technologies impacting their designs.
- **Be a resource, not a promoter.** Direct product promotion isn’t allowed in continuing education programs, but avoid even subtle promotion or indirect touting of product benefits. The bigger value for manufacturers is to present themselves as an expert and a resource. This will help build trust with architects and improve familiarity, which may increase the likelihood of product specification.

¹ The American Institute of Architects, “Architects Journey to Specification,” 2018.

“Discussing our products isn’t what’s most important. Being helpful to architects about our product category is. Do that effectively, and they’ll often approach you for more information about your products.”
—Patricia Mireles, Thyssenkrupp

- **Incorporate the architect’s voice.** Architects, like many professionals, respond to the experiences of their peers. Leverage architects’ work, insights, and lessons in your content.
- **Subject matter familiarity is fundamental.** Architects are sophisticated, so if the presenter isn’t completely comfortable with the topic, it shows. Presenters should know the subject matter so well that they speak easily, do not need to rely on a script, and can confidently answer questions from the audience—about the subject matter, their products, and their competitors’ products.
- **Focus on your product category.** AIA data confirms that architects seek out relationships with manufacturer representatives who know all the products in their category—not just their company’s products. Leverage your CE content to demonstrate that capability.

Developing an engaging presentation

A plain PowerPoint and a droning presenter can hinder even the best content. Consider these strategies for increasing engagement:

- **Try a fresh approach.** It’s tempting to follow the traditional bulleted-list PowerPoint presentation format. But consider other ways to present the information, such as case studies that show the bad as well as the good, storytelling using real-life experiences, a panel of varying perspectives, or a series of burning questions and practical answers.
- **Be prepared.** Top-performing companies train their representatives to deliver specific content. That ensures that they are conveying the right message along with visuals they understand. Give your representatives the training they need to be successful.
- **Be interactive.** AIA CES Standards require that live learning programs include at least one element of engagement related to program content. The best engagement strategies get the audience directly involved—ask questions, ask for examples from their work, or incorporate a short activity that requires them to get out of their chairs. For online presentations, include easy-to-answer polls.
- **Be professional.** Good content is the most important thing. But first impressions matter, and poorly executed visuals will distract or bore attendees. Use professional fonts, quality photos, and clear language. Avoid cluttered-looking slides and limit the amount of text per page.

- **Speak conversationally and with authority.** Reading from a script—or reading bullet points verbatim—is the fastest way to lose the audience. On-screen and spoken content should complement but not replicate each other. Presenters should know the subject matter well enough to speak with confidence, as if they are having a one-on-one conversation.
- **Use voice effectively.** For online presentations, vocal confidence is even more crucial because there's no option for eye contact or using motions. Rely on volume changes and inflection to emphasize points and engage the audience.

Building a relationship doesn't end with the thank you slide. Successful manufacturers say they follow up with participants in one or more ways, including with an email blast containing additional information on the topic or with a personalized phone call from the presenter.

Other success factors to consider

- **Be smart about the content development.** The most successful CE courses from manufacturers are designed by people with curriculum development expertise. If your company lacks that expertise internally, consider hiring a third-party consultant to design a course and test it in the market.
- **Bring your SMEs to the table. Architects find incredible value in speaking to authorities on the products and materials they specify.** Tapping your technical representatives and R&D staff to deliver—or assist in the delivery of—your content strengthens your brand and enhances the probability that your products will be specified.
- **Make your content available online. AIA data shows that online acquisition of learning units has grown in recent years.** Even if you have great success with face-to-face engagement with your CE content, it pays to have your courses available through an online learning platform.
- **Be timely in reporting learning units to AIA.** When AIA members see that you have quickly reported the learning units they have acquired, they know your company is reliable and cares about their professional success.
- **Have a consistent plan for follow-up.** Your company is wasting a valuable opportunity to deepen relationships with architects if you aren't communicating with them after they've experienced your CE content. Have a plan in place that your sales and marketing team can consistently execute from one experience to the next.

Manufacturers with successful continuing education courses recommend incorporating engagement opportunities such as fun facts, trivia questions, humor, animated imagery, and real-life scenarios that meaningfully engage the audience.

Top ten things about AIA continuing education that manufacturers need to know

- Delegate primary and secondary points of contact within your company to work with AIA CES.
- Be familiar with the AIA CES Standards.
- Submit courses online at least 10 business days before advertising a course.
- Report AIA member participation in a course within 10 business days.
- Keep active files and records of all approved courses for three years.
- Make sure presenters not employed by your organization sign speaker agreements.
- Follow health, safety, and welfare criteria outlined in the AIA CES Standards.
- Use the AIA CES Provider logo.
- Offer electronic or print course evaluations for your course participants to complete at the end of each educational activity.
- Provide an electronic and/or print Certificate of Completion to your course participants.

We're here to help

AIA's in-house team of education experts and account managers are available to assist with continuing education creation—topic development, presentation strategy, and presentation review/feedback.

For questions and assistance, contact the AIA continuing education team at ces@aia.org.

Developed in collaboration with the AIA Manufacturers Council

