

Explore online AEC services

by Bill Burchard

As we in the AEC industry strive to find ways to increase our productivity, Internet vendors scramble to provide us with useful services, hoping to fill our needs and find a niche to call their own. While many of us have heard about online services that facilitate project collaboration (see article on p. ?? for more details), other sites provide different useful services. Online services can locate construction materials, help you prepare and submit agency permits electronically, or simply provide quick access to current AEC industry news and events. The range of available online AEC services can help us with nearly every conceivable aspect of our business.

Find product manufacturers

The Web is perfectly suited to finding products and manufacturers, and 4specs.com (www.4specs.com) fills this niche nicely. With an impressive variety of manufacturers participating in 4specs.com, you will most likely find the product you need.

4specs focuses on products targeted specifically at architects and engineers. Therefore, it offers no information about tool manufacturers, contractors, or distributors. 4specs lets you browse for data in several ways.

First, 4specs organizes data into product divisions based on CSI code numbers. When you choose a division, its product subgroups display. Each product subgroup lists manufacturers who produce the particular product (figure 1). A second way to browse for data is through an alphabetical listing of all manufacturers. If you already know the manufacturer of the product you need, you can easily find it using this option. Finally, you can use 4specs' search engine to find the appropriate manufacturer and product. You enter either a manufacturer's name or the type of product you need. The results display a selection set of product division subgroups that match your search criteria. By following a search results link, you end up at the product subgroup,

which lists manufacturers who meet your needs. Once you find the appropriate manufacturer, you select the hyperlink to access the manufacturer's Web site.

Use the Web

Through the Internet, we can quickly locate a vendor, product, supplies, and services. We can also easily keep up with what's going on in our AEC profession. A world of information and tools is at our fingertips, just a few mouse clicks away. ■

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Figure 1.
4specs groups manufacturers by division and lists them alphabetically.

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