



Consultants Add Value for Manufacturers

By Helene Hardy Pierce, FRCI

“The roof consultant adds value for the manufacturer when a specification allows for fair competition between manufacturers.”

To summarize the role roof consultants play in the roofing equation is simple – they add value. And whenever value is added, simple economics tells us that the dependence of property owners and others on the services provided by roof consultants will continue to increase. These are bold statements from a manufacturer’s perspective, so let’s explore why and where a roofing materials manufacturer would claim that consultants “add value.”

Consider the Venues

Roof consultants participate in a number of different processes that involve a building’s roofing system. *Table 1* provides one way of considering these different venues where value may be added.

Certainly there are other ways to delineate the services that a roof consultant can provide and where each spends his or her individual efforts varies. For the purposes of this discussion, however, let’s look at each of the areas of service provided as defined in *Table 1*.

Roofing Projects

In a pure sense, “Roofing Projects” is the area where most consider the majority of work performed by a roof consultant is found – from the initial evaluation to the preparation of construction documents to bidding the project and

then ensuring that the project is completed to provide a watertight roofing system for the building owner. Seems simple, right? Not exactly, and it is here that “value added” has many different facets.

As a manufacturer, the evaluation of the project and subsequent specification preparation are very important. It’s not a “one roof fits all” roofing world anymore, and the professional roof consultant is well armed to take into account all of the different needs of the building and its occupants when determining the best roofing choice to be made for a specific project. Unlike other design professionals, roof consultants know roofing and are in a unique position of being advocates for the best design given all of the particulars, such as geographic location, code requirements, occupancy requirements, building limitations (such as height and access), maintenance needs, unusual uses of the roof surface, local contracting expertise, etc. In addition to these concerns, they are also knowledgeable about manufacturers’ system requirements that must be met in order for warranty issuance.

From a specification preparation aspect, the roof consultant adds value for the manufacturer when a specification allows for fair competition between manufacturers. Most on the material supply side compete every day, offering quality products at competitive prices. Well-written, fair construction documents allow for comparison between like products that sometimes is missing when project documents are writ-



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TABLE 1

SERVICE PROVIDED	DESCRIPTION	DEFINITIVE ASPECTS (MAY INCLUDE)
Roofing Projects	Participation in the process for new construction or re-roofing projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation • Design • Document preparation • Project management • Quality observation
Roof System Evaluations	Evaluation, for a property owner, of the roofing system on an existing facility, what may be needed to maintain the system, what the life expectancy is of the existing roofing system, etc. Often a precursor to a full “roofing project.” May be for one or multiple locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-destructive testing • Destructive testing • Roof plans • Basis for a historical record • Some reporting mechanism
Forensic Evaluations	Similar to Roof System Evaluations, except in this case, the roofing system(s) did not perform as anticipated and this evaluation is to determine the cause(s) of failure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-destructive testing • Destructive testing • Roof plans • Reporting mechanism • Roof consultant’s opinion of cause(s)
Roof Asset Management	While a Roof System Evaluation may be considered a one-time event, Roof Asset Management provides for the long-term care of the roofing system. At its best, it helps property owners realize the best performance they can get for their dollars invested in the roofing system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual or routine maintenance and repair schedules, checklists, and plans • Roof plans • Photo documentation of inventory • Financial planning model for future expenditures • Source of historical data for each roofing system in the owner’s possession, system specifications, repair history, warranty specifics, etc.
Expert or Legal Testimony	Often the end product of a Forensic Evaluation, Expert or Legal Testimony by a roof consultant may include depositions, testimony at trial, or simply providing an unbiased third-party opinion on a roofing matter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unbiased, independent opinion based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – experience, – education, – data, – and practical knowledge.

ten by individuals with less knowledge of either the products or the systems.

Just because a system is “warrantable” for a specific time doesn’t mean it’s the equal of another roofing system. A specification written by a roof consultant typically is a more specific document and the accompanying construction details often offer a high level of design detail that has been tailored to the project requirements. Construction details that incorporate the knowledge and technical experience of the roof consultant are often better than the “generic” details of a manufacturer.

Given a good evaluation and well-written construction documents, the next step is project management, including the bidding of the project. At this point, the expertise of the consultant in defining the bidding requirements for contractors who wish to participate in the bidding process can assist the property owner in obtaining a well-installed roofing system. For the manufacturer, the roof consultant with stringent bidding requirements provides an avenue for competent contractors to be the quali-

fied invited bidders. Again, value is found in a level and competitive playing field.

After a successful bid award, the actual roof installation proceeds. At this stage in the project, roof consultants provide much value to the manufacturer as another set of independent “eyes” on the installation. This is not to question the intent of the contractor and it should be understood that the roofing contracting community is filled with professionals who take pride in their workmanship and approach projects with the goal of providing a well-installed roofing system that will perform for its expected life. However, involvement of a knowledgeable consultant whose only purpose is to be an advocate for the project while providing quality assurance, results most often in a system with much less chance for an installation oversight. Additionally, for the roofing contractor, a roof consultant can often be a fair spokesperson for the installation when unforeseen conditions arise. As for the manufacturer, knowing that full-time or even part-time quality assurance was conducted on a project may provide confidence

that its exposure for warranted projects has been reduced.

Roof System Evaluations

Property owners often do not understand or know what comprises their roofing investment. It is not uncommon for owners and managers to want and need a roofing professional to survey their facilities and help them understand 1) what they have, 2) what may be required to protect their investment, and 3) why they need to invest in maintenance for their roof system(s).

These services, provided by either roof consultants or professional roofing contractors, are often about educating the property owner. Once educated, owners can make better decisions regarding roofing needs. For the manufacturer, educated owners who understand these three key issues (what’s there, what’s needed, and why) are much better equipped to avoid problems and premature failures of their roofing system(s) and understand the importance of their proper care and maintenance.

Often included in roof evaluations are

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recommendations to maintain the existing roof. Knowing what needs to be done and how to proceed is often critical in avoiding inadvertent warranty problems up to and including cancellation. Unfortunately, property owners and maintenance personnel can and do cause harm to roofs by taking the wrong steps when a roofing problem arises, such as using incompatible materials to make a repair. Instructed by a roof consultant, these missteps can be avoided. Likewise, the consultant, as an independent party, can be key to addressing other areas of water intrusion that are not roof-related, saving the manufacturer and the roofing contractor from seemingly self-serving claims of “it’s not the roof.”

Forensic Evaluations

When a roofing system fails prematurely, the determination of cause can be a critical component in making the right decisions to avoid the same fate for the replacement roof. Sometimes the cause of a premature failure is straightforward and self-evident. In these cases, as with the water intrusion statement above, the roof consultant as an independent third party can provide an opinion that is unbiased and much less likely to be self-serving than if coming from the designer of record, the general contractor, the material supplier, the roofing contractor, or any other party with a vested interest.

In cases where the cause of failure is more complex or comprised of a variety of factors, the roof consultant brings knowledge and expertise to the determination of cause, and the value to the manufacturer is a greater chance of a fair assessment of why the roof failed. Almost no one, and certainly not material manufacturers, has any desire to be involved in premature roof failures and their investigation. Yet an investigation conducted by an independent professional who truly wants to understand the “why” is much preferable to any part of the “blame game” that can develop when no party wants to take responsibility for a roof failure.

Roof Asset Management

This is an area of expertise that is continuously developing to provide property

owners with a service that has not been formalized in the roofing industry. There are varying levels of service offered, but at a minimum, asset management should include roof evaluations and a disciplined approach to managing the roofing system over its expected life, up to and including scheduled replacement. For the property owner, benefits include fewer hassles, greatly reduced expenditures for unplanned repair and replacement, more controlled and typically lower operating costs, detailed specifics on roofing assets, etc.

Manufacturers, whether of widgets or roofing materials, understand the principles of preventative maintenance and asset management for their facilities, and the benefits of applying these types of proactive programs to the roofing system can be easily appreciated.

For the materials manufacturer, the value of proactive management of the roof is found in preventing unintentional neglect and providing for routine inspection and maintenance by qualified personnel, both of which contribute to the system realizing its intended service life. In addition, long-term care of the roof can be very helpful in identifying potential problems before they become large issues. It is much preferable to be made aware when there “might” be a cause for concern than to find out about a problem after a large area of the system has been affected.

Asset management also provides a degree of realistic expectations for the property owner. Many owners intellectually understand that preventative maintenance is cost effective, but in practice, live from one roof leak to another. Roof asset management can be used to break this cycle and educate owners on how to take a measured approach to protecting their property and meeting their roofing needs. For the manufacturer, again, value is found in dealing with educated property owners who hold realistic expectations about their roof(s).

Expert and Legal Testimony

In any dispute, there are at least two sides – each with differing opinions about the basis of the dispute. Manufacturers routinely utilize consultants to be an independent, unbiased voice where there is a difference in opinion about a roofing matter. The value here is self-evident; the roof consultant opines based on what the science and data tells him or her and not for other, vested reasons.

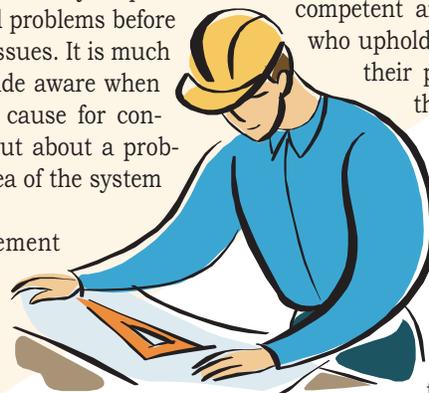
The limitations of expert and legal testimony offered by roof consultants are found in the experience and practical knowledge of individuals and their ability to educate. If “testimony” is the first-hand authentication of a fact, then the experience of the individual giving testimony can greatly influence his or her understanding of the facts. Likewise, the ability to communicate not only “what” was seen or happened but “why” it occurred in a clear and concise manner is key to educating the parties involved in a dispute. Often, roof consultants can accomplish this education because they are operating from a different position than others who may have vested interests in a particular outcome.

What Can You Conclude?

First, make no conclusions without a clear understanding that roof consultants and the services that they provide, as detailed within this article, describe those individuals who conduct themselves in a competent and professional manner and who uphold the ethical standards set for their profession. If this is a given, then it’s easy to understand that roof consultants do add value to the roofing equation and perform a variety of services for which they are either specifically qualified to perform or are best situated within the framework of the process to perform.

At a recent industry symposium¹, Joe Hale, FRCI, commented that the roof consultant is the only individual in the process whose sole purpose once a job commences is to be an advocate for the roof project. From their unique position, roof consultants’ value proposition is to bring unbiased technical knowledge and experience to the roofing industry. 

¹Cool Roofing...Cutting Through the Glare, May 12-13, 2005, Atlanta, GA





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