

*Yet whatever their initial professional choices, all designers should be aware of the directions in which specialty practices take the profession of design. Without this awareness, a designer can fall behind in a competitive market for the best projects . . .*

It is commonplace that a company, upon embarking on an interiors project, requires someone to represent them and their interests to all constituents involved in the project. When the client retains an interior designer to perform in the role of owner's representative, the client is able to concentrate on his core responsibilities with the knowledge that facilities-related issues will be competently addressed by his advocate. In some cases, interior designers are more experienced than a client's own representative, especially if the client's representative is an office manager or firm partner rather than a facilities professional.

Marilyn Farrow, FIIDA, is an interior designer who has performed the role of owner's representative for several large corporations. She defines this service as "adopting the relationship of 'agency,' that is, putting the best interests of the owner first. When a designer assumes the role of owner's representative, she performs as though a member of the owner's organization, fully accountable and responsible for the business initiative in your care." A few common activities in this role include: soliciting vendors' and consultants' proposals, negotiating fees, negotiating conflicts with departmental end users to uphold corporate standards, analyzing data to achieve cost savings in furniture and construction, recommending new standards to reduce cost of churn, assisting in lease negotiations to achieve project savings, and documenting project activity.

In the early 1990s, Farrow was an independent consultant and project coordinator for Kraft General Foods, overseeing one-third of their consolidations of sales offices in cities throughout the country. She recognized that in her work for the client, "The goal was to minimize real estate expense and foster communication, collaboration, and cooperation. Consolidation was proposed to bring the various divisions' sales persons into dialogue and cooperation, in order to leverage their activities to build sales and minimize expenses. To do this, co-location of the sales forces was proposed, offering parity of quality of environment. Activities included a process of six meetings which included human resources, information technology, management, and me as the owner's representative, to gain concurrence and buy in, select real estate, and realign sales offices to occupy "flex-tech" type of real estate (high-tech warehouse). Kraft benefited financially from using a contracted owner's representative by leveraging the expertise and resources only so long as they were required (18 months)."