

A Streamlined Approach to Technical Document Development, Balloting, and Publishing

PPI and SpecBuilder

By Debora Bechtloff

The Plastics Pipe Institute — the major North American trade association representing all segments of the plastic pipe industry — publishes studies, guides, manuals, calculators, and tools to aid the development and evaluation of plastics for pipe systems. These publications are developed in a balloting process that capitalizes on the technical expertise of our engineering staff and membership.

To help manage this process, PPI launched ASTM International's new platform, SpecBuilder, in May 2016. We are happy to report that the platform has simplified what was previously an onerous, staff-driven process; improved voter collaboration; and allowed us to publish completed documents in record time.

PAIN POINTS

Over the years, our members' dedication to developing critical technical publications for the plastic pipe industry created an upturn in productivity and increased staff workload.

Fellow developers of ballot-driven documents will recognize our time-consuming process: Staff emailed drafts to task group members for comment and proposed edits. Email file-size limitations meant that larger documents posed an issue. Version control was problematic. Votes and comments came back to us as email replies. PPI staff had to create complex spreadsheets with formulas to tally votes and determine if the number of votes satisfied the requirements established in our bylaws. At the close of each ballot, staff compiled a final report that included voter comments and the final tally from the spreadsheet.

Ultimately, our only way to meet the growing demand for publications was to improve efficiency. We initiated a search for a solution that would automate as much of the balloting process as possible. We received several proposals; although ASTM's SpecBuilder was in the early stages of development at the time, it was evident that it was the best fit.

Company Snapshot



- The Plastics Pipe Institute
- www.plasticpipe.org
- PPI is the major North American trade association of the plastics pipe industry, advancing the acceptance and use of plastic pipe systems through research, education, technical expertise, and advocacy. PPI encourages plastics as the material of choice for all pipe applications, and is the industry's premier technical, engineering, and knowledge resource. PPI publishes studies, guides, manuals, calculators, and tools to aid the development and evaluation of plastics for pipe systems. PPI collaborates with industry organizations that set standards for manufacturing practices and installation methods.

SPECBUILDER SOLUTIONS

ASTM International's SpecBuilder platform provides a contemporary solution for collaboration, balloting, and publishing. Since adopting SpecBuilder, the number of PPI ballots issued has increased, member involvement in collaboration and balloting efforts has improved, and PPI publishes documentation more quickly.

Balloting

- The streamlined SpecBuilder ballot creation process notifies voters when a new ballot is issued. Because we no longer email documents, there are no file-size limitations. Automated voting reminders eliminate the need for extensive email follow-up, and PPI staff no longer has to create separate tracking spreadsheets.
- PPI's voting members log in to SpecBuilder to see all ballots available for their vote, improving member participation and eliminating the need for staff to re-send a ballot if an email isn't delivered.
- Throughout the balloting period, the Vote Reports section of SpecBuilder provides admins with a dynamic and consolidated view to track voter participation, including any comments received, and monitor progress on response requirements. The elimination of manual data gathering saves a considerable amount of administrative time and reduces the chance of human error.
- SpecBuilder emails group admins a final consolidated report after each ballot closes.

Collaboration

- Admins create project-specific SpecBuilder collaboration groups where members can upload drafts and support files, participate in discussions, and maintain document version control.
- SpecBuilder is a secure online environment that eliminates the need for FTP sites when working with confidential documents.

Administration

- The easily navigated SpecBuilder user interface enables group admins to add and delete members, create and edit collaboration groups and projects, and issue ballots to PPI's voting members.
- Sending emails to individuals using the Email Group Members function is as simple as choosing a SpecBuilder group or selected individuals within a group.
- The User Report Generator allows group admins to verify SpecBuilder user and group membership.

Since officially launching SpecBuilder in May 2016, we have grown to appreciate ASTM's quick response to troubleshooting issues, attention to detail, and willingness to hear our recommendations for additional enhancements. Today PPI and ASTM enjoy a collaborative relationship with a shared goal of making SpecBuilder the best tool it can be.



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is member services coordinator and chief PPI SpecBuilder administrator.

ASTM SpecBuilder

Manage Change When Developing Internal Documents

ASTM International's collaboration management tool, SpecBuilder, streamlines the composition and editing of internal documents, keeping team members up-to-date and projects on deadline.

SpecBuilder allows you to seamlessly:

- Create task groups,
- Discuss and share comments,
- Track discussions and vote on revisions, and
- Reference and hyperlink pertinent ASTM standards.

Collaborating groups can achieve consensus more efficiently while maintaining multiple, simultaneous drafts without the burdens of manual version control.

Instead of cumbersome email chains, and without the confinement of inbox limitations, ASTM SpecBuilder logs a historical index of comments and revisions inside a single online repository. After a project is finalized, you can archive related documents and reference them at any future date.

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