

editor's note



"GOOD WORK AIN'T CHEAP AND CHEAP WORK AIN'T GOOD." "Fast, good or cheap. Pick two." "You get what you pay for."

We've all heard these axioms but are they true? Studies have shown when consumers are trying to judge the quality of a product, its price is often the deciding factor (that is, there is a clear correlation between price and perceived quality). And blind testing of consumer products largely bears out the accuracy of the hypothesis (not surprisingly, luxury consumer products such as wines are often the subject of these tests).

So when I recently received an email from an old friend castigating *Modern Steel Construction* for singing the praises of a company specializing in offshore detailing, I needed to take a step back and think whether the criticism was fair. According to my friend, it's not unusual for offshore detailers to \$10 an hour on their workforce while U.S. and Canadian detailers need at least \$75 per hour (including overhead). And detailing software has made it easier to have inexperienced detailers, which has accelerated the move to offshore detailing.

This brings to mind two immediate questions:

1. Is there a societal penalty for sending work outside the U.S.?
2. Is there a qualitative difference?

If price and quality were the same, the first question would be a no-brainer. Or if there was a 1:1 correlation between price and quality you could make a rational decision on how much quality you'd get for what cost you were willing to pay. Unfortunately, the answers are a lot less clear for detailing than they are for bottles of wine.

My friend believes that AISC should be promoting detailers who have at least 80% of their staff in the U.S. or Canada. I'm not willing to go that far. But I am intrigued by one of his other proposals: Fabricators should have to list the résumés of engineers and detailers who are producing shop drawings. Let the customer decide whether he's willing to pay more to keep the work domestic—or to pay more for a possible increase in quality.

What do you think?

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