



NUMBERS DON'T BUILD GREAT PLAYGROUNDS

An opinion on why bigger specs
don't mean better playgrounds.

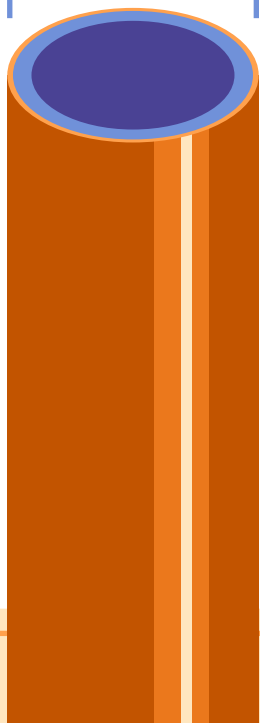
Once, I was at an install job and had spoken to a representative from a major playground manufacturer. After some back-and-forth, we got to talking about the play structure being installed. The rep boasted, as if on cue, that their company's five-inch posts were the biggest in the industry.

This puzzled me. Playground posts typically come in three sizes: 3.5-inch, 4.5-inch, and 5-inch. So why is this guy out here claiming that his company's posts are somehow bigger than they really are? Does he also think a pound of lead weighs more than a pound of feathers?

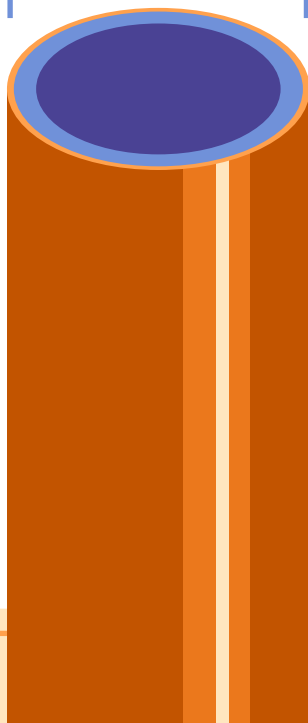
Well, turns out, he wasn't technically wrong. An extra coat of paint makes their posts a bit bigger than everyone else's.

The Truth? It's just an extra coat of paint.

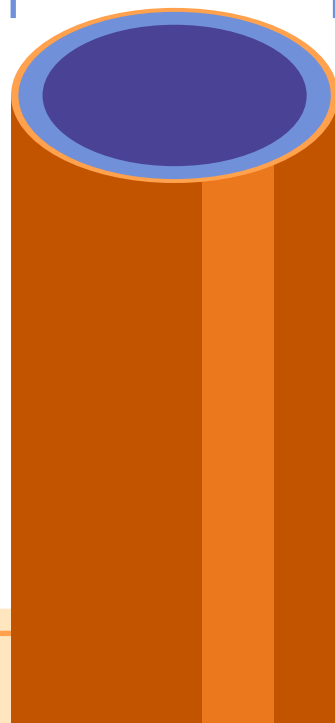
3.5 IN POST



4.5 IN POST



5 IN POST



But it got me thinking: is this really how playgrounds should be marketed? Are we really in the “bigger numbers are better” game? Too often, the answer is yes.

“You see, the playground industry tries to sell you numbers that don't really add up to much. Buyers are taught to compare elements like post diameter, warranties, capacity, and all sorts of other metrics that don't actually tell you anything meaningful about what you're buying or how long it'll last.”

IT'S LIKE BUYING A NEW TRUCK



It's like going to a car dealership and being upsold on a more expensive truck that has 50 more horsepower than a cheaper one. Will you ever use that extra horsepower? Probably not, but 500 is a bigger number than 450, and your salesperson is willing to bet you'll fork over another five grand for it.

THE SAME IDEA APPLYS TO PLAYGROUNDS



In a similar way, when a playground salesperson tries to talk you into buying a play structure with a 50-child capacity over one with a capacity of 30, they're probably hoping you see the bigger number and go with it out of pure instinct. But it's important to look beyond the numbers and ask what they actually mean. Not just definition-wise, but how they'll affect your playground.

In my mind, there are two things that matter above all else when buying a playground:

Whether a structure will be safe in year one.



Whether it will still be standing in year 20.



And if a salesperson can't adequately answer those questions, you should immediately ask yourself what it is they're trying to sell you. It's fine not to know every single detail about a given structure, but you can tell a lot about what they choose to put front-and-center. Specs like post diameter and capacity aren't unimportant, but they're also not selling points in any real sense of the term. A bigger number doesn't equal a better structure, and a smaller one doesn't make it worse.

SPEC CHECKLIST:

- ☐ POST SIZE
- ☐ CHILD CAPACITY
- ☐ USE ZONE
- ☐ COMPONENT COUNT
- ☐ ASTM COMPLIANT
- ☐ ADA COMPLIANT

**THE JOB OF A
PLAYGROUND
SALESPERSON
SHOULD
BE TO FIND
EQUIPMENT
THAT FITS
EACH SPECIFIC
SPACE.**

Specs can and should inform those decisions, but they shouldn't decide which equipment is ultimately purchased. I understand how the "bigger is better" mentality that drives modern sales culture has pervaded the playground industry, but no one is served by it, least of all the kids who play on playgrounds.

THEORY VS PRACTICE

► THEORY

Selling a playground is like selling anything else; it all depends on finding out what the customer needs and giving it to them for the lowest price possible

The bigger a playground is, the better it will be for a customer

At the end of the day, the customer is always right, and giving them what they say they want is more important than interrogating their wishes.

► PRACTICE

Playgrounds are unique products in that the customer will be responsible for the safety of those who use it

Bigger doesn't mean better when it comes to playgrounds, and using high numbers as a selling point sets up a customer for failure

While customer input is crucial, it shouldn't override safety considerations and other factors that could make their playground unsafe for kids to use

THE NEEDS OF YOUR SITE WILL HELP DEFINE THE EQUIPMENT THAT FITS BEST, NOT BIG NUMBERS.