

Marketing: Lessons from America's best-managed architectural firms

This three-part series provides a comprehensive overview of marketing architectural services.

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It's the stuff of night sweats. You've grown from one to 25 employees in the last 15 years without even a brochure. You do good work, but few beyond your peers have ever heard of you. Regular clients bring the firm steady assignments, but what if you lost one active job? There are no prospects in sight. You'd have to lay off five loyal people who helped build the business and depend on it to support their families. You're far too busy to hang out at the golf course, hoping to turn up new work. But isn't that where new clients come from? You have no stomach for schmoozing. What you really want to do is design buildings. Should you expand your marketing effort? Find a PR consultant?

Develop a marketing plan, hire a designer for your Web site or a business development director? Do you invest a substantial chunk of money into this? If so, where do you find the best candidates, and what exactly should you expect of them? How soon can you expect results? How can you develop a strategy that will take your firm where you want it to go? Prospects used to land on the doorstep. Now you have to spend half your time developing them. Where do you turn?

The evolution of architectural practice—from an anti-competitive, “may-the-best-man-win” culture to one in which firms have to go out and win new projects, promote their designs, and also market their firms—was one of the most important changes in our profession during the 20th century. But many architects still do not completely acknowledge that they need marketing, although in this new century, marketing will continue to be more fully adopted by practitioners of architecture, and a plethora of marketing activities will be conducted over the Web. Unfortunately, little in the education of most architects ever gave them even the most basic understanding of how to sell what they do.



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Marketing:

The unsung heroine of successful architectural practice



In this first of three articles on marketing architectural services, we will examine why architects are relative newcomers to the field of marketing, look at the cultural clash between architects and marketing people, and explore the gender issues that have emerged during the evolution of this discipline—a little discussed but important factor. The second article will focus on the various ways in which firms can organize their marketing efforts, discuss the components of a complete marketing program, and examine innovative practices used by some of the best-managed firms. The third article will look to the future of marketing. It will examine the views of young practitioners, look at where education is headed, and assess the techniques architects are using to take marketing to the Internet.



The origins of our humble, self-deprecating nature

Historically, marketing was not only looked down upon, it was forbidden. The first Principles of Practice adopted by the American Institute of Architects in 1909 barred architects from using even the simplest forms of marketing. They could not advertise—defined as paid publicity—or even put their names on a sign in front of one of their buildings during construction. They could not offer free services, such as proposals or sketches. They could not take part in any competition unless it was conducted under the AIA's guidelines.

While an architect could advertise by paying for a line in the Yellow Pages, any “exaggerated or self-laudatory language” in brochures or press releases was against the rules—and that discouraged most architects from hiring public-relations staff. Press releases of today would have been grounds for censure by the standards of 50 years ago.

Prior to 1970, the greatest impediment to competition between firms, and therefore the greatest deterrent to marketing, was the rule that prohibited a firm from knowingly competing with another by offering to charge less for the same work. This rule was reinforced by the requirement that fee schedules, promulgated by the AIA, were to be used to determine what firms could charge for work [see “Why Architects Don’t Charge Enough,” Record, October 1999, page 110]. Every architect was supposed to charge the same percentage of construction cost—the assumption being that if one architect charged less than another, the underbidder would also produce a building of lesser quality.

During the 1960s the U.S. Justice Department began to investigate the ethics of many professions on the grounds that rules against fee negotiations, such as those established by the AIA, were a form of trade restraint. As a result, the AIA signed a pair of consent decrees. In 1972 it agreed not to restrict members from submitting price quotes for services. In the 1990 decree, which has since lapsed, the AIA promised to refrain from adopting policies or bylaws that restrained members from submitting competitive bids, price quotations, discounts, or free work. Meanwhile, it asked its chapters to discontinue using fee schedules.

The effect of the consent decrees on both fees and marketing cannot be overstated. Because architects, like doctors and lawyers, have a fiduciary duty to their clients, they adopted ethical standards similar to the ones in place for those professions. They decided, as doctors and lawyers did, that they could not compete with one another on the basis of price and could not advertise their services. In the case of architects, it was as if Starbucks were forced to charge the same amount as Folgers but could not state why their brand was unique.

But when the consent decrees allowed firms to compete with one another for work, the AIA’s position changed. Architects could openly compete and were allowed to market their services. Yet, freed from the strictures of the ethics codes in the 1970s, many architects still didn’t overcome their reluctance to sell themselves.

Shortages of work during the recessions of the late 1970s, late ’80s, and early ’90s, combined with significant changes in client culture, forced architects to take marketing seriously. According to Cynthia Kracauer, principal at Archimuse in New York City, “There was a sea change in the manner in which architects



“Being able to clearly show how a client will derive greater value from your services than from those of your competition is fundamental, and yet most firms do not understand how to explain what makes them unique,”

Richard Burns of
PSMJ Resources.

were selected for major commercial projects. In the past, selection was the purview of the company owner, CEO, or chairman—a component of the old boy network. Today, the facilities professionals select architects. This has made the formal, professional marketing effort crucial for success. But there still is an inherent distaste for this turn of events among the more traditional practitioners.”

Today architects are actively engaged in marketing and are spending money on it. According to the AIA’s recently published Firm Survey 2000-2003, in 1999 architects spent on average 7.5 percent of their expenses on marketing.

This figure holds steady in 2003, with small firms (under 50 employees) spending from 6.5-8% and large firms (over 50 employees) spending an average of 7% on total marketing (staff and direct expenditures). That is an impressive sum, considering that larger firms report three-quarters of their billings are from repeat work, and smaller firms report two-thirds. While larger firms tend to get more repeat work than smaller firms, they are also far more likely to get new work through the more formal “request for proposal/request for qualification” method than smaller firms, which tend to rely more on referrals.

Since marketing as a mainstream function of architecture is relatively new to the profession, the differences among its distinct elements can be quite foggy to architects. It’s no wonder. In the best case, marketing is still only touched on in the professional practice courses offered at architectural schools. According to Barry Alan Yoakum of PSMJ (Professional Services Marketing Journal) Resources, “Virtually 100 percent of architects’ training focuses on doing projects. Their number one strength—solving project problems—creates their number one weakness—not equating clients with ‘relationships’ and failing to understand clients’ businesses.” These relationships don’t grow on trees; they have to be cultivated—and this is the purview of marketing.

By definition, the marketing of architectural services includes all the activities required to create a “brand” for the firm and then to position the firm to attract the clients and projects it needs to achieve its practice goals. Branding means establishing a firm’s identity and remaining true to it in as many ways as possible. As Craig Park wrote in his article “Brand Equity,” published in the June 1999 SMPS Marketer, “The brand of a firm is the sum of all its measurable and visceral characteristics—the ideas, values, philosophy, features, and history that make it unique. The firm’s brand image represents all internal and external assets—the name, iconography, literature, signs, vehicles, and culture of a firm.” Richard Staub, a marketing consultant in New York, explains that positioning can then “take the brand and make it suitable for a particular market.”

Ironically, architects are in the business of creating brands for their clients—they design spaces geared toward communicating the client’s specific message to the world. In fact, there is a trend today among architects like Rem Koolhaas to emphasize the architect’s role as a branding guru who takes the *raison d’être* of clients and shapes it into tangible forms and messages. Given that architects have this skill, it would seem they would grasp the importance of successfully communicating their own image to their clients and to the public. But often they don’t, or their reluctance to do so makes them resist examining what makes their firm different. In any case, the value of understanding and reinforcing the firm’s brand cannot be overstated. “Being able to clearly show how a client will derive greater value from your services than from those of your competition is fundamental, and yet most firms do not understand how to explain what makes them unique,” says Richard Burns of PSMJ Resources.

Good intentions, mixed results

Although most firms have attempted to develop marketing to some extent, the results are often disappointing. In the worst-case scenario, architects often simply don't understand why they need marketing. "They think that if they put out a quality product, the world will beat a path to their door," says Mark Zweig, Vice Chairman of ZweigWhite, a management consulting firm serving the design professions. He points out that a commercial may run hundreds of times during the course of a television ad campaign. Zweig isn't suggesting that architects market their services the way Madison Avenue markets soap. He is simply noting that many architects don't understand that they cannot rely on their reputations alone to communicate all-important messages about their skills and the quality of their work.

Sometimes architects expect instant results and will often prematurely blame the marketing professional when they don't occur. When it comes to new prospects, a long lead time—sometimes years—elapses between the initial contact and a tangible result.

Hugh Hochberg, president of the Coxe Group, a management consulting group for architects, believes these efforts sometimes fail because architects expect marketers to be the deal-closers between the firm and the client. But, as he sees it, marketers mostly serve to position the firm, providing the support required to put the architects exactly where they need to be in order to convince a client to hire them. Then the architects step forward and complete the dialogue using their personal and technical skills, thereby "closing" the deal. Not all firms follow this model, but such fundamental misunderstandings about who does what is a sure sign that a marketing effort is in trouble.

There are also cases where architects hire people to set up marketing departments and then turn their backs on them. "The principals of a firm define the direction and goals for the marketing and business development effort. If the principal does not own this effort, everybody fails," says Joy Fedden-Habian, herself an architect and a PR consultant in New York. Yet many architects are ill-equipped to establish these goals without receiving plenty of input from seasoned marketing professionals.

Just the opposite can also be true. Some architects have a difficult time accepting the contributions of others to their "art." In many cases they founded their firm and defined its philosophy. They find it hard to believe that anyone could promote it better than they. They may feel that marketers are less professional, their credentials less quantifiable, their skills more vague. A high percentage of marketing professionals worked their way up from being administrative assistants or took other, more circuitous career routes than architects. "Many architects, whose path to their position was more direct, have a level of distrust toward those whose education was less formal," says Maxine Leighton, a marketing principal at Beyer Blinder Belle Architects. The marketing professional is probably less senior, more focused on the business aspects of the firm, and perhaps less tuned to the subtleties of design. But both can wield considerable power over the firm's destiny.



Marketing:

The unsung heroine of successful architectural practice

No amount of marketing will fix poor-quality services, however. An architect may be a brilliant designer, but if he or she is unable to retain clients due to an inability to bring projects in on time, to stay within the budget, or to get along with clients, marketing efforts will be in vain. AIA's Firm Survey 2003, in 2003 firms reported 59 percent of project billings from repeat clients. There is no underestimating the value of cultivating positive relationships with existing clients. A firm's failure to secure repeat business is often due, not to the fault of the marketing department, but to the firm's inability to live up to its own promises.

There are distinct differences between marketing and business development, or "sales staff," and if the architect is not aware of them, he or she may hire the wrong person for the wrong job. "I perceive the greatest downfall of firms to be the continual insistence upon lumping everything having to do with promotion, sales, marketing, presentations, and communications into one department—often one person—called 'marketing,'" says Joy Fedden-Habian. "The person who assists with proposals and presentations, keeps the slide library together, writes press releases, and organizes the firm's holiday party is simply not going to be able to steer an effective business development program as well."



Mars versus Venus, and the opportunity gap

One fact that almost no one talks about is that the majority of people who market the work of this mostly male profession are women. As of September 2000, 60 percent of the Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) members were women. Why?

Karen Courtney, a registered architect, interior designer, MBA, and 15-year marketer currently Director of Marketing at BSA LifeStructures in Indianapolis, IN, says, “The graduates I have hired for marketing positions have mainly come from journalism or communications backgrounds. My guess is that there are more women than men in these college majors.” Others speculate that women gravitate naturally toward roles that involve interpersonal skills, no matter what industry they work in. Lisa Bowman, Senior Vice President of Communications for SMPS, backs this point of view: “Women are communicators, and communication is at the core of marketing and business development.”

Mark Zweig believes the large number of women in marketing is due to the way marketing positions at architecture firms have evolved. “The first marketers at architectural firms were initially hired as administrative support staff, and they typically were women. As time went on, they gained experience, took on the task of preparing proposals, and eventually became what are now known as marketing coordinators.” He’s quick to add that the job requirements have changed since the creation of the first marketing departments at architectural firms: “The skill levels and professionalism of marketing staffs have escalated over the past two decades.”

But while most marketers are women, very few make it to the top. According to the SMPS 2000 Salary Survey, only 16 percent of marketing staff at professional services firms are at the vice president or principal level, and of these, 84 percent are men. Though it’s easy to point to gender as a cause of the historically uneasy relationship between architects and marketers, this explanation is too simplistic. There are some extremely successful firms where women marketers have been made principals. Even the corporation laws that exist in some states and that make it unlawful for nonregistered personnel to become firm partners do not completely account for the high percentage of men who are both principals and marketers.

According to Lisbeth Quebe, who has 32 years of experience—heading the marketing department for two of the country’s largest architecture firms (RTKL in Chicago and Perkins & Will in New York) “In an architecture-driven firm, it’s difficult for engineers, interior designers, and graphic designers to achieve equal footing with the architects. It’s even more difficult for people without a project focus, the so-called support personnel—those in marketing, finance, human resources, and administration—to advance. When there is a ceiling on the number of leadership positions, the revenue-producing staff and especially the rainmakers will get preferential treatment. It takes a firm with some vision to see that the rainmakers and the revenue generators are made far more effective by association with an exceptional partner in marketing.”



“In an increasingly complex marketplace, a world driven by appearances and fast response time, marketing is here to stay.”

Architectural Record interviewed a number of marketers, mostly female and mostly nonarchitects, who have been made principals in their firms. Many of them feel their firms consistently integrate marketing with other business goals. Maxine Leighton considers herself fortunate to work for a firm that does not view marketing as an appendage. “My promotion to an associate partner, though I am not an architect, is indicative of how the firm understands and respects the role of marketing. It is a perspective that begins at the top of the organization. The firm sees marketing as an extension of its identity rather than as something that obscures its talents. It took a lot of work on my part to sow the seeds for this understanding and for this respect to develop.”

Knowing how effective and valuable the marketing efforts of women can be, Richard Hayden, principal of Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, decided to turn the gender gap to the firm’s advantage. Knowing that women communicate well and are effective marketers, he has supported the promotion of five women (four of them architects) to the position of principal at SHCA since 1999. All are active in marketing. Before this development, there had only been one female principal in the firm’s 99-year history. Firms that fail to learn from this example may be missing a great opportunity.

More to come

Architects see themselves as artists whose projects accomplish specific creative, technical, and functional goals. Marketers, on the other hand, are more likely to use their skills in a variety of different industries or settings to achieve a wide range of goals. This culture-clash issue also deserves more scrutiny if architects want to continue to market their services more effectively and more comfortably. Clearly, the architect’s relationship with those who market services is still evolving. But one thing is sure: In an increasingly complex marketplace, a world driven by appearances and fast response time, marketing is here to stay. In part two next month, we will examine the organizational choices firms grapple with in the marketing arena, detail the elements that make up a complete marketing plan, and review strategies of some well-managed firms that have achieved remarkable success in marketing.



Marketing:

Building your firm's incredible marketing



The sign of a successful marketing effort is that your firm is getting profitable, desirable new work. To create that kind of success, firms must set themselves apart and gain recognition from clients. It sounds simple, but is it? Maybe your firm has a good track record for getting shortlisted, but you fail to get selected over and over again. Why? Or, you seem to be the last one to find out about exciting new work—you should have been positioning yourself with the client far before the word hit the streets—how did you miss it? Or, you're tired of spending a fortune getting projects professionally photographed, submitting them for publicity and awards with pitiful results. How can you ever make the jump to professional-looking proposals like the competition's with the technology you have? Everyone is talking about the joys of using digital libraries to sort and access their images, and you hardly have a slide library. In terms of human resources, infrastructure, and expense, the idea of improving your marketing is frightening, yet you must move forward.



Most firms share these laments. But there is no single solution, since no two architectural offices are alike and the services they offer vary, as do the talents, interests, and personalities of their people. Nevertheless, certain characteristics are common to all successful marketing efforts. In this second part of our series, we focus on fundamentals: the strategic planning that stands behind a marketing program and how this informs the entire marketing process. We touch on public relations, technology for marketing uses, successful strategies to win work, and various forms of organization.

Today, practically every large-and medium-sized firm has full-time marketing staff. According to the AIA's Firm Survey 2003, 87 percent of firms with 50 or more employees have a marketing person on staff, and 71 percent of these have two or more. Over half the firms with 20 to 49 employees have someone engaged in marketing, with 20 percent reporting two or more. It is notable that 5 percent of total staff added at firms in 1999 was marketing staff, a higher proportion than was hired in subsequent years. This may suggest that firms anticipated that the recent economic boom was leveling off and were preparing to enhance their future marketing efforts.

Strategic planning

How do you get started? Strategic planning forms the basis of any marketing effort and is necessary to successfully brand and position the firm. The firm's principals and managers must take a long, hard look at where the firm really is—assessing the current mix of work and forecasting the viability of these markets for the future. Is the firm client-driven or market-driven? What are the firm's past successes and failures, and what goals realistically capitalize on its strengths while remaining honest about its weaknesses? A planning process will typically occur annually, reviewing the previous year's plans to see if the firm is on track, and devising a strategy for the coming year. Sometimes serious planning will be reserved for a management retreat, with a specialized consultant overseeing the process.

“When firms do not understand what makes them different, they have a difficult time creating a competitive edge,” says Richard Burns, a consultant with PSMJ (Professional Services Marketing Journal) Resources. “Architecture, one might argue, is a parity product. Any number of firms can provide the service. Being able to clearly identify how a client will derive greater value by using your services than those offered by your competitors is fundamental. However, most firms can't quantify these attributes when it comes to describing their own practices.”

Once a sense of identity and direction has been agreed upon, a firm will engage in branding to express the benefits you offer your clients while instilling those values in the firm internally. Branding spreads into all of the firm's public relations and informs the positioning activities of business development and marketing.

CAVEAT: Strategic planning doesn't always succeed. Sometimes firms attempt implementation without assessment, which is time-consuming and can reveal serious shortcomings that firms wish to ignore. In other cases, assessment takes place, plans and budgets are developed only to be shelved, because the firm's principals aren't committed to them and because more imminent deadlines became an excuse for brushing them aside.

One marketing director from the East Coast, for example, had earned his stripes, developing a marketing plan that was simply ignored. The firm's partners continued to pursue their own marketing efforts as “Lone Rangers,” going in different directions. The associates and marketing staff broke into factions, taking sides with one or another of the partners, working against each other rather than as a team. When direction and responsibilities become blurred, it shows up in every step of the marketing process, confusing staff and clients, to whom you especially wish to be clear.

Laura Stillman, marketing principal at Flad and Associates, of Madison, Wisc., has found: “The happiest marketers work in firms where marketing is a strategic function and business strategies are clearly outlined and followed. Usually the most dissatisfied marketers work in firms where multiple principals give conflicting directions, and where marketing is a support function. In those firms, marketers generally have less experience, quickly burn out, then go back to school or pursue other careers.”

“Principals should be sure that they have people who enjoy doing business development as part of the core management team and then support them”

Richard Staub,
marketing consultant
New York City

Sales and business development

Once a marketing plan has been established as a foundation, it should inform the business development or sales activities, which involve prospecting for opportunities. Prospecting includes market research and networking, which ultimately leads to contact with potential clients, and it often results in valuable information that can lead to advantageous teaming arrangements in pursuing new work.

Many firm principals choose to undertake these activities themselves and others abhor the task, leaving it to the marketing staff. “While these functions are crucial, not every principal or associate will be comfortable performing them. Principals should be sure that they have people who enjoy doing it as part of the core management team and then support them,” says Richard Staub, a New York City-based marketing consultant.

Business development professionals obtain leads from other consultants, existing clients, or influential contacts. They also use references such as the local, state, and federal registers, which list requests for proposal/qualifications (RFP/RFO) as well as McGraw-Hill Construction's Dodge Project Data, Construction Marketing Data's (CMD) Early Planning leads, local construction trade newspapers, and other publications (the AIA's Web site is a great source). Participation in industry activities and trade organizations is also important.

Some firms attend conferences sponsored by associations serving a variety of clients such as museums, historic buildings, libraries, higher and lower education, facility managers for a number of industries, the federal government, and the developer community. Here, they reaffirm existing client relationships and aspire to cultivate new ones. Most of these conferences offer the additional opportunity of the trade show. Some firms are now committing part of their marketing budgets to cover the cost of having booths at trade shows that serve their market sectors.

One effective way to get recognition at a conference is to present a paper or give a lecture. According to Christa Mahar, marketing director at Graham Gund Associates, in Cambridge, Mass., “Giving a presentation with a client about an innovative practice you've developed together or a case study can be extremely beneficial. This activity gives your principals and senior staff the opportunity to contribute their time and expertise to show how the firm has worked with and supported its current clients.”

CAVEAT: Trade shows may draw attention better than a pretty face can.

Some architects think that they can get new work by hiring a persuasive, charismatic, or attractive salesperson to woo their clients. This can backfire and undercut the firm's integrity. Lest we forget, prospective clients are often rookies in understanding architecture and the building process and are relying on the architect to educate them. Or they may be sophisticated enough to know when someone is trying to snow them. This is not to say that compelling people should never be hired in marketing positions. Persuasive power must be accompanied by an understanding of the client's needs and of your firm's services and by the ability to articulate that understanding.

The Go/No-Go Questionnaire

Give 1 point for each “yes” answer, 0 for each “no.” If the total is 7 or over, it is considered a “go”; if less, a “no-go.”

- Did the firm hear of the opportunity from an inside source (yes) or publically (no)?
- Do we have an existing relationship with the prospect?
- Will the project fall into one of the firm's primary markets?
- Is the fee commensurate with its technical complexity?
- Do we know anyone with influence on the selection committee?
- Are marketing and technical staff available to meet the necessary time commitments to respond to the prospect?
- Is this a complex or simple selection process? Will it require a high or low investment in marketing? A low investment is a “yes.”
- If the firm needs a local partner, does it have existing relationships in the area?
- Will travel expenses incurred on the project be worthy of the profits or other goals, such as getting more work, that might be achieved?
- Does the firm have something strong to show at the interview?
- If selected, will the firm have the staff needed to service the project?

Winning work

Perhaps the most common and essential marketing activities are those that occur after a lead lands on the doorstep. The “winning work” process begins with the receipt of an RFP/RFQ. The firm must first consider the likelihood of being shortlisted but more specifically being selected (see “The Go/No-Go Questionnaire,” above). If the prospect seems good, examine the complexity of the response, the strengths of the firm's experience and staff, and then assemble a strong and responsive team of consultants. Even proposals can involve considerable research into the project (see “Strong Research is the Key to Winning Work,” page 82). “Clients are the best source of information, and yet firms are reluctant to ask for feedback and help. My best efforts have always been preceded by research,” says Karen Courtney, Director of Marketing at BSA LifeStructures in Indianapolis, IN

“The sharp marketer organizes the proposal by the evaluation criteria cited in the RFP, which is often the client's wish list, to show that a firm thinks like the client!” says Lori Miller, marketing director of Perkins Eastman Architects, Pittsburgh. These days, with desktop publishing and in-house production, proposals can be custom-designed quickly and beautifully. Everyone agrees that it is best to create an attractive proposal, short and to the point, responsive to the client's concerns, well written and interesting. “In essence, you want to get the reader, and ultimately the decision maker, nodding their heads in agreement with what you are saying as they read it. If your proposal does not address ‘the things that keep the client awake at night,’ you have lost an opportunity to connect with that client,” says Sherri Bowman, vice president, EwingCole, Philadelphia.

CAVEAT: Firms are guilty of impulsively responding to RFP/RFQs that are out on the street. Indeed, go/no-go strategies (see sidebar) are employed in only 22 percent of the firms in the country, according to the ZweigWhite 2000 Marketing Survey. Instead, firms need to build long-term business relationships in target markets. It is also important not to waste the time of a prospective client by submitting a poorly composed document—a mistake that may block any future hopes of doing business with them.

The interview

When presenting yourself face-to-face with the client, you want to establish and convey the special chemistry of your team. This most important marketing opportunity is where the architect often closes the deal and the people on the team can really shine. According to a recent study released by SMPS, capability, chemistry, and client orientation are the three primary issues on the minds of clients, with chemistry rated as most important. Given this scenario, it behooves the architect to use whatever resources are available to enhance the human dimension of the interview.

These days, PowerPoint has become the standard fare in presentations.

But, "It's not the tool that sells, it's the person," cautions Lisbeth Quebe, who has 32 years of experience –heading the marketing department for two of the country's largest architecture firms (RTKL in Chicago and Perkins & Will in New York), says, evaluate its effectiveness for specific situations. Visually, projected digital images still "While Powerpoint does have strong virtues, we now fall short of what other means can achieve. When I show a client our architecture, I want its brilliance and clarity to engage them, and I continue to rely on slides for many presentations."

CAVEAT: Conducting rehearsals and training staff to speak simply and articulately in interviews are necessary steps that are often neglected.

Architects make the mistake of favoring personal statements about their work over investigating what the client has asked for. Another common problem is the tendency some architects have to engage in intellectual grandstanding, speaking at length in highly abstract or technical language, not to mention usurping other team members' contributions and interrupting the overall rhythm of the presentation. If you don't get the job, request a debriefing from someone on the selection committee. This will help your firm identify its weaknesses and hone its skills, so you will be less inclined to make the same mistakes twice.

Remember that winning the job doesn't mean the job will be a success. Service and follow-through are crucial if a firm is interested in developing a relationship that will lead to repeat work.



Checklist for the interview

There is nothing worse than showing up for a presentation to find that in the rush something crucial has been forgotten. Here is a list to review when you prepare for the big day.

- **Has the firm designed its interview around the client's stated or implied goals?** Did the firm obtain plans, photos, or supporting documentation to help compose the presentation?
- **What is the appropriate media for the presentation?** If more than one medium will be used, is there redundancy in the information?
- **Get names and titles of the selection committee.** What is the percentage of users to owners? Is the selection "process-driven," by its future users or "trustee-driven," that is, directed by the building's owners? Does the presentation address this?
- **Will the presentation hold the audience's interest?**
- **Did key speakers rehearse the presentation and does everyone have something worthwhile to say?**
- **What degree of effort will be put into the development of interview materials** and is this commensurate with the chances of winning and/or fee potential?
- **What are the characteristics of the room and is there a place to assemble and rehearse?**
- **If the client provides equipment, be clear about what it is and familiarize yourselves with it.** If bringing your own equipment, check it out first—did you remember extension cord or projection lamps?
- **Can the presentation materials be transported** and did you bring materials to assemble and disassemble them?
- **Has the firm scheduled an early flight in case there are delays** and are essential materials packed so that they can be carried on the plane?

Public relations

While it may sound obvious, many architects would benefit from a clear definition of who they are when communicating their image to the public—this what we broadly call public relations. Marketing and business development are about positioning—winning work through the pursuit of specific targets; PR is about branding, establishing your firm's image and spreading the word. In addition to performing the tasks required to get published in the trade press, newspapers, and other media, PR duties include managing your firm's Web site, photo shoots, award submissions, firm newsletters, special events, and advertising. PR activities usually performed by the architects themselves include serving on design juries; writing for journals, magazines, or books; belonging to professional and charitable organizations; and participating in leadership and speaking roles at industry events.

Why does a firm want to get published? It provides personal satisfaction to the hard-working architects, offers them opportunities for exposure that can lead to new work, and shows that a firm can compete meaningfully with its peers.

How does a firm get published? According to Nancy Fishman, marketing principal at Zimmer Gunsel Frasca Partnership, in Portland, Ore., "First, a firm must do good work, and understand that's what editors are looking for. Next, one must understand the process of getting published. 'Selling' is not an appropriate approach to an editor, but rather you present story ideas that are interesting and relevant to their readers. Supply editors with well-written materials, good drawings and photographs, organized in a professional, easily readable way."

Assemble awards binders so the images tell a story. According to Jennifer Greene is Director of Marketing and Public Relations at Dattner Architects in New York, "If the nature of the project isn't apparent from the drawings and photos, then no amount of text will help you understand it. You will be lucky if a jury even reads your text." Her boss, Robert Kliment, was Chair of the 2000 AIA Honor Award for Architecture jury. It received over 400 submissions and had a day and a half to pare them down to 30! The average time allotted to a submission was 30 to 45 seconds.

High-quality photography is of the utmost importance for doing publicity, winning work, and keeping records. However, some firms find the expense too much to bear. "You can save money by arranging to share with the project's owner, engineers, and other consultants. But many photographers add a 'sharing' fee into their contracts and some may require the firm to order all prints from them. Read the contract carefully," says Veda Solomon is the principal and founder of Strategies for Success, a New York City marketing consulting firm.

And how about doing a monograph? It seems these days every firm has one—it's practically a prerequisite of getting noticed, especially after your firm has a number of successful projects under its belt. Sometimes it is the only way some projects will ever see print, if they were never published in the trade press. We explored some of the reasons for the proliferation of these books. Cooper Robertson and Partners recently decided to publish a monograph after 20 years in business. Communications principal Karen Cooper says, "First, we wanted to document the work in a cohesive way; second, potential clients ask for our book. Before we had one, they wanted to know why we didn't, as if that had become the test of whether a firm was 'real.' Third, the staff wanted it so that the evolution and implementation of the firm's work could be understood."

“Marketing and business development are about positioning—winning work through the pursuit of specific targets; PR is about branding, establishing your firm's image and spreading the word.”

However, most “vanity” publishers require a firm to commit to buying several thousand copies of the monograph, and there are costs associated with writing and editing the copy, doing photo research, and obtaining rights.

It can often take a staff member years to complete such a task, if you are lucky enough to have someone to do it. Eric Mott, founder of Colorado-based Mott Associates, former national president of SMPS, wonders if the expense is worth it. Sure, the result is attractive, but is it simply an expensive ego boost for the firm? Be sure the cost can be justified in terms of your marketing objectives.

Finally, PR is not just press releases, publications, and training seminars, but it is image-making in its entirety. For example, answering the telephone can express an attitude of competence and cooperation, or it can completely turn off a potential client or member of the press. “We insist on a live voice instead of voice mail when greeting callers to emphasize our personalized service,” according to Karen Cooper.

CAVEAT: Many firms feel that unless they are among the most recognized, getting published is too difficult to be worth the trouble. Architectural publications are limited, but individual market sectors have their own trade journals. Both these and local newspapers reach prospective clients, and impressing them is more important to your practice than showing off to your peers. Seek publication where it will be of most benefit, cultivate relationships with those working the appropriate beats, be realistic about the possibilities for publishing your work, and educate yourself on what to emphasize in your press releases. See “Submitting work for publication” on the Web at architecturalrecord.com.

Strong research is the key to winning work

Below are examples of questions one might ask when pursuing a prospect:

- Does the client have a budget for the project or a capital improvement plan in progress? Does the budget cover total project or construction costs?
- If there was a study prior to the RFP, who did it? Is that firm submitting? And is there a copy available?
- What type of fee will be awarded and is there a scale?
- How many other firms received the RFP? Who are they? What are their strengths or weaknesses?
- Are maps, photographs, or other data available?
- Of those that received the RFP, how many are national, in-state, or local firms? Which have previous experience with the client?
- What is the approval process for a project to proceed? Are state, local, architectural, or an institution's review boards involved?
- Are other consultants (such as campus planner, city planner, city architect, or landscape architect) involved and in what capacity? Try to interview them regarding the project.
- Where are the funding sources—a donor, bond referendum, legislative appropriation, etc.?
- Does the client have a preference for engineers? Such engineers can be a great source of information on the client.
- What architects has the client worked with recently? Was the experience favorable or unfavorable? Are these firms submitting?
- What is the anticipated schedule for obtaining funds for the project? Is there a fund-raising campaign under way?
- What type of facility does the client favor stylistically—conservative, modern, classical, signature, etc.?
- If teaming with a local is necessary to selection, do research to determine the appropriate local. Roughly speaking, what would the division of work be?
- Go to the client's Web site to do research. Can you find images and logos for use in the submission?
- See the Web site of the Chamber of Commerce in the city where the project is located to familiarize yourself with the demographics and issues in the area. Does the project have links to the larger community?
- Get an idea of the date for the interview early on. Are staff members available to attend?

Marketing infrastructure

This includes project and client databases, electronic image databases, slide libraries, photo collections, and equipment for color output and binding. These tools support the rapid creation of in-house marketing-communications materials and proposals. The database requirements of design firms are surprisingly large and complex. Marketers will want to track and sort past projects, store boilerplate text for staff and consultants' capabilities, previous proposals, and manage images while also tracking contacts, "hit rates" for making short lists and winning jobs, leads, and more. In larger firms the complexity is compounded.



Organizing your marketing department

It is usually the size of a firm that determines if marketing activities will be conducted in-house or by outside consultants. For modestly sized firms with fewer than 20 employees, it is often not economically feasible to employ full-time, in-house staff, so using consultants makes sense.

Outside consultants can do some things better than others: for example, public relations, strategic planning, marketing research, Web site design, database setup, or creation of copy for a brochure. However, the general task of producing proposals should usually be performed in-house. One novel approach that works for small architectural firms is used by the Marketing Partnership, a consultancy serving New York and New Jersey. Acting as interim marketing directors, they supervise and train non-marketing staff assigned to marketing activities, as well as full-time or temporary marketing personnel. The Partnership does not focus on PR or business development for its clients, however, as it might pose a conflict of interest in their client mix. Hugh Hochberg, president of the Coxe Group, in Seattle, suggests an alternative: "Architects can work with a PR firm that aligns itself within a specific market sector, such as one that specializes in health care, which can represent many constituents within a field."

Most marketing professionals feel the business development function must remain part of in-house staff. "I have never seen a successful outcome from involving consultants in business development, other than in a research capacity," says Joy Fedden-Habian, a New York City PR consultant. Linda Eklund, a business development consultant who successfully performs this function for two to three noncompeting firms, shows another side to the argument. "My observation is that business development is better done by a consultant than by no one at all. And it is well practiced by a consultant who is dedicated to a long-term relationship with the architect."

Larger firms should also consider whether their marketing might be best organized to parallel the firm's organizational model. Given the niche nature of the market today, some firms find it best to divide into camps according to building typologies—education, retail, public—with a principal heading up each. "Thus each principal becomes an expert in a field and can focus all marketing and business development efforts within this one area. Without the focus this model offers, it is virtually impossible to really dig one's heels into a market and develop name recognition within the prospective client base," says Joy Fedden-Habian.

Scott Smith says, "Sasaki's 32 partners work with specific client types and develop a practice base within those areas. The marketing activities are organized around these client groups, which include public agencies, corporate entities, universities, and one international group."

Marketing today:

Balancing people and machines



connecting people_projects_products

Marketing and communications in architectural firms have been profoundly influenced by the phenomenal growth of the Internet. We now see firms performing considerable market research online and using their Web sites to attract potential clients. Their geographic reach has been vastly expanded, so that a two-person firm can appear to be a 200-person firm. People are bypassing conventional information sources for the convenience and speed of the Internet: Notices for upcoming projects and awards programs are announced on Web sites; online architectural Web-zines are proliferating; and e-mail has become the established form of communication for almost everyone. As a paperless, timesaving vehicle for giving and receiving information, the Internet has changed the way marketing people do their work, but it hasn't lessened their importance.

We don't think we'll ever see clients who actually buy architectural services online, any more than they would from a telemarketer. "If that happens," says Lisbeth Quebe, who has 32 years of experience –heading the marketing department for two of the country's largest architecture firms (RTKL in Chicago and Perkins & Will in New York), "we've sunk from being an idea-driven service to a mere commodity." While the Internet, which has forever changed the way services are sold, demands has its strengths and weaknesses. In this final installment of our marketing series, we address this subject, as well as the issue of finding and training qualified marketing staff and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the marketing education offered to the current generation of architects.

Your web site and internet resources

The reality today is that if your firm does not have a Web site, you don't exist.

If a potential client knows your name, he or she is likely to look first on the Web before contacting you. Cynthia Kracauer is a principal at Archimuse in New York City, says, "Historically, architectural firms have had their work exposed most publicly through specialty publications. The Internet creates a platform where even a sole practitioner can gain worldwide exposure for his or her work."

As a business investment, the establishment of a Web site is one of the most cost-effective marketing tools available to a firm in terms of reach and exposure to potential clients. It works 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. It allows others to learn about your firm at their leisure and is one of the most polite, noninvasive forms of marketing today.

According to Elizabeth Geary-Archer, president of Out of the Box Marketing Strategies in New York City,

- "The perfect Web site will be easily updated in-house;
- It will contain a resource library of information that could include
 - Discoveries,
 - Case studies,
 - New products, and/or creative solutions that are useful to your clients;
 - Recent news about your firm; a recruitment page;
 - A referral form for those who would like to receive information about you;
 - A page for projects that will soon be bid;
 - A portfolio of past and current work;
 - And a password-protected portal to access an intranet/extranet site where clients can view the progress of their project, consultants can make updates, and projects are managed and documented."

As a communications vehicle, the Internet is limited by its immense size and content. How does a firm grab an audience when the audience and competition are unfathomably huge? Geary-Archer suggests spending minimal time registering your site on search engines, focusing instead on listing your firm in directories, or placing links to your site in strategic locations on the Internet where your clients may look. Focus on building an informative Web site that clients will return to again and again.

Steve Goldberg, faia, partner at Mitchell/Giurgola Architects of New York City, says his firm's Web site seeks to establish interactive Web relationships with clients and to employ the advantages of Web media. "By linking the projects on our Web site to the client's Web site, we allow potential clients to better understand the context of the building. Similarly, a potential client searching our current clients' Web sites will be linked to our site, where they will see further examples of our work." Mitchell/Giurgola uses Web-media exposure, encouraging readers to explore the subject of an article in greater depth by following links, embedded in the text, to the firm's Web site.



CAVEAT: Although a Web site has great potential as a two-way custom communications tool for firms, many remain one-way mass communication vehicles. Karen Courtney, Director of Marketing at BSA LifeStructures in Indianapolis, IN, points out, "The next challenge in making a firm's Web site an effective marketing tool is to understand a few specific objectives that your audience wants to achieve and respond to them exceedingly well. This means sharing ideas, having opinions, and creating useful information for your audience, not just posting project information." Nancy Fishman, marketing principal at Zimmer Gunsel Frasca Partnership, in Portland, Ore., echoes the sentiment: "We all need to remember that in a world already overwhelmed with information, the solution is not to shout more and louder, but rather to focus the message and the audience."

Getting work electronically

Particularly among institutional clients, Web sites are becoming the most widely used means to communicate with architects and consultants interested in working for their institutions. Such clients conduct consultant prequalification processes electronically and request that proposals be submitted via the Web; they outline their capital campaigns and building projects. Some describe what projects are under way and upcoming; others publish shortlists and winning firms or illustrate the status of work in progress. For an example of such a Web site, see the University of Connecticut's at www.aes.uconn.edu.

Today, architects can assemble an "electronic slide show" of their work to respond quickly to busy clients, and some are using the Internet to transmit e-brochures and online "light-box" presentations to potential clients. Ron Worth, Chief Executive Officer of the Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS), notes that both DesignArchitecture and Arkropolos are consultancies that assist firms in automating this process. He says, "I can't help but feel this is the start of a significant way of accelerating the way we do business."

One firm that makes use of e-brochures is the Dirsmith Group of Highland Park, Ill. They send out monthly e-mailings to their client list, with links to images of specific projects on their Web site, an extremely efficient, cost-effective, and immediate way to reach people with special news items. With research, the firm developed a method for quick downloading of images, text, and graphics so that busy clients need not wait long.



Web hints for architects

By Guy Esberg

1. Develop your site design with the Web in mind. A beautifully printed graphic design can be disappointing as a Web site, since the Internet is inconsistent with traditional graphic-design parameters, such as colors, fonts, and the high resolution that graphics and photography demand.
2. Test your site on the most popular screen sizes (15, 17, and 19 inches) and commonly used resolutions. Color and contrast can range significantly. Also, there can be pronounced differences between Macintosh and PC systems, even with the same monitor.
3. Test your site on the most popular browsers, such as Microsoft, Netscape, and AOL. The look and performance can differ radically from browser to browser, so don't expect that others will see what you see.
4. Design your site to work well for users with slower connections. A number of people still use dial-up modems, and corporate users with T1 or T3 lines are often saddled with slow performance due to heavy volume on their networks.
5. Keep your files small—the larger your files, the longer they take to load, and the more likely that people will lose interest waiting. Keep your pages and individual graphic images as simple as you reasonably can.
6. Avoid unnecessary plug-in software. Unlike casual and consumer Web users, business users want fast, easy-to-access information. Plug-ins slow down the user, take extra hard-drive space and memory, and users without the plug-in or the version you've used will have to download new software. Considerably interesting and useful effects can be achieved without plug-ins.
7. Choose a Web host with the speed and storage capacity required for your current and anticipated needs. Look for around-the-clock technical support, a client control panel, and the ability to download reports on your site traffic.

Guy Esberg is a marketing consultant with his own firm, Guy Esberg & Company, in Marin, Calif.

Doing research on the Web

The Internet has revolutionized market research with instant information about potential clients; construction, economic, and market trends; and the competition. “You can get a taste of an organization’s culture, values, services, products, and structure from looking at its site, where you will often find key members of the organization listed, as well as contact information,” says Richard Staub, marketing consultant in New York. Also, a firm can research awards programs, industry events, postings of leads for new work, and e-publications that provide industry news and information. Many industry Web sites provide links to sites of related interest, which can be helpful.

Finding and hiring marketing staff

Regardless of digital wonders, architecture is still a person-to-person business. But have you tried to hire any marketing staff lately? If the answer is no, you're lucky. It's not a jungle out there, it's a desert: Finding a trained marketing professional in the field of architecture is a bleak prospect. And, it's a very small desert to boot. Before you even officially have an opening, you can be sure the information has beaten you to the street—as fast as it takes to tap out an e-mail. Marketing professionals are already evaluating what they've heard about the relative pros and cons associated with working for your firm. One large, well-known national firm is quietly known among marketers as the firm that “eats” marketing directors—and marketers generally give it a wide berth. So, what gives? Why is good staff so hard to find and why is turnover so high?

First, marketers are hard to find because there is no formal career track for them. Sure, organizations like SMPS, Professional Services Marketing Journal (PSMJ), ZweigWhite, and others offer training courses and books, and local consultants offer seminars for marketing coordinators. Recently SMPS even launched a professional certification program, which will help employers identify marketers who possess the required skills to excel in their positions. This certification also helps marketers maintain and increase their skills and subsequent value to the firm through continuing-education requirements. But it is difficult to find a single institution of higher education that offers a program in professional services marketing. Second, many qualified marketers leave architecture for more money or for a work environment where they don't face the obstacles traditionally associated with architectural offices [see “Marketing: Part 1,” february 2001, page 66, and “Marketing: Part 2,” march 2001, page 76].

Another reason is suggested by Sharyn Yorio of the Marketing Partnership of New York and New Jersey. “My guess is that people who have stable situations with successful marketing efforts are staying put. Remember that whenever the economy slows, the marketing people are the first to be let go. Of course, getting rid of the marketing department can lead into a spiral of failure if there are no technical people ready to pick up the slack or if the economic slowdown becomes severe.”

If you are in need of marketing staff, there are a few resources out there. SMPS and the AIA have national and local Web sites where you can advertise an opening, and other Web sites serving the design field, including this magazine's, post job openings. Some firms advertise in the local classifieds, of course. Possibly the most successful method, though, is simply to get the word out that you're looking. Employers and headhunters will obtain names of marketing directors or coordinators from the SMPS membership directory and call to see if they will respond to an offer. The marketers then evaluate its appeal and decide whether to respond to it themselves, pass it along, or simply dump it.

Veda Solomon is the principal and founder of Strategies for Success, a New York City marketing consulting firm. advises principals of design firms to hire young people with excellent computer and communication skills and train them.

Another practice is to hire marketing people from other industries. This strategy can often bring a fresh, unique perspective, although marketing professional services is not at all like most other forms of marketing. It is also possible to hire an outside consultant for a particular set of tasks; there is a proliferation of freelancers who have made the break from a nine-to-five routine. Unfortunately, only a few marketing tasks are suitably performed in this capacity [see "Building Your Firm's Incredible Marketing Machine," february 2001, page 79].

Mark Zweig of ZweigWhite advises hiring marketing staff with a classic marketing background.

"Learn from the consumer product marketers," he says. "There is a body of knowledge on [marketing] just like there is on how to design a hospital or an HVAC system for a restaurant." Another approach comes from Christa M. Mahar, director of marketing at Graham Gund Architects, in Boston, who suggests hiring those with a strong writing and/or theory background, rather than someone with a design or marketing degree. "Those who come to marketing with a strong graphics background can also do well," she says. But the bottom line is, if you're looking, get in line and be patient.

Because there is no set career path, all kinds of intelligent people from different educational and career backgrounds may find success.

Kelly Dougherty, former director of strategic development at Lehman Smith + McLeish, in Washington, D.C., decided on a joint M.B.A. and architecture degree program before working in an architectural firm. She says, "I knew that the management option of the architectural program would provide me with some business knowledge, but I wanted more. I hoped the M.B.A. program would help me be a successful project manager instead of a designer. However, upon beginning my course work, I quickly realized the complexity of business and that a very high level of understanding would be necessary to succeed. My original goal of project management changed to marketing and strategic planning."

Lori Ann Worthington, marketing director at Hart Freeland Roberts of Brentwood, Tenn., has yet another story to tell.

Her education was in psychology and communications, and in her first job she represented a nonprofit regional council that allowed her to develop close ties to local elected officials and learn about the process of designing and building by acting as an owner's rep. What a beautiful segue into the marketing and sales arena. In addition to the usual marketing tasks, her responsibilities include acting as a liaison between client and architect until the completion of the project, participating in feasibility studies and programming, researching policies and funding sources for the client, and conducting client interviews on project team performance. Her background in communications and psychology attunes her to the needs of her firm's clients, whereas architects are more likely to focus on technical matters.

Educating young architects in marketing

These days, most architecture schools offer courses on professional practice, which encompasses the study of marketing. The AIA, NCARB, and NAAB do not have specific statistics about what these courses include, but we did uncover some eye-opening, though anecdotal, information from Dennis Astorino, aia, who chaired the steering committee for the Architecture Practice Analysis Study, conducted by the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB). In their 18-month investigation involving focus groups of 110 practitioners, including interns, newly registered architects, and educators, they discovered that architects are generally unable to communicate what they do for their clients, nor are they being taught to do so. Communication skills—an integral part of the marketing function—have become a sorely missing part of architectural practice. Clients sometimes have no idea what responsibilities their architects have taken on, even after they have been hired, which is a leading cause of malpractice litigation [see november 2000, Practice Matters, “Managing Your Practice to Reduce Professional Liability,” page 57]. Astorino says communication skills should receive more emphasis at architectural schools.

On the bright side, the new generation of architects is not being educated under the cultural stigmas of the past, when architects were first barred from marketing and later viewed it as detrimental to the integrity of the profession. These days, marketing is part and parcel of our young architects’ everyday thinking. They’ve grown up in a time when their lives are saturated with it. They know, for example, that no product appears in a movie unless it’s part of a merchandise tie-in. They know that the Nike Swoosh trademark doesn’t appear on college athletic teams’ uniforms because it is pretty but because they’ve been paid to wear it, so Nike can build its brand. Young architects have grown up in a time when only those who sell survive. We see they are much more accepting of the realities of marketing—and more savvy about it—than any generation before.

The New York City firms Work and ARO (Architectural Research Office) illustrate the acceptance of marketing as a necessity in these terms. Both have full-time marketing staff even though they have fewer than 20 employees. Rachael Gray of Work says, “We place a high value on marketing and PR, not just so we can get projects but rather to hone in and seek culturally significant work that is meaningful to our staff.” Stephen Cassell, cofounder of ARO, says his firm wants its “innovative work to attract clients.” But even most creative work won’t bring clients in the door if people don’t know about it. Small firms must work especially hard to get the word out. “We spend time making sure every project is well documented,” he says, “for publications, lectures, and our portfolio—this is the best way to reflect the quality and type of work that we do.”

How marketing is handled at architecture schools

Many instructors invite an architect or marketer to present a series of marketing lectures. Other professors have devised approaches that better approximate what students will face when they go into practice.

Stephen Kliment, faia, a former record editor, is an architectural journalist and adjunct professor at the School of Architecture, Urban Design and Landscape Architecture at City College of the City University of New York. He teaches a course on written and verbal communication skills, which he says is really a marketing course. At the beginning of the term, he assigns a fictional design problem in which the students must first win the commission. They write a snappy marketing letter to the selection committee, followed by a proposal and interview. Next students write a feasibility report on the program and in due course make a design presentation to the client, with each student defining and defending his or her main approach. This stage is followed by correspondence with the client, a letter to a magazine editor proposing coverage, a submission to a design awards program, and so forth. Later on, the class reviews and critiques the Web sites of several firms.

Tulane University currently offers five professional practice courses, which have high enrollments and waiting lists: Over the past several years, student interest has noticeably veered toward the practical, according to Elizabeth Burns Gamard, both an associate professor and associate dean of the School of Architecture at Tulane. “Students find that their abilities translate into areas far beyond the limits of their elders. Marketing becomes a tool with which to assert, develop, and frame these many possibilities.” As part of one course, Tulane students develop and design materials for their own “projected” firm; this entails establishing a firm name and mission statement, designing a logo and marketing materials, and writing the text. It is the highlight of the course.

Brian Schermer, aia, of the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, currently teaches professional practice and design studio. “In class, I highlight the importance of client relationships. The old saw ‘Cultivate clients, not projects’ is a useful mantra. A key lesson is to make clear what the architectural process looks like from a client’s perspective.” Brian asks his students to interview firms to learn about their client base, new markets, and strategies to pursue them. Students bring back what they learn from these interviews and report to the rest of the class. Another strategy at UW-Milwaukee involves colleagues and former students who have started their own firms. They report via an e-mail diary about their experiences in attracting new work. The e-mails arrive in installments over the course of the semester. Students critique the architects’ decisions about their target markets, their method of making contacts, their marketing materials, and so on. The fact that a young architect, who is not so far removed from the student’s own experience, has to hustle and endure disappointments is a very sobering lesson.

While these examples show that the academy itself is finally eschewing the idea that marketing undermines the profession, we suggest much wider use of these kinds of creative approaches.

The more things change . . .

Over the past several months, we have examined the negative associations traditionally attached to marketing and the changes in ethics and rules that have encouraged the profession to begin marketing their services. We have looked at the skill sets required of marketers and the various organizational structures that may be used. We've also seen how the good-old-boy networks of yesterday are being replaced by a new generation of architects who understand that marketing is their firms' lifeblood. And, as Ron Worth, executive vice president of SMPS, says, "Today's relationships are cultivated with cell phones, e-mail, and 'what-have-you-done-for-me-lately?'" Globalization is real—relationships evolve over greater distances and in ever decreasing increments of time. People are easily accessible, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and build their contact databases with ferocity, speed, and concentration."

But how can architects make the most of all the information that can be gathered so efficiently and redistributed almost instantly via the Web? Our conclusion is that improvements need to be made on the most fundamental level, by offering better education for both architects and marketers. Most architects are still insufficiently exposed to marketing concepts and do not develop communication skills in schools. Training architects in the art of marketing drastically increases the likelihood that firms employing them will get repeat work from their clients—the source of most new work. As an aside, it is unfortunate that American universities still do not recognize that the marketing of professional services is different from other kinds of marketing and that it merits its own course work.

The acceleration of communications and information gathering does not change these basic facts: marketing is a complex and necessary part of any practice and should be seen, not as a onetime event, but as an ongoing way of conducting business. It is based on the cultivation of personal relationships, research, and a well-thought-out platform of complementary activities which must be regularly evaluated in terms of the core purpose of the firm. It demands the commitment of firm management or it will fail.

In summary, we like the words of marketing maven Joan Capelin, of Capelin Communications in New York City: "Marketing is one way a firm can consistently think about its future: What you want to do, for whom, where you want to do it, what kind of fee you can command, what standards you want to adhere to. Marketing is far more than an activity; it is an orientation. Architecture. Education. Communication. Business. Service. Marketing. Added together they equal Survival."

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