

Communication is Open and Often for AIA Florida

Contributed by AIA Florida

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SUMMARY

Since 2004, AIA Florida's communications efforts have increased exponentially with a concentration on communicating the AIA brand and the value of its members. The goal of the communication department is to present Florida AIA members as knowledgeable community leaders to the media, lawmakers, and the general public.

AIA Florida has a membership of 3,285 registered architects, associate and emeritus members. With a staff of 8 full time employees, the Executive Vice President along with two dedicated communication staff lead the communication efforts of the component. Communications staff include a Director of Communications and Public Relations and a Communications and Public Relations Manager.

A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

AIA Florida's communication efforts are directed both externally to the broader media and public and to the membership and allied organizations. Different communication methods and media are used to send a focused message to the most appropriate user group.

COMMUNICATING WITH MEMBERS

AIA Florida has six publications, detailed below, that are either distributed to the entire membership or targeted to select groups within the membership.

The award-winning *Friday Facts* is a weekly, e-newsletter that is sent to the entire membership. *Friday Facts* averages a weekly open rate 33 percent. *Friday Facts* also includes a monthly member spotlight to feature noteworthy accomplishments of members.

The monthly *Component Newsflash* is dedicated to all component executives, presidents, president-elects and state directors. These constituents receive information relevant to their job responsibilities, component needs, best practices and minimum standards.

CE-Mail News is an event-specific publication that provides upcoming continuing education (CE) opportunities and licensure specific requirements. Launched this year, *CE Mail* was distributed on a

rigid schedule to help prepare members for the 2009 license renewal.

Epigram was created this year to target the interests and needs of emerging professionals. It focuses on issues relevant to interns, students, associates and architects with less than 10 years experience, topics include the IDP, the ARE, design competitions just for emerging professionals and more. This newsletter is part of ongoing outreach to students and non-Florida AIA associate members.

Florida/Caribbean Architect (FCA) is the component's full-color, quarterly magazine. It is distributed to the entire membership as well as other subscribers such as public officials, urban planners, universities and colleges. Popular regular features include "Work in Progress," "Features in Brief," which spotlights specific projects, and "Legal Notes" written by Tom Lewis, FAIA, J.D., a member who provides information on legal issues within the profession. Once a year, FCA is dedicated to the Florida/Caribbean Honor & Design Award winning projects and one issue is focused on legislative updates from the most recent legislative session.

The annual *Florida/Caribbean Firm and Membership Directory* serves as a yellow pages for members and other interested parties.

KEEPING INFORMATION CURRENT

The AIA Florida Web site is used as a conduit for information and updates. Redesigned in 2008, members and the general public can access information on everything from continuing education, to sponsorship opportunities, to how to select an architect.

As part of the site redesign, AIA Florida partnered with Ascribe to launch a section where members can showcase their work and list contact information. Member benefits on the site include access to online continuing education, online firm marketing through Ascribe, as well as sections just for emerging professionals. It also lists regional updates and government affairs. Further, current news and events are highlighted on the front page to keep members engaged and in-the-know.

E-mail News Blasts/Calls to Action are typically used to send pertinent information to members quickly. Since January 2009, 10 e-mail news blasts have been sent. For 2009, subjects included an update on the final demise of Paul Rudolph's iconic Riverview High School in Sarasota.

As another way to communicate with members, AIA Florida has incorporated Web-accessible videos into its communications efforts. From regular updates on legislative sessions to calls to action for members to contact a legislator, these videos have proven effective in relaying pertinent information that may directly affect the profession and the way the members conduct business.

SPREADING THE MESSAGE

One of AIA Florida's Five Bold Steps (as part of its five-year strategic plan) is to "Communicate the AIA Brand." In trying to reach this goal, AIA Florida has worked diligently to develop relationships with state newspapers and design-related publications.

Media relations' efforts have doubled since April 2008. Since that time, more than 80 press releases and editorials have been distributed. This has garnered printed coverage more than 70 times in newspapers and publications around the state. To date, 30 members have received media coverage because of AIA Florida's media push.

Social marketing is a new communication tool for the Component. Social marketing outreach includes an emerging professional blog, a Facebook fan page, and Twitter and LinkedIn groups. With these new tools, the Component is able to quickly send announcements and updates to members and other interested parties. Since joining Twitter earlier this year, AIA Florida has more than 550 followers many of whom are members, allied professionals and other marketing professionals around the country. AIA Florida sent out 15 tweets during the 2009 state annual convention to followers and convention attendees. Tweets included brief updates on the convention schedule and events.

The five-year strategic plan includes a bold step to better communicate the AIA brand. Metrics under the strategic plan include generating 10 press releases a month, redesigning the Web site, and increasing open rates of email news by 2012. After two years, AIA Florida averages four to five press releases a month, has completely revamped the Web site, and maintains a 40 percent open rate on e-news publications. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the media and the public are aware of what AIA Florida members can offer and what AIA members do that affects how people live, work and play.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 21.01.03 Individual Contribution Has Lasting Effect
- 21.01.04 AIA Colorado Overhauls Communications
- 21.01.05 Communication Plan of AIA Louisiana

Feedback

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact bestpractices@aia.org.

Key Terms

- Leadership
- Associations
- Design associations
- Architectural associations
- The American Institute of Architects
- AIA components
- Communications
- Media outreach