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Practice Management Digest

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In the last couple of months it seems as if everyone has been jumping onto the Twitter bandwagon. What started with a bunch of like-minded tech savvy early-adopters has now grown by some estimates to over 15 million visitors per month. There are now literally thousands of blog posts on the subject, either describing what Twitter is, what it does, or why someone should or should not be on Twitter, none of which really focus on how an architect might use it ...Continue Reading.

Are you LinkedIn? Using LinkedIn to find Clients, Colleagues, and Consultants
By Jason Wagner, Oculus Inc.

I had someone on LinkedIn the other day tell me they hate social networking. I replied to them by saying, "You realize that LinkedIn is a social networking site right?" I did not get a return response. I guess I shouldn't be surprised. The major difference between LinkedIn and all of the other social networking sites out there is that it is business oriented from the beginning ...Continue Reading.

Facebook:
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By Jonathan Scaggs, Assoc. AIA

From being a photo sharing site for college students to co-hosting one of the 2008 Presidential debates alongside Charles Gibson, it is a force unlike any other. Sites like Myspace are often seen as a "fun" social site and others such as LinkedIn are "professional." Somewhere in between is Facebook ...Continue Reading.

The Firm of the Future: Big Picture Trends Shaping the Future of Design Firms
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Far too many design firm leaders are consumed by immediate matters and near-term deadlines: writing proposals, finishing construction documents, responding to field problems, dealing with problem employees, and constantly fighting fires ...Continue Reading.

Thrash Planning:
Skateparks as Model for User-interactive Design
By Bruce Playle, AIA

Thrash planning is an interactive process where design decisions are made working together with users to create solutions which closely match their needs. I discovered the power of this technique while designing skateparks and have since used it to improve buildings ... Continue Reading. (.pdf 395 KB)

How Did You Guys Get That Project?
By Joe Remling, AIA

"How did you guys get that project?" I'm asked this question quite often lately as clients and peers review ai3's portfolio of finished design projects. We have a distinctive reputation as a diverse practice, with projects ranging from

architectural and interior design to graphics, textiles and furniture. We pride ourselves in this approach, and now that many of our peers are searching for new ways to fight through the current recession, they seem to be taking a closer look … Continue Reading.

Lean Architecture:
The Pursuit of Excellence in Project Delivery
By Michael F. Czap

Lean Architecture is the ongoing process of rethinking and improving architectural process and methodology. It is the pursuit of better work by applying "Lean" principles to every aspect of practice … Continue Reading.

Managing for Prosperity in Precarious Times
By Steve L. Wintner, AIA Emeritus

Where can a firm executive find the answer to the question about the future prosperity of their firm?
As hard as it may be for many to believe, the answer begins, in my studied opinion, with the discipline of how to complete, that dreaded of all office tools, the timesheet … Continue Reading.

Downsizing, Layoffs and New Opportunities for Architects
By Betty Doo

You are laid off or fear that a layoff will occur given the state of the economy. What happens next?
First, don't panic. Many people have experienced layoffs – they recover and you will too. In fact, this can be the opportunity you need to make important shifts in your career to better prepare for the 21st century … Continue Reading.

News

Web Seminar: How to Start an Architect-Led Design-Build Entity
June 17, 2009, 2–3:30 p.m. EST

Interested in pursuing design-build in your practice or want to learn more about this increasingly popular project delivery method? Don't miss this Web seminar.

IDP Coordinators Conference
August 13–15, 2009, Portland, Oregon

The annual IDP Coordinators Conference brings together coordinators and other key IDP stakeholders. This year, the program will focus particularly on how the economic downturn has affected IDP programs—and coordinators' roles.

Changing Times | Time for Change: Practice, Productivity and Effectiveness
September 24–26, 2009, Chicago

Architects practice in a world that is changing at a breathtaking rate, requiring near-constant reassessment of business models and professional practices. "Changing Times | Time for Change" will explore the major areas of challenge and opportunity that are reshaping architecture practice.

Designing Learning Environments to Rebuild Urban America
October 23–25, 2009, New York City

Design professionals and educators will explore common ground and emerge with strategies to create learning environments that are both practical and inspiring.

IDP Outstanding Firm Awards
Deadline: July 15, 2009

By becoming an Intern Development Program (IDP) Outstanding Firm, your business will be recognized as a company that makes the path to licensure an integral part of your firm's culture—and that will help you find the best-qualified candidates for the future.

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Happy Summer!

This issue of the *Practice Management Digest* looks forward to more work and how to deliver it.

Jason Wagner takes on Twitter and LinkedIn, two important new tools in communicating with your clients and staff. The PMKC has a LinkedIn group …please connect and join.

You can also follow the National AIA on Twitter.

Not to leave out another social networking site, Facebook. Jon Scaggs describes how Facebook can be used as a filter for talent for staff. With work and project demand coming back, having and being a friend on Facebook can be a firm and individual's differentiator.

Mike Czap takes the continuing story of the Toyota Production System (Lean) and how it can transform architectural design and delivery. While many groups are researching using versions of Lean in design services (for example, the Lean Construction Institute, and Ghafari Architects) Mike looks at Lean as tool for excellence in project delivery execution.

I attended Bruce Playle's (of Indigo Architects) session on "Thrash Planning" at the AIA National Convention in San Francisco last month, and thought it unique in its approach to participative design. He's included his skate park design story in this issue.
The discussion on alternate projects and delivery methods is continued in Joe Remling's (of ai3 inc.) conversation on "How did you Guys get that Project?" where he describes how ai3 came to be a "design happens everywhere" architecture firm.

Ray Kogan, the PMKC's newest Advisory Group member writes about "10 trends that are transforming the profession".

Steve Wintner outlines ways to make that dreaded tool, "the timesheet" a more effective metric capturing device. I've been using Timesnapper for a few months now to capture my day spent in front of the computer. It helps you visually track your day, from answering emails first thing in the morning, to the pre-midnight skype chats, and everything in between.

Finally, Betty Doo continues the discussion on downsizing and layoffs. Even though the future looks promising, firms are continuing to layoff while waiting for projects to materialize.

Betty describes how a downsized staff member can use this time to take stock and plan for the future.

Cliff Moser, AIA

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10 Tips for Using Twitter to Support Your Practice

By Jason Wagner, Oculus Inc.

In the last couple of months it seems as if everyone has been jumping onto the Twitter bandwagon. What started with a bunch of like-minded tech savvy, early-adopters has now grown by some estimates to over 15 million visitors per month. There are now thousands of blog posts on the subject, either describing what Twitter is, what it does, or why someone should or should not be on Twitter. None of which really focus on how an architect might use it. For an architect, Twitter can be a potentially valuable tool in your arsenal if you know how to use it effectively. By now you are probably asking yourself, "What can I get out of Twitter to help me as an architect: A) Get more business, B) Be more visible in the design community, or C) Meet and network with people who need architectural services." Twitter will not automatically do these things for you. With anything, reward comes after work. No one can tell you why you or your company needs to be on Twitter. You need to determine whether Twitter is something you are interested in. If Twitter is something you think you might want to pursue, these tips will help you get the most out of your experience.

1. When selecting your profile, figure out if you are going to BE the company, or if you are going to be an employee IN the company.

This is very important because it will give you an insight as to how much personal information and interaction you will need to provide in your tweets. If you are a popular architecture firm like HOK, SOM, or Morphosis, you could essentially create a profile, link to your website or blog, sit back, and watch the followers sign up. Tweet now and then about the newest project or an issue with a client (assuming there is not a non-disclosure clause), or your trip to Sri Lanka with a photo, and you are golden. However, other companies will need to get more personal and interactive with their twitter profile.

If you tweet as an average everyday run of the mill architecture firm, here are the people that will most likely follow you: architecture students, other architects, suppliers and product manufacturers, building and trade journals, and random spammers and people looking to boost their follower count. You will probably tweet about issues as they pertain to architects and the industry. One idea is to snap a photo of your most recent project and tell everyone about a new client you just landed or a project you completed on time and under budget. You can interact by getting more personal and interactive with your followers, but it will probably take you longer to get people to regularly follow you after you follow them.

If you tweet as an employee in the firm you have much more leeway with what people will accept and who will follow you. People will see you as a person with an opinion not just another company trying to spread the word about their business. You can tweet more about your life, which is the essence of Twitter, connecting with your followers, interacting with them, and sharing information. Your followers can run the gambit depending upon who you decide to follow and what you tweet about. If you are into sustainability it is possible to get a lot of environmentally conscious followers. If you want to have more of a presence in your community you can find followers from your area, maybe people you know outside of the office. Unless you are a "starchitect" or one of the more famous architecture firms, this may be a better route to take to get value from your Twitter experience. If you have already made a decision to be an employee in a firm, and realize that now you want to switch to being a firm, you can. Twitter lets you change your username whenever you want. It knows who you are since a name is just a name. For example, one day when I log on I may see tweets from Jack Smith. If he decided to change his name to the firm name I would then be receiving tweets from JSM Architects. Depending upon the conditions there is always a chance of follower attrition, but there will be others to take their place.

2. If you tweet it, they will come.

Before you can have followers you must have content. You are less likely to be followed back if you only have a couple of updates. That may have been fine in the early days of Twitter, but it has gone mainstream with at some estimates over 15 million visitors a month. Now, users familiar with Twitter are more picky about who they will follow, with the exception of those who follow anyone and everyone in the hopes that they will get

followed back to increase their follower count. So, what is your content? Well, as stated above, talking about projects that you are working on, or linking to some press release about something you have done is only part of it. That is the selling part. That is what people do not want to see. While you might be following people and your contributions of the same content seem dispersed through the twitter feed of your followers. If someone were to visit your profile, all they would see are your tweets, and none of those from the people you follow. One can quickly see that all of your tweets were about the same things over and over again. To offset this, provide value to your followers. If you find something interesting, tweet it out. Again adding personal tweets, or responding to people you follow will help engage your community of followers and others who might not currently follow you. How you do this is explained in depth later.

3. Just because you follow someone, it doesn't mean you are talking to them.

This is where Twitter is vastly different than say, a chat room. Sometimes it's hard to remember that not everyone is following everyone else. If you see something that someone says, and they are not one of your followers, they will not see your tweet in reference to theirs unless you put @ with their username in the tweet. Also note that unless they are following you, you cannot send them a DM (direct message). If you see a person out there following 300 people with 3 followers, they don't get it. No matter what they say, the only people seeing it are the 3 that follow them. Some other follow tips: do not follow everyone in the "suggested follow" page when you sign up for twitter. Instead, find people by using key word searches and follow users who tweet about things you might be interested in. Using search.twitter.com or tweepsearch.com can help you in your quest. If I could give you one piece of advice it is to be judicious in people you choose to follow. Would you pay money to hear what they have to say? Do you think they will follow you back because they will be interested in you? Do not immediately follow 300 people. Other users will see the disparity in the follow to follower ratio and assume you are a spammer or someone who doesn't understand Twitter. It requires work and patience to grow your followers. Take your time and you will find out what works best for you.

4. Fill out your bio. Provide an avatar photo.

This one is not just for architects. Every user should, at a minimum, have a good photo (or logo if you are a company), a link to something, (website, blog, or otherwise just no MySpace links- it's a turn-off for other Twitter users), and a good bio with a short blurb about your company. Note that the bio is searchable and indexed in Google, so instead of full sentences, organize keywords and terms how you would like to be found. For example, if you are LEED accredited, put down LEED AP in your bio. The Twitter founders have optimized user profiles so they are better ranked in Google. Google searches for your username will typically turn up as the first entry, and if not, at least on the first page.

5. Start getting noticed by providing value, not tweeting about your lunch.

Twitter is more than just telling people what you are doing. Your followers don't necessarily need to know that you just had tea. Now, if you just had tea with the Queen of England that would be something to tweet about. Some users choose to tweet about links they find throughout the day. Others may have a special skill and tweet tips for other users. For example, if you specialize in dentist office architecture, tweet about issues as they pertain to dentists. There are dentists on Twitter and it's likely that they will do Twitter searches. Your job is to guess at what your target audience might search for and tweet about it. Tweets don't go away, so even if you tweeted about something a year ago, a dentist today is still able to find it. Note: I said tweets don't go away, so if you tweeted about that bender you went on last night, a year from now, someone can find it. If it's not something you would want posted on a billboard or sent to your grandmother you might consider not sending it or, if you do, remember to go back and delete it.   Finally, hash tags have been used if you have a particular theme so others can find info on that theme. #dentist would be a good one for tweets about dentist's offices.

6. Information is power- utilize search and set up RSS feeds.

Google is envious of Twitter's ability to track, in real time, keywords in every tweet that is posted. Considering that millions of tweets are posted a day, and the search goes back to the beginning of Twitter, that is ALOT of information. Information Google would love to get its hands on, along with the ability to perform real-time web search. Once you have figured out what you are looking for, start a search at www.search.twitter.com. You can try it out by selecting keywords. Once you get one you can then get an RSS feed for it. Click where it says "Get a feed for this query" and it will take you from there. Once you get the hang of simple searches. Click on "Advanced" in the same window and you can do many other things with your search. Only interested in information that is happening in a specific area? You can localize your search by where tweets originate. You can also search by specific date range, whether it contains links, even attitude :) or : (The possibilities are limitless you just need to work at it to get good results. Some search terms I have set up are Revit, Building Information Modeling, Facility Management, and I even have client names in my searches so I know if something is happening with one of my national clients.

7. Encourage others in your office (or offices if you have multiple locations) to use Twitter.

The traditional response to social media in the office (if there is one) would be to block employee access at work. Instead, be proactive and write rules about Social Media use. Here is a link to a great blog post

regarding policies for Social Media in the Corporate Workplace with subsequent links to specific examples. Each office is going to be different, but it feels more real if more than one person tweets about your company. This is especially true if it's a larger company and they can provide different points of view and reach a different audience. Identify these people early on who have an interest in social media. This is not always a young person in the office, and it's usually not a marketing person. If possible it should be someone who is doing the work to give a firsthand account of the inner workings and understandings of the architecture profession. Surprisingly the median age of the average Twitter user is somewhere around 34.

8. Get an application to manage your Twitter stream(s).

Twitter is great, but Twitter through an application such as Tweetdeck, Seesmic Desktop, Hootsuite, or a similar application is even more powerful. If you have a hundred or so followers it's easy to manage the conversations and stream through the web interface. What you will notice though is that you have people you talk with more, or have different things in common than others. Maybe there are a bunch of local people that you follow, but then you also follow a bunch of architects. Applications such as those mentioned above allow you to split these people into groups. Profiling is big on Twitter. I have groups for architects, but I also have a local group, and other groups for things I am interested in such as news, stocks, celebrities, professional organizations, or whatever. Applications also allow you to more easily follow a greater number of people, search tweets, add and remove followers more easily, and favorite tweets for later. I would encourage you to try a couple out before settling on one. Even then I still find myself using Twitter from multiple sources. I personally use Tweetdeck, but on my phone I have Windows Mobile so I use PockeTwit. PockeTwit is probably the best out there for Windows Mobile. Otherwise if you have an iPhone there are MANY choices. I even use the web sometimes just to get a different view. If you are already into social media with Facebook, LinkedIn, or other social media outlets, try Peoplebrowsr or FriendFeed. These allow you to aggregate your information into a single application so you can more easily manage announcements and information across multiple platforms.

9. CEO's of fortune 500 companies (and many other smaller companies for that matter) are not on Twitter.

Okay, that was an unfounded statement. If they are, they are not looking to be marketed to. This doesn't mean that Twitter is useless. Just because you are not talking to the CEO of the company it doesn't mean you aren't making an impression. Twitter is about buzz, it's about relationships based on 140 characters, it is helping others so they can help others knowing that it will come back to you. Twitter Karma. That's what they call it. What you will begin to find is that the same people on LinkedIn are on Facebook and also on Twitter. By being visible and giving people information and sharing about yourself you improve your chances of marketing on Twitter.

10. Retweets, Followfridays and Tweetups oh my!

Now that you understand the basic principles and how to use Twitter, have your Twitter interface set up, created RSS search feeds, and have some followers, it's time to get real. Here are some other terms and features that you will see on Twitter.

RT= Retweet: This is typically used when you find a good link or bit of info and you want to pass it on to others who might follow you. Note- just because you see something that has been RT'd a couple of times, it doesn't mean you are too late to send it out again. RT'ing notifies the person that sent it that you are interested in what they have to say, at the same time allows people who follow you to see it where they might have not gotten it from the source. Many times people will shorten RT's so it fits without going over 140 characters, or so they can add their own personal comment at the end. Making your tweets RT friendly is important. If you constantly use every possible character you will never get retweeted. Leaving 15 or more characters available at the end allows someone else to send your tweet back out there, without modification.

Followfriday: This obviously occurs on Friday. #followfriday is used in conjunction with other usernames to let people know that you find a particular user interesting and that they should follow them. Good #followfriday suggestions usually include a few usernames with a short description why someone should follow them. I typically "theme" my #followfridays, i.e. "#followfriday @breaking news and @cnnbrk for current up to date news information". If you are using Tweetdeck each username is highlighted. If you click on it you can pull up their profile right in the application, follow them if you like, and if you have groups set up, add them to the group straight away, without a lot of steps.

Tweetup: This term is reserved for an actual face to face meeting of Twitter users. GASP! Say it ain't so! Yes, as much as we like to use social media to stay connected with others, face to face contact is necessary to complete the bond and provide useful networking opportunities. Many times it's just a social gathering where you get to know other users at a local establishment over lots of alcohol and good times, but there are also LinkedIn tweetups that are more networking intensive where people come with the expectation that they may walk away with a few business cards at the end of the night.

Favorites: Favorites are a great way to mark something that you see to refer to it later. If you are working on blog posts, creating favorites helps you bookmark tweets with links or other information that you can refer to at a later date without having to search for it. It is especially helpful if you are busy at work but still following

twitter, or on the road and are following from your phone. Personally my phone cannot handle a lot of the links I get aside from the occasional Twitpic or two, so I favorite many tweets from my phone using Pocketwit. I can then go back later when I have more time, read any links and then delete the favorite so I know I looked at it. Many people do not use this option as much as they could, but if used more I think you would see more retweets later in the day, week, or longer. As a for instance, you find a new architect friend who is just learning Twitter. If you have made favorite a tweet that sent my blogpost out, you could then send it to them via RT (retweet) if you think it's especially helpful info. Thanks Traci for that great tip. She is not an architect, but this just means that by only following architects and profession oriented tweets, you miss out on valuable info that others can provide. If you want to see who made favorite your tweets check out Favotter, or from Google you can type the following in. { site:twitter.com/*/favourites @username } substituting username for whose ever username you want to see.

So how do you use Twitter?

I currently operate two accounts, one for myself that I use to stay in touch with local people and friends, find out about new ideas and people in architecture, stay current on news events, and keep up with various trends. I try to center many of my non-@reply tweets on architecture, what is happening in St. Louis, news, and brewing since these are my passions. The other is a new page for my employer Oculus Inc. that is more industry related and focused on architecture, information, and users that the company might follow or have influence with.

Some people will be good at using social media tools such as Twitter, and some will not. Even though you may not find your next client directly through Twitter, it's almost impossible to measure the metrics of viewers and people who might click through to the information you provide. Some of these might be future clients, existing clients, or even consultants looking to partner with someone on the next big proposal. Traditionally architects have been reliant on outbound marketing, traditional networking, and relying on relationships and referrals to promote their business. The new rules of marketing 2.0 will rewrite how architects must market themselves to stay competitive. While Twitter may not be the answer, a company must ask itself if not being on Twitter will adversely affect their chances for work in the future.

I am following you, but how do I find other Architects on Twitter to follow?

There are a few sources I use to find architects on Twitter. The first being RSS feeds for particular topics I am interested in. The other is here. Thanks to @SuButcher for getting architects together across the globe. She has a great blog too called "Just Practising". Even still there are online directories that one can add themselves to such as Wefollow, Twibes, or even Localtweeps where one can group themselves by zipcode.

Jason Wagner is a Project Manager at Oculus Inc., a 30 person architecture firm in St. Louis Missouri, who's early adoption of technology, including BIM has helped them secure large projects from even larger competitors. Realizing that younger less seasoned, or production oriented staff traditionally have fewer professional contacts, Jason began using his interest in social media as a networking tool to accompany the more traditional networking roles of The company's founders. This multifaceted plan helps gather as much information as possible about potential clients when going after project leads, and is designed to enhance the available information that these contacts might find when searching for Oculus inc. on the web.
www.oculusinc.com

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Are you LinkedIn? Using LinkedIn to find Clients, Colleagues, and Consultants

Jason Wagner, Oculus Inc.

I had someone on LinkedIn the other day tell me they hate social networking. I replied to them by saying, "You realize that LinkedIn is a social networking site right?" I did not get a return response. I guess I shouldn't be surprised. The major difference between LinkedIn and all of the other social networking sites out there is that it is business oriented from the beginning. LinkedIn doesn't even pretend to be oriented to friendships, and believe it or not, people can be banned for trying to connect with others they do not know.

Your First LinkedIn Experience

For many, your first experience with LinkedIn was probably an email that you received from someone you work with or have done business with inviting you to join. Maybe you shrugged it off thinking that it was junk mail like the ones asking you to update your contact information. But then you got another, and another, and before you knew it you had a few invites from people you know all asking you to connect with them on LinkedIn so you gave in. Now what? I have 3 contacts of people I already know, work with, or do business with. I have read a little about LinkedIn and have heard how people are using it to network and get new business, but I am not sure where to start.

The Profile

First things first, set up your profile. Like any other social networking site one of the first things you are asked to do is tell everyone else about yourself. Unlike the other sites however, the LinkedIn profile page reads like a resume. So much so that many recent grads and younger job hunters have forgone paper resumes for links to their LinkedIn pages. Here you can list your education experience, work experience, specialties, etc. Including a professional avatar photo is important. Unlike sites such as Facebook or Twitter where one could get away with using a Polaroid beach photo, that is not what you want to use as you are trying to make a business impression. If you don't have a professional photo, or the photo you have is from 15 years ago, spend the money to get one. It's well worth it. Finally be sure to link to your website and/or blog in your profile and customize the stock descriptions to fit your needs. You can go into the settings when you do this to change it from "blog" to read "Architecture in the Midwest". Anything that helps search engines do their thing. By adding these links, people who don't know you will find out more information about you and what you do outside of LinkedIn. The status update field is an ever changing portion of your profile. Here you can post links to recent articles about yourself, let others know what you are working on, or maybe link to your most recent blog post. This will show up in your connections timeline on their main page so updating it every day will keep you in their field of view when they go to use LinkedIn.

Invite Your Existing Contacts

The next step is to import people in your contact list to LinkedIn and invite them. This is where you start connecting with your existing colleagues, coworkers, clients, and consultants to build your base network. There are other resources out on the web that tell you how to extract a .CSV or similar file from your contact list and import it into LinkedIn. You might have some extra people in your list, but after it's imported, you can go back and take out people such as your third cousin whom you probably are not going to do any networking with in the near future. One final thing to note about invitations, I highly recommend clicking on the "Edit Invitation Text" and writing a more personal note than the cookie cutter one that LinkedIn would send. Even saying that you are just getting introduced to LinkedIn, or something similar is better than sending without modifying this text at all.

They Like me, They Really Like Me

Eventually you will start getting responses from people who have accepted your invitation. This is great. If you want you can touch base with them once more thanking them for the connection, which could also be a great time to get back together and catch up. At this point you can also see all of their connections if they were

already on LinkedIn. The more direct connections you have, the larger your potential network is. This is especially true if you have connections with many of their own connections. This is also your base network. They are people you already know outside of LinkedIn. At this point you might already be making other connections just by seeing who others have in their contact lists. Maybe you also knew them before you joined but didn't have their contact information. You can easily add them to your network by clicking the appropriate icons.

Are You an Open or Closed Networker

There is much debate about open networking versus closed networking on LinkedIn. Open networkers will accept invites from anyone (or almost anyone) and will also work to invite others they don't particularly know to be a connection. Closed networkers are the opposite. They only accept invites from people they know directly outside of LinkedIn. If you are out at an event trying to network, do you only talk to people you know, or do you try to meet many new people? The answer to this may also tell you what kind of networker you would be on LinkedIn. I personally accept invites from many different people to make my extended network as large as possible. This allows me to perform searches within LinkedIn to find people of interest in my extended network. You will not get the same results in a closed network as your search will be more limited. If for some reason or another you decide not to accept a new connection, clicking on "I don't know this person" will get them banned after they have 5 of these. Many on LinkedIn use the ignore feature instead. While you might not know the person, banning them from LinkedIn for trying to connect with others outside of their network might not be your intent either.

Other LinkedIn Features to Facilitate Networking

Some other powerful features of LinkedIn would be the Recommendations and Groups. Any one of your connections can request a recommendation from you and vice versa. Recently the recommendations have been flying which has degraded the value of having many recommendations on your profile. This is not to say that you shouldn't request or give recommendations, but do so with value. One good recommendation is better than 10 bad ones. If people visit your profile, it's almost a guarantee that they will read your recommendations from others. Groups are great in that you can immediately connect with many people that you don't typically follow. By being part of a group you can start discussions, share information, and connect with like-minded people who share the same topic. There are groups for many different things, many of which are not business or industry related. By being part of these groups and adding group users to your network you increase your chances of being seen, and of seeing someone that you might want to connect with. This is where we meet the new potential clients, colleagues, and consultants. As a case in point if you are interested in teaming up with someone who uses Revit, there are Revit groups out there. I have personally used it to find consultants who use the MEP and structural versions of Revit for future co-marketing opportunities. Other times I will research particular clients on LinkedIn to get more background on them prior to going into a meeting. Any time you can get more information on a client before the meeting, the better chance you have of making a connection.

Finally, LinkedIn has an "Answers" section where anyone can ask a question that can be answered by any other user. If enough users find your answers valuable they can choose you as an expert on that particular subject matter. By others electing you as an expert, people outside of your network are more likely to search you out to solve similar. These people could turn into your next client.

How Should I Use LinkedIn?

No matter how you use LinkedIn you are better off being a part of it than not. Just by having a profile out there, you have instantly made yourself more accessible to potential clients and consultants. That being said, it's what you do with the information and contacts you get from LinkedIn outside of the site that matters most. LinkedIn is not a solution to your networking problems. It is merely a tool in your networking toolbox.

Jason Wagner is a Project Manager at Oculus Inc., a 30 person architecture firm in St. Louis Missouri, who's early adoption of technology, including BIM has helped them secure large projects from even larger competitors. Realizing that younger less seasoned, or production oriented staff traditionally have fewer professional contacts, Jason began using his interest in social media as a networking tool to accompany the more traditional networking roles of The company's founders. This multifaceted plan helps gather as much information as possible about potential clients when going after project leads, and is designed to enhance the available information that these contacts might find when searching for Oculus inc. on the web.
www.oculusinc.com

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Facebook:
Using the Social Network to Win/Keep Projects and Talented Staff

By: Jonathan Scaggs, Assoc. AIA

Facebook, we've all heard about it (and some are on it) but its far reaching power is often left untapped. As the site and society keep evolving; how can it be better optimized in the A/E/C industry?

From being a photo sharing site for college students to co-hosting one of the 2008 Presidential debates alongside Charles Gibson, it is a force unlike any other. Sites like Myspace are often seen as a "fun" social site and others such as LinkedIn are "professional." Somewhere in between is Facebook. The casual aspect of its use lets users relax in a way that makes it truly a marketer's dream so much so that it has crossed over into the world of multi-million dollar advertising. How is this useful for an architect? Let's look at some of the ways the site has been working for others.

Facebook can help your staff do some of the exhaustive staffing searches for you. For example, a few weeks ago my office was trying to help a client who is unfamiliar with any type of CAD software. The client is based out of Washington D.C. and we are in Los Angeles. Our solution was to find someone who could sit down and go over the final revisions in person with the client. A message was sent out to personal contacts in the D.C. metro area. Within an hour my contacts had found someone more than suitable within their own networks. Their recommended candidate sent a resume and files of her work and was hired.

Now why is this story so important?

NETWORKING and TIME

Given that the young architects of today keep in contact with classmates and friends over Facebook the power time and money was saved. Our office kept our client happy, saved money by not hiring a head hunter or flying out to Washington D.C, and kept the project on time.

Recruiting through Facebook can be like fishing, put an ad out there and hundreds will fight for it. In these tough times some of the first people let go are those of Generation Y. Being of that generation (and having been down-sized) I know I spent my months of unemployment looking the same places everyone else was, LinkedIn, Career Builder, Monster, and the AIA website. However most of that time I had Facebook running in the background. Of those few months guess how many job opportunities came from Facebook, zero. And why zero? Companies are not trying to recruit Gen Y on their turf! That is a huge hole left for someone to fill. Talented 20, 30, 40 somethings are on Facebook looking for something. Be it an architect to design their new headquarters or simply a place to work. The website shows so much promise that Microsoft purchased a stake of the company for $240 Million, making the site worth nearly $15 Billion.

Someone's company can advertise on Facebook just like many other websites, by simply sponsoring a group and purchasing a link that sponsors advertising content. Now some may think, why advertise on a website aimed at 20 somethings for work? It's not 20-something anymore, even my parents have their own pages and update them daily. Advertising to Generation Y and the iGeneration will create a brand name for your company in the future. Your company's name will be etched into their minds long before they see the signs for the big flashy Super-Corporate firms of today. Facebook puts your company in the face of over 200 million users worldwide. Now who doesn't want that kind of exposure?

Facebook lets offices create their own web pages and update their status daily, maybe by posting "Looking for a great BIM person! Send us your resumes!" Create your own group and let people become fans of your work. They can keep track of what you are doing without having to wait for you to update your website or be published in the next AIA Publication. Go ahead; list your company's industry, city, neighborhood and any other relevant information to let potential customers and business partners know where they can find you. If you have multiple offices make sure to include them all in the same place.

From staffing to brand building to just getting the job done, Facebook is a tool that no one can afford to be without. Familiarizing yourself with the site and having some fun can often create the right kind of collaborative environment that has made this social networking site the leviathan it is today. Creating a presence on Facebook can not only help make your work accessible but allows access for all the support and information that will help your practice grow, thrive, and be profitable. Business in today's international market will still be done on the real world golf course, just remember to start playing on the new course called Facebook.

Jonathan holds a degree from Indiana University in Interior Design and a Masters of Architecture from Southern California Institute of Architecture. He currently works for CADFORCE Inc. a division of Neilsoft as a BIM Project Manager.

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The Firm of the Future: Big Picture Trends Shaping the Future of Design Firms

By Raymond Kogan, AIA

(Note: This article is based on a seminar presented at the 2009 AIA Convention in San Francisco.)

"Trends, like horses, are a lot easier to ride in the direction they are already going."

   - John Naisbitt, futurist and author of Megatrends, 1982

Far too many design firm leaders are consumed by immediate matters and near-term deadlines: writing proposals, finishing construction documents, responding to field problems, dealing with problem employees, and constantly fighting fires.

Heeding John Naisbitt's wisdom, firm leaders must step back from the day-to-day and understand what the future holds in order to navigate through tumultuous times (as well as the good times that will ultimately return). This article looks at the forces in our world today that will shape successful design firms in the future. For convenience, it neatly categorizes trends, although many overlap much like the ripples from a handful of stones thrown into a still pond. The reader should consider "What does this mean to me? To my firm? To my clients? To our profession and our industry?"

Demographics

Generations evolve over time in many predictable ways. We know, for example, that the size of the aging baby boom generation will continue to have a substantial impact on the demand for facilities and infrastructure much as they have had throughout their lifetimes. In addition, statistics clearly illustrate that there is no population "boom" nearly as large as the baby boom to follow on its heels.

Populations shift geographically—and unevenly—as well. Contrary to the comments of Sarah Palin and the nostalgic songs of John Mellencamp, decreasing numbers of Americans are and will be living in small towns. Instead, according to www.America2050.org, ten urban megaregions are emerging which will contain approximately 70% of the U.S. population. Further, the overall population of the U.S. will grow by 50% from 2000 to 2050 with the southern and western regions experiencing 85% of that growth, partly by relocations to those areas as well as through immigration, while the population of other areas of the country will remain flat or even decline.

Around the world, population growth (or decline) varies more dramatically. The U.N. World Health Organization estimates that to maintain a steady population, couples must have an average of 2.1 children (to account for those children who don't survive to adulthood or ultimately do not have children themselves). Using that measuring stick, note the contrasts between India at 2.8, Europe at 1.8, Japan at 1.3, and China at 1.1 (due to their strictly enforced one child per family policy). For reference, the U.S. average is 2.0, but within that the Hispanic rate is 3.2 and the Anglo rate is 1.6.

Markets

Within or outside of the U.S., a growing demand for design services is largely derived from population growth and shifts. And the ability to satisfy that demand comes from the financial resources that are available. Looking long term, design firms will see their best prospects meeting the specific needs of generations and also in places where population increases combine with an economy that can afford to provide the required (or desired) facilities and infrastructure.

The need for living space to house a growing population drives more "rooftops"—whether single family homes or multi-family buildings—and the ripple effect of more rooftops extends to more places to learn, work, shop, heal, as well as transportation, power, water, and other utilities and services that they need.

However, suburban sprawl will not extend indefinitely. The movement toward re-urbanizing America's cities will continue, fueled by empty-nester baby boomers who no longer find the suburban and exurban lifestyle appealing as well by as singles and childless couples who are attracted to living more compactly nearer to their cities' centers. In addition to the building and rebuilding of our urban fabric, this trend will leave behind underused buildings—including malls and big box retail—that will need to be repurposed, providing unique and challenging opportunities for design firms.

Technology

BIM's inevitable universal adoption will influence—and be influenced by—changes in project delivery systems. Technology will become "the tail wagging the dog" in its ultimate affect on project delivery by facilitating or even forcing traditionally non-collaborative team members in the design and construction process to work more closely together.

At the project level, BIM will require increasing amounts of up-front intelligence gathering and overall effort in the design process.

For staff, BIM will widen the "technology gap" between tech-proficient young architects and those tech-deficient senior managers who find themselves managing people who are doing tasks that they themselves cannot do.

In contracts, BIM will pose threats and present opportunities for firms to reconsider their scope of services, intellectual property rights, design liability, risk management, and overall compensation.

Your Projects

As owners continue to crave a single source of accountability for projects, contractor-led design-build will become more popular and contractors who themselves employ BIM will be able to convince owners that they can save time and money, be compensated for their own use of BIM, and will ultimately control more of the design and construction process.

Integrated project delivery, enabled by BIM and now emerging as a new level of project collaboration with multi-party risk and reward sharing, will grow in popularity but likely not displace either design-build or even design-bid-build as a project delivery system.

As project delivery continues to evolve, design firms find themselves having to decide between two alternatives: either make themselves more valuable to their clients by broadening their palette of services beyond traditional design-construction documents-construction administration, or find themselves further marginalized by other more entrepreneurial players in the construction industry.

Your People

Design firms will again face a skills shortage, despite the current (and temporary) surplus of talent compared to many firms' workload. Many aging baby boomers will retire, leaving fewer post-boomers to take their place. Many potential employees have been flushed out of the professions by past and current recessions. And because design firms compensation has traditionally been meager compared to other professions, it will be increasingly difficult to attract young people.

This shortage will extend beyond the quantity of employees to the quality of their skills. Relatively few firms today give sufficient attention and resources to developing their staff. Just as marketing was a new frontier for many firms a generation ago but is mainstream today, training and development will be the "marketing" of this generation and firms that "get it" will surpass those who don't.

Your Leaders

The skills shortage will become even more acute for the future leadership of firms due to all of the factors previously mentioned plus the differences in generational values between boomers, post-boomers, and millennials. Every design firm today will need at least as many future leaders as it has current leaders, and with the world and our industry changing and becoming more complex and competitive, the future leaders will have to be smarter, more entrepreneurial, and generally better than their firms' current leaders.

With many firms currently led by boomers approaching retirement in the next decade, and too few firms making adequate plans for leadership succession far enough in advance, lack of leadership succession planning could become the primary factor forcing many firm sales. This trend could be exacerbated by ownership transition challenges as potential incoming owners and firm leaders find themselves unable to afford to buy out retiring owners, especially in the numerous design firms that still have their ownership concentrated among a small group of principals (who may be retiring within a short time span).

The Industry

The design industry will experience simultaneous consolidation and expansion. Big firms will get bigger and small firms will get more plentiful. Consolidation will continue to occur—even at an accelerated pace—due in large part to leadership succession and ownership transition challenges. But the expansion will occur as those more entrepreneurial design firm employees form their own firms, in many cases spinning off after their former firms were acquired.

Our Resources

The wave of environmental sustainability—the intensified conscience about our impact on our environment—is being driven from many sources: The government, clients, investors, the public at large, our own professions, and design firms' employees. As a social trend, sustainability for facilities and infrastructure will continue to grow and become more mainstream in much the way that design firms adapted to the Americans for Disabilities Act in 1990, whose design requirements are now simply assumed as a matter of course.

But sustainability is just one component of the much broader concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies that more firms will continue to adopt. In part, this trend will be driven by a growing movement toward altruism, but younger generations in particular regard CSR as an important element in their choice of an employer. Considering the talent shortages forecast above, it will also make good business sense for design firms to adopt CSR principles.

The World

Globalization is upon us, also facilitated by advances in technology, and for design firms looking forward it will present both opportunities and threats.

The most immediate opportunity for U.S. firms will continue to be outsourcing production to locations around the globe where low labor costs intersect with acceptable levels of quality & service. Outsourcing production will enable U.S. professionals to provide clients with the highest value-added services while shedding more commoditized services. But outsourcing could also present a threat to U.S. architects' and engineers' training, job security, and compensation if (or when) overseas firms provide U.S. licensed architects and engineers and the balance of project responsibility begins to shift from U.S. firms to overseas firms. Also, firms that outsource production could deprive themselves of the ability to train entry level and intern employees on important constructability issues, and without that knowledge their career growth could be impeded, further worsening the impact of the overall skills shortage.

However, globalization opportunities will also be a two-way street as more U.S. firms will work with overseas clients and/or on overseas projects than ever before.

Your Firm's Future

One way that a design firm can consider and address these and other changes that will occur in the future is through scenario planning in which the firm envisions a range of alternative futures and develops contingency plans for them. It is not as important to predict the future as to prepare for what may come, so in scenario planning, consider: What strategic decisions will your firm face? What major trends and drivers do you see as probabilities in your firm's future? What will trigger those trends and drivers? What effect will those trends and drivers have on your firm?

And, of course, what will your firm do to prepare for them—now?

Ray Kogan is the newest member of the five-person Advisory Group for the AIA's national Practice Management Knowledge Community.

A registered architect and AIA member since 1979, Ray received his B.S. in Architecture from the Ohio State University.

Ray is the president of Kogan & Company, specializing in strategic planning and management consulting for design and construction firms. He brings 35 years of experience in the practice, marketing, and management of architecture, engineering, and construction services, including his work with many leading firms in the industry. Ray has worked with more than 100 architecture and engineering firms in the development of their strategic plans.

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Thrash Planning
Skateparks as Model for User-interactive Design

By Bruce Playle, AIA
INDIGO/ Hammond & Playle Architects, LLP
All images courtesy of Bruce Playle

Thrash planning is an interactive process where design decisions are made working together with users to create solutions which closely match their needs. I discovered the power of this technique while designing skateparks and have since used it to improve buildings.

I designed my first skatepark in the 1990s for the City of Davis, California. This was an early skatepark built in the post-modern boom years of skateboarding and the sport had then nowhere near the level of social acceptance or even allure which it has now.

At the time, I was consulting architect for the City and was commissioned to design its new skatepark. Soon afterward, a woman in town accused a group of male skaters of rape. Public outrage ensued and skaters were assailed in the press and on the streets. Police stops, questioning, and confiscation of skateboards reached a crescendo. After a few weeks of this the woman recanted her story, and a history of emotional disturbance emerged. A level of self-realization developed within the community that it had been all too quick to accept the mob mentality directed against a group held in disregard - skaters. If this could happen in Davis, the self-proclaimed second most-educated community in the country, it could happen anywhere.

It was in this context that I found myself creating the first of many skateparks using **thrash planning**, the hands-on interactive design process involving skaters as well as community members. I knew then that the unique combination of public perception and skater design input would teach me much about our diverse culture and would change me forever as designer. The years since have born this out. In part due to this process, I was selected to design skateparks in places like Boca Raton, Hong Kong and Scottsdale among others. Some commissions were sole-sourced via clients searching the web, most were awarded through competitive RFQ/ RFP, in part due to this consultative design process.

By embracing cultural diversity and allowing myself to enter the realm of the user, I found that I could create the best work by designing _with_ users and not just _for_ users. This principle is at the heart of "**thrash planning**". Effectively, it is a form of organized chaos where anyone can participate in design as an equal with others. The designer on the scene sorts it all out and creates a functional skatepark pre-tested and approved by skaters before it is ever built.

As such, "**thrash planning**" is highly democratic. It requires working early-on with neighbors, finding out what skaters want, and developing a preliminary design which gets reviewed with the skaters so all participants have a chance to weigh-in on the developing design. The services of professional skaters are used to help guide the design. All sounds simple, right?

A minimum of two public workshops are generally used. In Public Workshop #1, there are no design pre-conceptions, only listening to skaters who bring their ideas and sketches of what they want. Sidewalk chalk, clay modeling, and sand sculpting are used with great expressive effect. Features built at other skateparks are reviewed and at the end of the workshop, all attendees review each design idea as described by its creator.

Public Workshop #2 is held to review designs prepared by the designer and based on input received in the first workshop, typically in media such as to-scale clay models, sketches, and 3D visualizations. It is important that a feedback loop be created whereby participants can see how their idea was incorporated, or if not, the reasons and rationale of the proposed design. At this stage, the model is modified by participants to reflect their further input to the design – oftentimes torn apart and put back together again. Every effort to "test" the design is made, for example finger-skating. Where possible, design options are sketched out full-size so they can be field "tested" even at this early stage.

During construction, skaters are on the jobsite inspecting and adjusting the grading before rebar and shotcrete is placed, the last bit of "testing" the design receives before it is built. In our extensive use of shotcrete, we have seen it's incredible flexibility to create non-linear designs and decided to use it together with grind rails to create a skateable building. The "cubistic rock" look fit nicely with the boulders found on this particular site.


Thrash planning can be readily be employed to improve buildings by making them more poignant to the needs of the people who use them. While it is easy to see how youth-related facilities are susceptible to this technique, **thrash planning** also can work with "adults" as well. Required is to get them off-their-guard and loosened up so their thinking can be freed from the usual constraints posed by the business environment and they can participate in truly creative thinking.   Participants, including the design professional, must check their egos at the door and be willing to be one voice among equals in order to find the best results. Here's how **thrash planning** can be used to improve the design of a building project:

- **NO-FEAR DESIGN -** Think outside the building box. Allow diversity of form to emerge, look for new uses of materials. Look for building-to-site connections. Imagine new possibilities for mingling the worlds of art, architecture and sculptural form!

- **CULTURAL DIVERSITY -** Ask the question, who is the user? Identify the whole user: what are their cultural aspirations as well as their functional needs. Our built environment should reflect the diverse society we live in. The architect is well-positioned and trained for this vital work!

- **INTERACTIVE DESIGN -** Enter the realm of the user. Develop an interactive design process which is created with the user in mind more so than the architect. Make it fun and interesting!

- **DESIGN MEDIA -** Use design tools which best show design intent so users can readily determine if their needs are met. Don't expect much from user-review of construction docs. Architect's job is to clearly understand user needs, then create docs which meet them.

- **TEST THE DESIGN -** Test the design directly with users before finishing or building it. Create feedback loops in an interactive design process. Many design problems can be avoided this way.

An example is the teen center design for the small town of Riverbank in California's central valley. A two-workshop process was setup by the City and every participant had hands-on involvement in shaping the design. The design team synthesized the result, brought it back to the workshop attendees and ensured that a genuine feedback loop was created. After the design was effectively "thrashed", the result was a straw bale-built teen center integrated into its park setting.
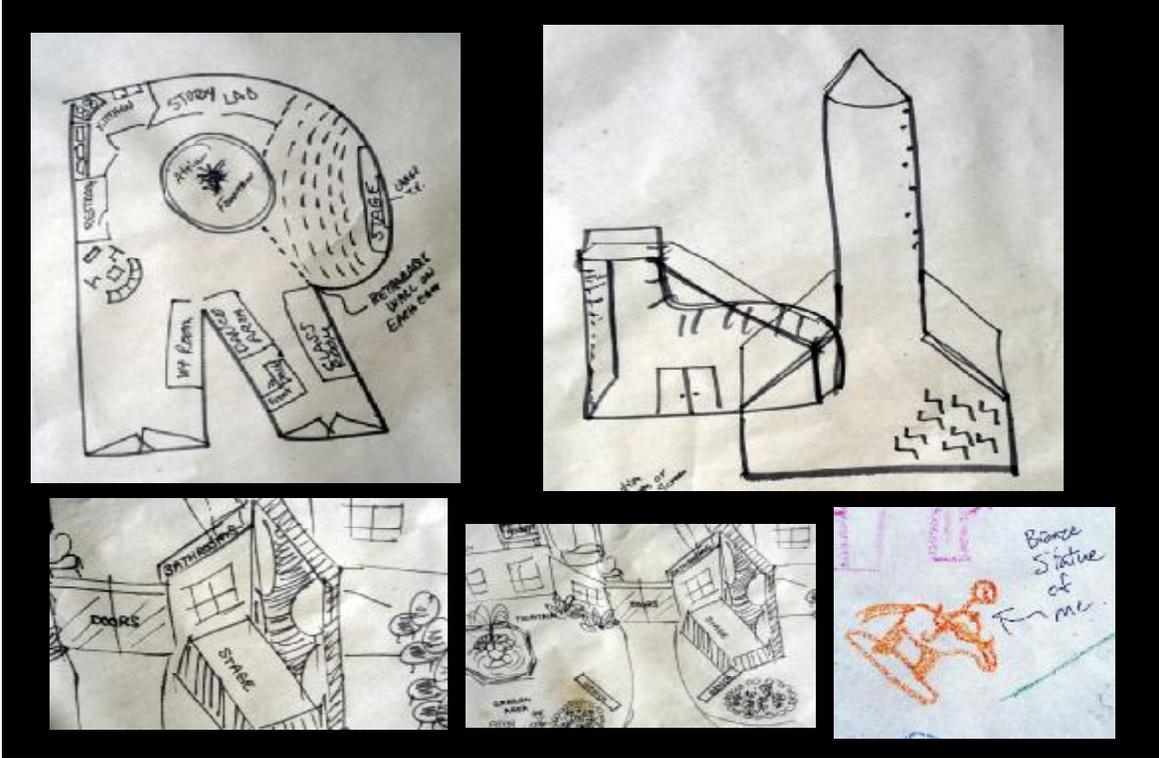
In summary, **thrash planning** is a user-interactive design technique discovered in the making of skateparks and is a valuable tool with which to improve buildings. It is a highly democratic approach delivering a facility closely matched to its need since users are directly involved. Since designers essentially join ranks with the user, they will adapt to a cultural setting which may be different their own and, in the process, develop empathy with user needs. Feedback loops and direct design testing by users are key elements. Once built, user satisfaction of the facility is improved when compared to conventional design methods. As applied to skateparks, **thrash planning** has created highly functional facilities which skaters love to use and which rank among the finest urban art and kinetic sculptural forms of our time.

Bruce Playle, AIA
Principal
With a professional design and planning background and over thirty years of experience in municipal, educational and commercial facilities. Mr. Playle believes that the success of a project hinges on a well-managed design and construction process.

The name of our firm is a shade of blue, but our roots are truly green. Jonathan Hammond and Bruce Playle formed INDIGO /Hammond & Playle Architects, LLP in 1999, merging over 55 years of combined experience in the field. Playle's skills in management and administration allow the firm to practice architecture that works in the complex regulatory and political settings that surround many projects. This combination of practicality and innovation makes Indigo both a logical and pioneering choice for buildings, landscapes and plans that are tailored to people and place.

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How Did You Guys Get That Project?

By Joe Remling, AIA

"How did you guys get that project?" I'm asked this question quite often lately as clients and peers review ai3's portfolio of finished design projects. We have a distinctive reputation as a diverse practice, with projects ranging from architectural and interior design to graphics, textiles and furniture. We pride ourselves in this approach, and now that many of our peers are searching for new ways to fight through the current recession, they seem to be taking a closer look.

The answer is simple enough:"We asked for it." As designers, we're challenged to think and create creatively every day. Yet, despite the obvious need to continuously evolve towards success, many of our peers have a hard time finding a way how. They're entrenched in a traditional formula for practice that requires a narrow market focus. Often, this "focus" eliminates opportunities to attract a diverse client base and portfolio of work.

But, don't be fooled – coming to this conclusion took a bit of soul-searching. Since founding ai3 in 2004, we have faced many challenges to create a multi-disciplinary approach to the practice of architecture. These challenges could have easily caused us to retreat to a safer market position and accept the modern day definition of an architect.

The reason I say "modern day definition" is that the practice of architecture underwent an overhaul in the mid-1960s. While the architects we admired and regarded all practiced a multi-disciplinary architecture (or the "old way"), the current practice paradigm required us to abandon the idea of creating, products, furniture and art hand in hand with buildings and embrace specialization. With technology advancing rapidly, and the global market becoming more accessible, many architects felt there was just too much to know. The speed in which information, standards and codes were evolving forced a siloed practice model. Hence, the common exchange: "What does your firm do?" "We do healthcare, multi-family and office."

ai3 was founded to question convention from the very beginning. In our own way, we proposed to practice the old paradigm by weaving together product, graphic, interior and architectural design for diversity. However, it required a major shift in mindset to ask for new challenges and opportunities.

We knew that the practice and process of designing architecture still had a place in furniture design, interior design, products, graphics and art. We also knew that our process could cross the defined verticals of existing markets like education, hospitality, medical and corporate. In essence, we defined our practice as horizontal thereby allowing us to cross-pollinate projects in different vertical markets within a single studio. It took almost three years for this mindset to pay off and for ai3 to shift from a siloed approach to a diverse *design* practice.

So back to the question; "How did you guys get that project?" Well, you have to be willing to make "the ask" for new opportunities, take risk and retain a commitment to practicing diversity.

First

Become aware that new opportunity is everywhere and surrounds everything we do as architects. The secret is the willingness to talk about your design ideas and concepts with *everyone* before things are fully baked. It requires a transparent design process that seeks criticism. If you share an idea early, you don't have time to fall in love with it and can seek and receive criticism openly.

Then

Build a team that can develop your new opportunities using an established design process. It requires collaboration and a lot of humility. Your team needs to know that failure is allowed. It's counterintuitive, but breakthroughs rarely happen when you are developing something you *know* will work.

Finally

Connect with people who can help you realize the potential of these new opportunities. Start with colleagues, clients, vendors, family, friends, etc. Be willing to *give away* your ideas to them and share your thoughts about diversity. Ask your client to expand your scope of work to include a new opportunity. In short, start with something simple and expand from there. You have to *ask.*

After sharing the desire to expand our product design practice with a vendor, ai3 was invited to participate in a closed call for submissions with an international furniture manufacturer. Despite not being known for furniture design, ai3 was the only architecture firm invited; the other firms were furniture and industrial designers. We gathered our entire studio together and challenged the brief presented. We spent a couple weeks researching materials, diagramming structural systems, observing users and developed three-dimensional models. Sound familiar? The process was no different that it was for a restaurant or office space. We *allowed* our experience as architects and interior designers to flood the design solution.

Through this process, we detailed a design that addressed the brief in spirit but challenged the idea of the collection based on where we thought the collection would be installed. We delivered the designs within a series of sketches and three dimension models developed in same CAD program we use for every architecture project. We didn't try to compete with the industrial firms; we simply and unapologetically presented an architectural solution.

I am sure you would agree that architects have the ability to reach past traditional boundaries to realize new opportunities and revenue sources. But, many of us don't allow ourselves the freedom to ask for new opportunities because of our restrictive practice models. While there are benefits to being a niche practitioner, the truth of the matter is that – in any industry – the freshest ideas rarely come from an insider.

Joe Remling, AIA

Joe has been working in architecture and design for more than 14 years, designing projects that range from multi-family residential to large-scale assembly, including the Georgia Aquarium and the Puerto Rico Convention Center in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Since the launch of ai3 in 2004, Joe has developed a multi-disciplinary practice that focuses on the integration of architecture, interior design, graphics and product design. The firm has won numerous design awards and will unveil its first furniture line, the "Peer Table" with Geiger / Herman Miller, this June at NeoCon.

ai3 was recognized in 2008 by AIA Atlanta and the Young Architect's Forum as one of the top young firms practicing in the city and awarded the Emerging Voice Award. Joe actively participates in professional mentorship with the Savannah College of Art and Design and is a frequent juror at Georgia Institute of Technology and Southern Polytechnic State University. Recently Joe was a speaker at the AIA National Convention and is a passionate advocate for a multi-discipline architectural practice.

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Lean Architecture:
The Pursuit of Excellence in Project Delivery

By Michael F. Czap

Lean Architecture is the ongoing process of rethinking and improving architectural process and methodology. It is the pursuit of better work by applying "Lean" principles to every aspect of practice. It is about smarter information flow and understanding how we perceive and process information in order to become better communicators amongst ourselves and with the ultimate users of our services.

Lean Architecture is not about skipping necessary steps or omitting information. To the contrary, it is identifying what adds value and reducing or eliminating that which doesn't.

Why Lean? "Lean" has become the terminology best associated with understanding and advancing productivity and quality in manufacturing, software development, management, construction, and healthcare.

"Lean" as a term signifying system improvement was popularized by James P. Womack and Daniel T. Jones in their seminal book "Lean Thinking". It has been applied to the now famous Toyota Production System with its relentless effort to eliminate waste and the development of innovative practices such as "Just In Time" manufacturing.

Other management approaches worth noting are Six Sigma, developed by Motorola for reducing variation among individual processes; and the Theory of Constraints by Elihu Goldratt which seeks to optimize an entire system by the elimination of constraints. There is much for architectural firms to learn from each of these. Their tenets can be applied to every firm and team practice to bring about improvement in project delivery.

Borrowing from these three approaches we can establish some basic goals:

1. Structure our work effort so projects better "flow" by identifying processes and tasks that contribute value and eliminating those that don't.

2. Reduce variation in the ways we work and in the deliverables we produce.

3. Identify and eliminate or mitigate, constraints in the office and on projects. Find out what hinders us from doing good work. These can be policies, practices, people, levels of expertise or equipment.

Let's briefly look at their application to project management, documentation and technology.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Approach project development from a critical path standpoint by identifying what needs to happen at the appropriate phase and building in coordination efforts between disciplines. Prevent problems by looking ahead to eliminate potential roadblocks rather than expending effort later to "detect and correct".

Concurrently design, engineer and make your buildings constructible. Where possible, major design and decision making coupled with simultaneous costing and value engineering should be complete by the end of Design Development.

Plan your projects and avoid the tendency to work as hard as you can without first knowing what you intend to accomplish. Work to reduce or eliminate barriers that prevent staff and consultants from doing work right the first time.

LEAN DOCUMENTATION

Mies Van der Rohe famously observed that "Less is More". We think of his comments with regards to design,

but should also consider their application to architectural process and methodology.

- Develop well thought out methods for getting work done rapidly and consistently.

- Develop drawing processes for dealing with repetitious information such as doors, partitions and cabinetry.

- Develop tools that facilitate client interaction and information gathering – and document it back to them in an attractive, easy to understand format.

- Draw what you know, not what you don't. An incomplete area in a drawing or BIM model is a powerful visual reminder that information is lacking or needed decisions are not made.

- Organize drawings to tell a story. The grouping and presentation of information is just about as important as the information itself and too much information dilutes a set of drawings.

- Know your audience. Who are your drawings intended for? Are they easily understood and navigable?

Processes serve a purpose to bring consistency to our efforts and leverage knowledge. Review them from time to time with an eye to changing technologies to see if there isn't yet a better way. They should be *adaptable* to clients and projects. The very act of process adaption can yield new insight into how to better do something and change the process itself – if we're paying attention.

TECHNOLOGY

The architectural profession is still in the midst of profound technological change. The tools in use today bear little resemblance to those of a generation ago and allow us to bring increased speed with greater accuracy and rapid visualization.

Interestingly, the use of new technologies has not significantly altered the architect's deliverables. We have merely automated old processes and construction drawings and specifications are essentially the same as what we have always produced.

Due largely to the advent of Building Information Modeling (BIM) software, Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) is re-examining and challenging the fundamentals of project delivery and stands to radically change long held relationships and methodologies.

It is important to understand that while practices and tools change, principles do not. Technology must be an enabler and serve architectural process - and not become an end unto itself.

- Consider your task to be that of information management. Devise methods to record project decisions, client comments and preferences with a goal of "handling" as little as possible. The fewer times we transcribe information, the less likely mistakes will be made.

- Establish office standards that are succinct and easily digestible, so interns and new hires quickly get up to speed. Look for simple solutions and use technology to automate mundane and repetitive tasks.

- Develop consistent methods to record, file and retrieve information. Architects have been diligent to set up CAD standards but haven't established good information management strategies for other types of documents.

WRAPPING UP

Firms don't hesitate to invest time and money in the pursuit of new work. However, marketing and business development can only obtain an *opportunity* to get what we're really interested in - profit and successful projects. Lean Architecture is about getting better at making a profit and doing so while delivering better quality projects with increased productivity.

Lean Architecture is thinking and then working to ensure that Less is More. It is a disciplined approach to examining everything we do and better using our resources of people, relationships, equipment and opportunity to deliver tangible benefits when times are good – and not so good.

Michael F. Czap, AIA is the Director of Quality Management at the Dallas office of RTKL Associates, Inc., an international architecture and engineering firm

Michael has lead efforts at RTKL to identify and implement new technologies and progressive project delivery processes. He has developed standards & training materials and administered the Quality Management Program in Dallas. He also developed the RTKL "Dallas Net" and RTKL Guide:Net intranets, comprising Firm Production Methodologies and a Project Documents Database.

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Managing for Prosperity in Precarious Times

By Steve L. Wintner, AIA Emeritus

Where can a firm executive find the answer to the question about the future prosperity of their firm?

As hard as it may be for many to believe, the answer begins, in my studied opinion, with the discipline of how to complete, that dreaded of all office tools, the timesheet.

For far too many firms, this tool is just 'something to be dealt with' in everyone's spare time (e.g.: the weekend), especially the firm principal(s).

It is my assertion that the timesheet is the single most important data resource of every professional design firm and its level of accuracy could spell prosperity or doom, depending on the firm's policy about how and when timesheets are to be completed.

Considering that the firm's Profit/Loss statement includes a section defined as 'Direct Labor Expense' (DL), which is simply a total of all hours charged to projects during the defined statement period, multiplied by each person's hourly salary rate (annual salary/2080 hours). The total of all of these DL hours' is referred to as 'Total Direct Labor' (TDL) and is the denominator in calculating two (2) very important financial performance metrics: the Net Multiplier (NM) and the Overhead Rate (OH). Once the OH is calculated, it is then possible to determine a firm's (and any project's) profitability. That's the 'Bottom Line' for every professional design firm. Without a profit, a firm faces potential bankruptcy and could soon become extinct.

Now let's go back to the oft-maligned and greatly misunderstood timesheet. If a timesheet is not completed in a timely manner (at least once every day) before the person departs for home, the hours on the timesheet will at best be an estimate and at worst, a 'SWAG'.

If a person's daily project assignment consists only of one project, then completing the timesheet at the end of the day is a 'no-brainer'. I still would strongly urge consideration for the completion of the timesheet twice every day. Once, just before taking a lunch break and then again just before leaving the office for the day. This approach is especially critical if a person's daily project assignments are spread over more than a single project, or involve several different tasks and activities.

The use of a written journal or log to capture time spent at the conclusion of every task, or whenever switching to a different task, is an essential resource to enhance the accuracy of capturing project hours for the timesheet. Those who would embrace this approach might conclude, and rightfully so, that if their time is captured accurately in their journal or log, they could wait to complete their timesheet at the end of the week. While this might be true, it is in my opinion, the 'lazy' way out and avoids the need to develop a rigorous discipline and commitment to having their timesheet be timely (daily) and meticulously accurate.

If the hours charged to projects are anything less than accurate, the TDL figure will be rendered unreliable, at best. This in-turn will then make the two key metrics, NM and OH, also unreliable and finally, the number shown at the bottom of the P-L statement, Net Profit, would be virtually meaningless.

Further, since the OH is unreliable, this will have an undesirable impact on the development of each staff member's break-even and billing rate. When project fees are developed this will become a compound error and will eventually be translated into an undesirable result in the profit earned on these projects; it might even result in a loss.

Overall, the compound problems created by inaccurate timesheets will continue to erode a firm's true overhead rate and its true profitability. What makes this even more pervasive is the Principal(s) would never bee aware that these distorted metrics are without merit. And all because this 'tool' has been overlooked and ignored as the single most important data resource of every firm.

Brief Biography

Steve L. Wintner, AIA Emeritus, has been in the architectural profession for more than six (6) decades and has been a licensed architect since 1968. Before retiring from active practice, Steve was the managing principal of his own small partnership and the VP of Operations for two of the largest architectural firms in the country.

In 1985, Steve started his second career as a management consultant, with a commitment to make a difference in this profession that has been so generous to him; by assisting other architects achieve their goals through the body of knowledge and experience gained in his professional career.

This commitment has lead to developing a series of workshops, which he has been presenting to national, state and local AIA components, since 1992. His financial management workshop was the basis of a recent book he co-authored with Michael Tardif, Assoc. AIA, Hon. SDA, *'Financial Management for Design Professionals: The Path to Profitability'*.

Steve serves a national clientele of design professionals and is based in the Houston, Texas area.

He can be reached at mcspc@sbcglobal.net, or through his website: www.managementconsultingservices.com.

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Downsizing, Layoffs and New Opportunities for Architects

By Betty Doo

You are laid off or fear that a layoff will occur given the state of the economy. What happens next?

First, don't panic. Many people have experienced layoffs – they recover and you will too. In fact, this can be the opportunity you need to make important shifts in your career to better prepare for the 21st century.

Architecture is a diverse, complex and interesting field that demands many different skills, capabilities, and roles. Perhaps your current work focus or specialty area is not as available in the current economic climate. Therefore, you may need to consider other options. Rather than jumping immediately into building a resume and spending hours surfing the internet for job postings, consider stepping back and taking some time to reflect upon your career in a more thoughtful and analytical way.

Self Understanding

Two questions to start with:

- What do you most enjoy about your work in architecture?

- What are you really good at?

Consider the many components of the architectural industry, including: design, project management, leadership, technology, marketing, finances, structural engineering, problem solving collaboration, direct client interface (or NOT interfacing with clients), writing, analyzing, drawing, building, constructing, presentations, critiquing others' work, working solo vs. on teams, and teaching. It is indeed a rich and varied profession.

Take stock and be brutally honest with yourself as to what you really enjoy about your work and what you don't, as well as what you are good at, and not so good at. This gives you a starting point from which to begin the process of moving forward.
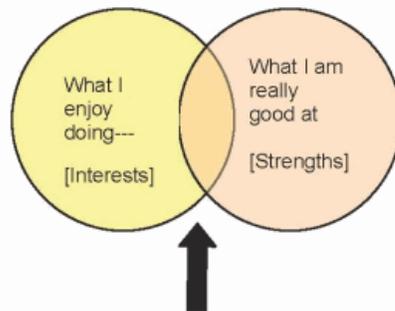
Your greatest leverage for successful, meaningful and engaging work is at the intersection of these 2 areas: your strengths and your interests. For example, you may love technology but find you are not really good at it. You have several options– one is to improve upon your technology skills; another is to focus on areas less technology-oriented.

Alternatively, you may realize you are good at managing people, but don't really enjoy it. Consequently, you may consider options that focus less on people management and more on implementation. These are just a couple of examples. There are clearly a number of scenarios, and it is worth putting some time into getting as clear as possible about what you enjoy, as well as your strengths and capabilities. This provides a baseline for where to go next.

Market Trends

Once you determine the overlap between your core interests and strengths, you need to understand how these apply to the world at large. For example, what is the market for these overlapping areas? This is, in essence, where the rubber meets the road. How do you find meaningful work that matches your strengths and interests, in a down economy and a changing world? Granted it is not an easy task; however, out of challenges and crises often come new opportunities and the greatest innovations.

So, consider what is currently happening in the world of architecture. What can we expect in the future? What are the trends? How can you best utilize your skills and interests within the field of architecture, or maybe even outside the field in related professions?

The world is changing and the "macro" economic or business realities will be quite different in the future than in the past. In order to keep ahead of the game, be willing to open your mind to options you may not have considered before. Some of the trends you can be looking out for include:

- Going Green—**the focus on sustainability will lead to many ecologically sound products, and design and build opportunities**

- Technology— **innovations in technology will continue to play a major role in the field of architecture**

- From Private to Public sector---**in the coming years there may be increased opportunities in the public sector as the government invests in infrastructure and other jobs-creating ventures**

- From Specialist to Generalist—**if you find a reduced need for your particular area of expertise, you might consider developing greater generalist skills to be marketable**

- Collaborative ventures—**Teaming up with other professionals or connecting across disciplines can provide viable new business opportunities**

Now the big question: how to get from here to there?

Strategies for Success

One does not usually walk right into a new career opportunity; it takes time and effort, maybe even blood, sweat and tears. But focus, perseverance and optimism will help. Consider your short and longer term needs. In the short term, you need a job, money to support your lifestyle, your family, etc. In the long term, you want a rewarding career. This is the time in which reflecting upon your longer term goals may be most valuable. It also helps to inform your short term needs. If, for example, you want to go into the "green" industry, what skills will you need to develop to position your entry? Can your next job, even if not ideal, at least prepare you for your ultimate goal?

One strategy with the greatest likelihood for a successful outcome is getting involved in Social Networking. Social networking is receiving lots of media attention today and for good reasons. In essence, it has created a whole new world—a world of short and long distance connections, information sharing, innovations, and new ideas. Examples of social networking include: Facebook, Linkedin, MySpace, Twitter, Ning and virtual worlds such as Second Life. These online mediums can assist your career in many ways, helping you land a job in the short term, and providing you with an array of contacts, ideas and resources that will assist your life-long career development.

So worried about being laid off? Or maybe you already are. If you take a "glass half full" approach, you may find yourself eager to explore new options and one day may even feel it was the best thing that ever happened to you.

Betty Doo *is a New England-based Leadership and Career Consultant. She can be reached via her website,* www.bettydoo.com *or email:* bd@bettydoo.com*.*

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