

Marketing that Sets Your Firm Apart

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SUMMARY

At its core, marketing is the development of a message designed to spur a firm's existing and potential customers to action. Do your firm's current marketing strategies accomplish this task?

Choosing effective marketing methods, creating client-focused materials, and honing your firm's message will set your firm apart and help to communicate its message quickly and effectively.

CHOOSE EFFECTIVE METHODS

People are often confused about what "marketing" encompasses. For purposes of this discussion, marketing refers to the tools used to tell and deliver information about your firm to existing and potential customers. Marketing includes research, planning, communication, and information management. Your sales or business development personnel will deliver that message, but the marketing staff develops the message and the strategies, and organizes, plans, and evaluates the effectiveness of the communication.

Many methods are used to market engineering and construction services. Some of the most popular include the following:

- Participation in associations
- Producing and mailing brochures
- Listing in professional directories
- Promotional speaking
- Advertisements

However, a national survey of architects, engineers, and contractors showed that the most effective methods included the following:

- Educational seminars
- Community involvement
- One-on-one meetings

This survey points out the importance of direct communication with clients and prospective customers. While marketing materials can help in

building brand recognition, position, and perceived value, you still need face-to-face contact to build long-term relationships.

FOCUS ON THE CLIENT

Most firms do not produce client-centric materials. Search your own brochures, qualifications packages, or proposals for the terms "I," "we," and "our." Effective communication focuses on the benefits to "you" and "your." The customer will always be more receptive to how you can solve *their* problem, and more so, how you've solved similar problems like theirs in the past.

It is important to provide both clarity and excitement in your communication. Enthusiasm is a great tool to excite the client about working with you. Defining what is unique and different about your firm, your services, and your people is equally important. Most firms share common history ("We've been in business for 'x' years"), experience ("We've completed 'x' projects"), and tools ("We have state-of-the-art 'x' systems"), so look for something new to say that sets you apart. What can the client get from you that they can get nowhere else?

HONING YOUR MESSAGE

The following tips will also help get your message across quickly and effectively:

- Keep your message simple (short words, short sentences, short paragraphs, great pictures)
- Keep it concise (think: you have 30 seconds to tell your story—go!)
- Think "bumper stickers" (simplify, simplify, simplify)
- Make it relevant
- Know your market (what are your client's hot issues?).
- Under promise, over deliver (make your clients happy)
- Build relationships

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

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

- 05.01.03 Measuring Your Marketing ROI
- 05.01.06 Ten Essential Steps of Marketing Planning
- 05.01.07 Making the Most of Your Marketing Materials

For More Information on This Topic

See also “Marketing Planning and Strategies”, by Roger L. Pickar in *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 7, page 142.



See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at bookstore@aia.org.



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