



## AIA Best Practices: Maximizing your marketing materials

---

Contributed by the editors of AIArchitect and excerpted from a 2003 AIArchitect article

### Summary

You have fewer than two seconds to capture your audience's attention: Do your firm's marketing materials do the job? The San Diego chapter of the Society for Marketing Professional Services provides key questions firms can use to evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing materials.

### Background

At the 2003 AIA convention, members from the San Diego chapter of the Society for Marketing Professional Services volunteered to evaluate architects' marketing materials. They evaluated the materials' strength of message and communication effectiveness. Below, they have compiled a list of points to help architects evaluate their own materials.

### Positioning the piece

- Who is the target audience of the piece? If you try to reach everyone, typically you reach no one. Put yourself in your target audience's shoes, and write and illustrate your material so it will interest those persons at their specific level of background knowledge and sophistication.
- What is your objective for the marketing piece? How will it be used to support your current marketing efforts? For instance, if you want a mailer that will draw people to your website, give a compelling reason for them to visit, and feature the web URL prominently.
- What are the three most important things you want to communicate to your target audience? Maintain that focus.
- What do you want the reader to see first? Second?
- What action do you hope the reader will take? Don't hesitate to suggest it in a few action-oriented, prominently positioned words.
- How is your firm different from your competition in a way that benefits the client?
- If the piece is commercially printed, consider excluding items that will date the brochure too quickly. Alternatively, if your message is delivered through an easily updated format (such as a website) make sure it is current.

- Is your contact information easy to find?

## Writing for skimmers

- You may have less than two seconds to grab the attention of your intended audience. Especially for mailings, you may have to pass one or more gatekeepers. Keep your value-adding message clear and prominent.
- Make headings informative. Use headings to draw in and involve the reader. Consider presenting your benefits as headings.
- Put all main ideas upfront. Lead with the features and benefits that you offer and that your clients value.
- Organize headings, subheads, text, and graphics logically so they are easy to follow. Text boxes and pulled quotations—short, pithy statements run in large type and often attributed to a high-credibility source—can be used as graphic elements to draw your reader to important points.
- Use short, direct sentences.
- Break long blocks of text into bitesize lengths.
- Use lists instead of long paragraphs.
- Highlight your firm “differentiators” and benefits—not just features!

## Inviting readers visually

- Design the piece so that graphics and text complement each other.
- Use simple graphics with a clear message. Visuals can stand alone.
- People read captions more often than body copy. Make sure they highlight the client benefits your firm offers.
- Use no more than two or three fonts, for instance a serif font (e.g., Times New Roman) for body copy and a sans serif font (e.g., Arial) for headings.
- Use plenty of white space, but avoid trapping it among blocks of text and graphics.

*The AIA collects and disseminates Best Practices as a service to AIA members without endorsement or recommendation. Appropriate use of the information provided is the responsibility of the reader.*

## About AIA Best Practices

AIA Best Practices is a collection of relevant, experience-based knowledge and expert advice on firm management, project delivery, contracts and more, aligned with the *Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice, 15th edition*. See the full AIA Best Practices collection at [aia.org/aia-best-practices](http://aia.org/aia-best-practices).

This article corresponds to:

*Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice, 15th edition* Unit 1 - The Profession  
Chapter 06 – Marketing and Business Development  
Section 02 – Developing Marketing Strategy