

Publicity & Marketing

AIA Small Project Forum



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Editorial

*Peter Wronsky, AIA
AIA Long Island—East End Section
2000 Chair, Small Project Forum*

The Small Project Forum serves to develop knowledge and information that benefit architects who are engaged in the practice of, or interested in, small project work. This, the second of four reports that will be published this year, addresses the topic "Publicity and Marketing." We hope that it will help SPF members to share marketing and publicity tips. Local Advisors, who contribute articles, "tips," and graphics relevant to the small project practice, provide the content of all reports. My editorial in the 6th annual convention issue, which is included in this mailing envelope, proposes a revamping of the SPF Local Advisor structure. I would be most appreciative of your comments.

Archiving and indexing of earlier topical reports and convention summaries continues, although at a slower pace than we had hoped. All articles that have been published will be archived, indexed, and available on the Internet through our section of the

AIA Web site. Eventually, you will be able to search electronically for articles that you remember from past reports, in addition to discovering others that you might have missed when the reports were first distributed. The AIA will continue to publish the reports and mail hard copies to all SPF members.

Many Local Advisors have organized monthly discussion groups for their components. The programs are often based on a review of the latest report. If you do not have access to such a group, talk to the Local Advisor from your component about starting one. If your component does not have a Local Advisor, consider becoming one yourself. If you do not feel that you can make that commitment, suggest to your component's program chair that you would be willing to moderate discussions if he/she would schedule them. Peer networking, whether based on SPF reports or on other pertinent topics, is of great benefit to the architect working on small projects. In addition, continuing education credits may be earned if participants submit an AIA/CES Self-Report about the program.

PIA

Getting Published

Scott Wilson, AIA
AIA Middle Tennessee

Being an architect can be a very rewarding experience. Architecture is one of few professions where one's career can explore creative expressions that satisfies its own search for perfection and solves real needs for clients. Perhaps the icing on the cake is that architects build projects that are visible for all to see. Upon learning that I am an architect, a large percentage of people tell me they had wanted to be an architect at some point in their lives. While all of these factors indicate that the general public has an interest in good architecture, many architects find it difficult to get the publicity they deserve. Through my personal efforts to become published, I have learned several steps architects can take to improve their chances of attracting the right attention.

Perhaps the simplest advice is to produce quality work. This may seem rather obvious, but if a project is merely well done, the ink will, most likely, go to a project that is truly special. Consider each project before accepting the commission; does the project program allow for creative solutions or is there something special about the site, the context, or even the client? If there is a choice of projects, these factors will affect the finished solution.

Once the project is accepted and a solution has been executed, the genius of the work must be communicated in a manner readily understood by lay people. For most projects, this communication involves drawings and photographs. Most architects should be able to provide professional drawings, but a professional photographer who specializes in architectural photogra-

phy should take the photographs. Well done professional photography can be a financial burden for many small firms, so look for others, such as project team members or manufacturers of specific products, to share the cost in exchange for their having access to the photographs.

The next step is to put together a package that will express the uniqueness of the project. If a project is going to capture the attention of publishers, the presentation needs to focus on the story, whether it is the creative solution of the architect or the journey undertaken by the client. Sometimes, the story is more important than the design, so do not overlook any possible ideas to get attention.

Now that the project package is ready, there are two basic options. The first option is to submit to any and all appropriate design award programs. Most design awards offer winners some sort of exposure in the sponsoring publications. The second option is to submit the project to any interested publication and/or media organization. Many firms hire public relations consultants to assist with this process. Be prepared for rejection at this point, as most award juries and editors have specific hot buttons and will turn away several good projects for each one that they select. The idea is to keep submitting the project to new sources until it attracts interest. There is still work to be done even when a project receives a positive reaction: television shows will need to visit the project and conduct interviews on camera, conventional publications may send their own photographer and writer to the site, and some award programs request winners to prepare additional presentations for public display.

Once a project has been selected for an award or publication, it is important

to send a press release to all local publications to increase the number of potential clients that are aware of your accomplishments. This also is an area for public relations consultants to help with.

During the process of getting a project published, it is wise to establish relationships with the people responsible for selecting projects to cover. The easiest way to get press is for someone familiar with your work to call and ask for information about new and upcoming projects.

Getting a project published typically involves a significant amount of time and money. While, occasionally, project leads come directly from someone seeing a project, the more common benefit is the exposure to future clients who will contact an architect only after seeing or hearing an architect's name several times.

With the commitment required to having projects consistently published, it becomes an important decision to pursue and should be approached as a long-term business strategy that often can take several years to truly know the value of the efforts.

Marketing Resources

Peter Wronsky, AIA
AIA Long Island—East End Section

Several years ago, a former employer/friend retired from practice. He gave me several books from his professional library, including *This Business of Architecture*, a book by Royal Barry Wills, published by Reinhold Publishing Corporation in 1941. In the foreword, Mr. Wills states:

"There have been architects for five thousand years, yet the heritage of their accumulated experience does not

spell the answer to success in the world of today. Why? Because the practice of architecture has been forced to take a course in business and to accept efficient, aggressive organization as the price of survival.

The architect is still a professional and always must be; it is one of the strongest arguments in his favor, but now his ancient lineage has also to be infused with the technique of a businessman. It is not an easy transition to make, and yet there is no other way to succeed amidst intense competition from within and without the profession."*

**Sorry, this passage is a quote from a book written in 1941.*

It is now common practice for many larger firms to include a department dedicated to marketing and publicity. But for the small project architect whose operating budget cannot afford a "rainmaker," there are ways to market and publicize the firm without feeling like 1-800-ARCHITECT.

AIA National Referrals—All AIA members pay an annual surcharge for National's advertising campaign. In addition to educating the public in general about the work of architects and the superior quality of AIA members, the AIA invites the public to visit the AIA Web site to locate a local AIA architect who is capable of developing specific projects. Check the Web site <http://www.e-architect.com> to make sure your firm is listed in the proper geographic area and under the type of projects with which you are familiar.

Component Referrals—Also as part of the national advertising campaign, potential clients are urged to contact their local chapter as listed in the yellow pages of their local telephone directory. Many components maintain

lists of members who are experienced with different building programs. If your chapter does not maintain such lists, get involved and volunteer to help develop them.

Name recognition in the community also is very important. Advertise in the playbill of local drama and musical groups. Write a column in your local newspaper. Sponsor a little league team. Be active in service organizations. Donate a house analysis and preliminary drawings to the local hospital fundraiser. Put a reserve of several thousand dollars on this service. Name recognition reinforces the dollar value of your work and saves you the embarrassment of going to the highest bidder at \$25. It might even lead to a full commission.

It is the opinion of many small project practitioners that the most important source of new clients is referrals from satisfied clients. Black line elevations of a project, a cinch to produce with CAD, can be used to produce personalized notepaper. At our local print shop, 100 note stock plus matching envelopes cost less than \$75 and make a wonderful housewarming present that advertises you every time it is used.

Enter design competitions if the sponsor plans to publish a journal containing identification and photographs of all the entries. My clients love to see a picture of their house with their name and that of their architect. Years later, it still happens to be on their coffee table. They don't mind that the project did not win an award. They love the house and are glad to tell their friends about it and also about their architect.

Keep in contact with old clients. A handwritten note on a Christmas card or a brief note acknowledging an honor that a client has received lets

the client know you still care and also increases the possibility of your being mentioned the next time the subject of architects comes up. All architects who work on small projects develop a close relationship with the owners during the design and the construction phases of a project. Objectively, both the architect and the client recognize that theirs is an artificial friendship between employer and employee. At the completion of the contractual obligation, neither the client nor the architect really expects the friendship to continue. It does not continue at its previous intensity. But, I get both pleasure and satisfaction by visiting projects that were completed 5 or 10 years ago, and genuinely enjoy keeping up with the owners.

Are not pleasure and satisfaction what it is all about? This aspect of practice is as true now as it was in 1941.

Publicity and Marketing

*Jerald Morgan, AIA
AIA Vancouver*

Strong economic times in recent years have certainly changed the way our firm markets professional services. In fact, we do very little selling to bring in new work. Instead, we concentrate our efforts more on maintaining our existing clients by providing the highest level of service possible and by not giving them reason to look elsewhere for services.

Marketing an architectural firm can require a tremendous amount of time, money, and energy. Technology (in particular word processing, color printers, and scanners) provides a simple, cost effective means of creating high quality promotional material. When we are required to compete for projects for our public clients, these tools allow us to quickly and economically

create professional looking documents tailored specifically to the client and project.

All of this said, our marketing success comes from the following:

- Service to clients
- Referrals from clients and contractors
- Networking in the community through civic clubs and volunteerism.
- Marketing in areas where we have a high level of competence.

My business as a sole practitioner grew very rapidly for five years through all of these means. My first project was an addition and remodel of a private athletic club. Before this project was completed, I received a commission to design a new athletic club. This new client found my name when he went to look at the first project. Currently, I am designing a third new fitness club for yet a different client. Neither of these new clubs would have been possible had we not provided good service on the first one and gotten good referrals from the owner and contractor.

Another client for whom I have completed several small projects is a local government agency. I met their representative while coaching his son in youth basketball. Since meeting him, I have complete three projects for the government agency. This has led directly to my obtaining contracts with other public agencies for which I completed even more projects. Networking in the community and volunteering, besides letting me spend time with great kids, were critical to my success!

Working on small projects can create a real niche for a firm if you are reliable and creative. I volunteered

once, about eight years ago, to meet with a group of people who wanted to build a new library. By meeting with this group one Saturday morning each month for about one year, I earned the trust of their immediate group and of the library board.

Since completing the volunteer work, I finished several studies for new library projects and one new library facility. I have become their reliable resource for project information when they need something small done and a source they refer to other architects for joint ventures on the bigger projects. This marketing or volunteer time did not cost me any money; it cost only time working toward a good cause with great people.

My success at marketing in this manner started with recognition of the needs of a possible client when I was working out at his club and saw how busy it had become. I simply asked if they had any plans to expand. One week later, I met with the owner and, shortly after that time, had an agreement to work together. That was seven years ago. I have since completed three phases of additions, designed his new house—which is under construction—and am starting phase 4, a locker room remodel. I have traveled with this client to seminars and conventions because I am interested in his business success. Knowing his industry has been key in creating successful projects for him.

This type of success with several clients has created some growing pains, particularly in the workload. In fact, because of the workload, I recently merged my firm with an eight-man firm. A significant portion of my job is to market the services of our new firm. I continue to work on small projects because I enjoy them and also because they lead to larger projects.

Common Sense Marketing

*Randolph C. Henning, AIA
AIA Winston-Salem*

I recently attended the *Marketing for Small to Medium Size Firms* seminar at the 2000 AIA National Convention in Philadelphia. The presentation, given by a marketing professional, focused on printed material, Web pages, networking, and the like. There was consensus that marketing was vital to the strength and survival of any small to medium sized firm. Nothing earth shattering there! (By the way, the only exception was one person who acknowledged that he didn't have to market as he admitted that his mom was his only client.) While the 90-minute session was informative, it was, unfortunately, not presented in the context of our current explosive economic building boom.

I think the majority of small office practitioners would agree that answering the telephone has been the best marketing tool of late. The majority of projects are coming to the small practitioner via a listing in the yellow pages, word of mouth, and referrals from colleagues. So, the real questions are as follows: How does one market when work is plentiful? How does one take time to market when there is no time? How does one market on a limited budget? Obviously, with the majority of our time in the present boom allocated to getting the project(s) done versus what little time we have left towards getting the project(s), small practitioners must focus their marketing efforts, energy, and dollars towards a common sense approach:

- Maintain your reputation
- Monitor and continue to improve your quality of service

- Remain flexible and responsive
- Take care in not over-committing
- Learn to say "no" selectively
- Recognize market niches, but take care in not over specializing
- Continue to improve and expand your network among your colleagues
- Minimize ego and maximize listening
- Maintain existing relationships and cultivate new relationships
- Get the word out about your firm, services and projects: both awarded and completed.

In other words, continuing to hone your personal and professional social skills will go a long way toward maintaining your marketing presence. In addition, you should continue to maintain and/or develop generic and niche specific marketing materials, create and maintain a Web presence, and photograph your completed projects. Obviously, if you seek to expand into new market niches, you will desire to obtain larger or more numerous building projects or will want to create a very specialized practice. Greater and more immediate effort needs to be made on your printed marketing materials. For a small practitioner, that effort might mean outsourcing the development of your marketing strategy, printed materials, and publicity to marketing and public relation consultants.

Remember that marketing that takes place when work slows down is marketing that already is too late. It is critical to market constantly so when a downturn in the industry takes place, opportunities can continue.

Get Your Name Out There

*James E. Snyder, AIA
AIA Montana*

If you are starting a small office, the first thing to do is call the telephone company for a listing; then you need to get your name out there. Volunteer to be the architect for community-based projects. Your city is constantly building things: park structures, skating facilities, etc. Your volunteer involvement with city and park personnel eventually can lead to projects that pay.

Habitat for Humanity has a great need for architects. At present, their national Plan Book has only pre-schematic design quality drawings of their house examples to build from. In most cases you will need to do drawings for their project. That's why they need you: to draw up some plans. Above your logo in the corner of the drawing add the note: These drawings are donated by James E. Snyder, Architect, P.C. Many contractors and business people are involved in the Habitat for Humanity construction process. Everybody seeing the drawings knows it took hours to do them.

Join your local and state contractors' associations. They are looking for involvement from all parts of the building community, including from architects. Two years ago, I designed and built the 4th of July parade float for the Upper Yellowstone Builders Association. We won first place in our class. It was a huge construction of the forms on their logo, which I designed for them gratis a year earlier. I am the only architect in their association. I got three log residences the next year through networking.

Whenever you volunteer, send a press release to the local media that

details your involvement. Press releases should also be sent whenever you attend classes or receive recognition from your peers.

It's a slow process to get your name out there. Every avenue you can put your efforts into will eventually help get you more work.

Tips from the Trenches

*Diana K. Melichar, AIA
AIA Chicago*

As design professionals, we try to sell our clients on the benefits of the master planning process. We can describe the five or six phases of design and construction with our eyes closed. Yet how many times have you heard your clients say that they would like to short-circuit the process? They want just "a sketch" and "let's get the carpenter to build it." We know this short-sighted approach will cost our clients time and money in the long run. And, our clients might not get what they thought they asked for.

So why is it that we can see the grand plan of design, but we do not envision a grand plan for our design firms? Perhaps it is because we were taught a design methodology in architecture school but weren't taught how to market those skills to the public. So, many of us know that we can provide great design work and client services, but we do not know how to get the word out. And, worse yet, we are so busy tending to our present work that there is no time to generate new leads. Therefore, we haphazardly market ourselves in a hit or miss fashion, sometimes successfully and sometimes miserably. We miss the master planning of marketing and go for the sketch-on-a-napkin approach.

I spoke with Audrey Cusack, a successful arts and architecture marketing

consultant in the Chicago area, who gave me insights into a unified marketing approach. She stressed that a marketing plan is key to a firm's marketing success. Once the plan is created, marketing is not a hit or miss proposition anymore.

I will liken a design firm's marketing strategy to our six phases of the architectural design process. Our schematic design is similar to the creation of a marketing plan; construction documentation is equivalent to the writing of a marketing plan; and the construction phase is like the implementation of the marketing plan.

Audrey fondly called our interview "tips from the trenches" and kindly shared her highlights for our Small Project Forum members.

Following, in outline form, is a summary of our interview.

Diana: Audrey, tell me about your career as a marketing consultant.

Audrey: I have a degree in art history and have always been interested in art and architecture. After college I did outside sales and marketing in corporate America for five years. When I moved to Chicago, I decided to combine my interest in art and design with my sales skills to become the marketing director for an architecture firm specializing in corporate interiors. I have worked independently for the last nine years in marketing the allied fields of fine and decorative art, photography, architecture, and design.

Diana: Why do small firms need a marketing consultant?

Audrey: Architects should do what they do best: design and architecture. Marketing yourself is difficult and uncomfortable. People either shy away

from it or appear too modest, or they overcompensate and appear too aggressive.

Diana: How should I expect a marketing consultant to help me?

Audrey: With your marketing consultant, you should establish a business plan—an action plan with specific tasks, benchmark dates, etc. Sign this together, and this will become your Agreement of Services. The marketing consultant's job is to implement the plan.

Diana: In small architecture firms, the client is often "buying the architect." What role, then, does the marketing consultant play?

Audrey: Besides implementing the business plan, the marketing consultant will play a supporting role behind the scenes. This would include cold calling, introductions, putting people together, dissemination of marketing materials, etc.

Diana: How would I find a marketing consultant?

Audrey: Just as you would find other professionals or consultants: word of mouth and networking. You could also contact the Society for Marketing Professional Services, a national trade association.

(Note: I reviewed the Web site of SMPS at info@smps.org. They seemed helpful with respect to marketing publications and general information about marketing. They appear to have chapters throughout the United States).

Diana: What skills should a marketing consultant possess?

Audrey: Good communication skills, a strong sales background, and an interest in architecture.

Diana: What tips do you have for small firms that might not have the budget for a marketing consultant?

Audrey: There is no magic bullet for success—just the basic tenets of sales and marketing. But just because it's simple doesn't mean it's easy. Following is some of my advice from the trenches:

On Marketing Materials:

- Go to whatever lengths necessary to get top photography. Plan for it. Use a photographer who is regularly published in magazines that you would like to target. He or she will probably already have an in with editors and can submit images on your behalf. It cannot be stressed enough to not scrimp here. It shows, and is a reflection of your self-image. If you get others to share in the photography cost, be clear about the arrangement because you never want to burn a bridge. (Who's paying what percentage of the creative fee as opposed to an order of prints?)
- With this photography, enter everything. It only takes one award to become an award-winning architect. Then, do announcement mailings about the award.
- Spend the money on photography, not necessarily production. Promotional materials can be done in-house to a large extent because of the quality of what you're starting out with (scanning, printing, copying). Even if your project sheets are black and white, here is the first opportunity to show off your design ability and creativity. The project sheets' only role is to help get the

interview—where you show off the real stuff.

- Develop a “USP,” a unique selling position. This, of course, can change depending on the situation. What sets you apart from the competition for a particular job? Does your brochure set you apart from the competition, or does it look like everybody else’s?

On Proposals:

- Answer RFP’s in precisely the way the information was requested to show that you could subordinate your ideas and follow directions. Until you are hired, repackaging and presenting the RFP response in a way you think is more appropriate is perceived as arrogant and extremely annoying when a number of firms are being compared. Compliment the prospect on how well the RFP was organized.
- In an RFP response or in your brochure, avoid lofty archi-speak in favor of plain English that the prospect will understand. Speak his or her language, not that of your peers. It is what is important to him, not to you, that counts—yet.

On Selling:

- Nobody sells a project like a happy client. Include a testimonial atop the project sheet. Ask them to occasionally intercede for you to reach a key prospect. Let them show off your design in a site visit, and let them know how very much you appreciate it.
- Become a comarketer with a happy client in promoting the project to a broader network. Their milieu is your expanded market—especially their competition, trade publications, and industry contests.

- Get your foot in the door by being absolutely aware of the intrusion when making a cold call. Lead off a telephone call the way Europeans do with, “I’m sorry to bother you.” Politeness and speed go a long way. It is the presumption of time, automatic first name basis, etc. that puts off a professional. And, if a cold call goes particularly well, quick—make five more! Your enthusiasm comes through.

- Every objection is a reason to close. Such as, “Yes, we’re a small firm—but that means direct involvement by the principal on a daily basis.” Or, “As a small firm, you’ll be the most important project we’ll undertake this year and you’ll see that reflected in our service.” Or, “So the only thing standing in our way is that we’re short on historic preservation experience. If we were to associate with another firm who had this or work with a consultant to round out the team, then could we work together?”

- Sell the benefits, rather than the features, of working with you. Every time you state a feature, be sure to follow it up with whatever would answer “so what this means to you is _____.” You do not literally have to say or write the rejoinder, but make sure you fill in the blank automatically. (An example of a feature would be that you are a small firm. A benefit of that feature is a high level involvement by the principals.)

- Don’t just say how much you want the job; *ask for it.*

On diversifying your work through marketing:

- Associate with another firm that has experience in a particular area you wish to infiltrate (such as library

design) when you can contribute something they are lacking (such as preservation). Be clear on the verbiage in joint promotions. Never burn a bridge.

Marketing is expensive. If 10 percent of the prior year’s profits are allocated to marketing (including yours and the consultant’s fees), that amount may not be very much. Do whatever self-promotion you can for free. Volunteer to be on panels, give lectures (especially to your intended markets), teach a course, be part of an exhibition, serve on a jury, etc. Then, send an announcement to the press on this work. Each event, and each publication of it, is an entry on your resume. Editors and organizers are harried and short on time. Offer to do it yourself, and you will do all of you a favor.

AIA/CES Education Reporting Form

(Use to report learning unit hours earned for Small Project Forum Report series only)

Instructions

- Use the following learning objectives to focus your study while reading this report.
- Complete the questions below, then check your answers.
- To receive credit, fill out and submit the *AIA/CES Education Reporting Form*.

Learning Objectives/Questions

After reading this report you should be able to:

1. List options for receiving publicity
2. List options for marketing
3. Describe the roll of photography and options for obtaining this service
4. Describe the components of a firm’s image

Tips & Techniques

Marketing Magic of Holiday Greetings

Kevin L. Harris, AIA
AIA Baton Rouge

Business texts (and the school of hard knocks) teach that maintaining contact with past or prospective clients increases the chances of their becoming future clients. A proven technique for keeping awareness of our work in front of potential clients is the practice of sending holiday greetings each year.

The Card and its Contents—Store-bought cards are most common and better than nothing at all. However, 10 years of holiday greeting experience demonstrate that cards created by the firm get more notice. We now look forward to receiving return responses, including notes of thanks and promises of keeping or framing. The cover may be of any nature: a drawing, a render-

ing, or a photograph of a recent project. The cover reinforces our message of good design and attention to detail. The message on the inside should reinforce the cover or the firm's mission and should be inclusive of the season. The greeting's objective is to welcome, not to alienate, potential clients.

We find that there is no substitute for an original signature. The entire office staff signs some cards. The back (or inside front cover) provides additional marketing space and should at least contain firm logo, name, address, phone numbers, Web site address, and email. We also use these areas to describe the cover art and to list any awards that the firm has garnered the previous year.

Mailing Lists—As this is our firm's only direct mail piece each year, we do not scrimp on the number of cards sent. We mail these to most everyone in our telephone database including friends, family, suppliers, consultants, business acquaintances, members of the organizations in which we're involved, community leaders, and past and potential clients. Each year, new projects result from the mailing, exceeding the costs of covering the cards and postage.

Benefits—Holiday cards are a natural and accepted way to contact people on a yearly basis. The cards serve as reminders to our past clients that we are still around and practicing architecture. The cards let our clients know that we remember them and their special project. Holiday cards also have a longer life than regular direct mail. While most direct mail pieces are trashed daily, we display holiday greetings at the office and in our homes for weeks. Sending cards at the beginning of the season increases their display time. Well-designed,

finely crafted cards further increase the chances of clients keeping and displaying the cards as mementos or artifacts.

In a day and age of fast, impersonal, electronic information, the old-fashioned card has a special appeal and is a natural marketing tool. From our entire staff, we wish you and your practice the very best success in the coming year.

Seasons Greetings!

Go High Profile

Ted Mondzelewski, AIA
AIA Philadelphia

Having the marketplace, i.e., your clients, your friends, the newspaper, and anyone who passes by one of your job sites and having at least the perception that your firm is busy, active, and being hired a lot, all are keys to good marketing and publicity. The perception is that "these guys must be good to be so busy." Let everyone know when you are hired for a project. Let everyone know when your project is ready to be completed. And, by all means, let everyone know when the project is completed, especially when the landscaping (including grass) is looking its best. Clients, the press, and the general public all are interested in what is going on in the community. When you are doing a project out of town, the press is still very willing to report on it, to somewhat boast that "one of our guys" was selected to do a far away project. The perception in this case is that "these guys not only are good, but are well known."

We all know that the hallmark of getting new work is doing good work and providing excellent services. But that aspect alone will limit your marketing if no one but that client is

aware of your efforts. When the press and general public become aware of your good work, you automatically expand who will know about you and possibly seek you out. When your clients become aware of the other projects you are working on, it will increase their confidence in your firm, and hence, bring repeat business.

Be relentless in submitting press releases; in notifying your clients of publication, not only of their projects, but other similar ones; and in placing a sign at every job site to let everyone passing by know that the masterpiece emerging from the ground started out with your pencil (or mouse).

Specifications as a Marketing Tool

Eugene A. Groshong
Arcom MASTERSPEC

How often do we hear people ask, "Why do I need an architect?" In some cases, the law may not require the owner to use the services of an architect, and this question becomes a legitimate one. One answer, of course, is design. An architect can provide the aesthetics of a good design and the efficiency of the thought-out design process. While this is a good answer, it often will take more to convince some potential clients to hire you. Another answer that will help sell your services is "documents." As an architect, you will provide the client with drawings and specifications that will provide clear communication so everyone involved with the project will understand exactly what is to be built.

Drawings show the owner how many of their requirements will be provided, and they communicate the same information to the contractor. But, drawings

do not indicate the quality of materials and workmanship that are to be provided: specifications do so. Most contractors who offer to design as well as to build the owner's project do not provide specifications. Point out this fact to prospective clients and show them the types of specifications you will be providing to them.

When you show prospective clients pictures of previous work, also show them samples from the contract documents. Relate to them the kinds of misunderstandings that can occur when specifications are not used and when sketches are substituted for working drawings. Adding specifications and working drawings to your presentation will show that you are not just an artist but also a practical businessperson.

What Is Your Image?

Laura Lee Russell, AIA
AIA Oklahoma City

Image may be the first perception of your firm resulting from your work, your self-presentation, or the presentation of others. When possible, it is important to create this perception, in effect, creating an image. Image building is used to compliment your marketing efforts. Image building must be proactive not reactive. Determine the target audience. The expense of the presentation and the size of the audience help determine which methods image building should be selected. No single activity will work.

- **Advertising**—The best way to reach a large target audience
- **Direct mail**—Specific target/client contact with a custom approach (best time to deliver is between December and January)

- **Special events and programs**—Sponsor an event during a target audience gathering
- **Professional publications**—Architecture and construction journals that your target might reference
- **Client publications**—Utilize the publications readily circulated in front of your target audience
- **Self publications**—Vanity Press, such as a Web site or brief newsletter of your firm's activities
- **Organizations**—Select one that interests you and plan to participate
- **Trade shows**—These are costly; select one attended by decision-makers
- **Personal appearances**—Select a subject of wisdom and present it to those interested.

How to Build an Image for Your Firm, Randle Pollock, SMPS News, 1985.

The Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) is devoted to the marketing activities of individuals employed in architectural, engineering, interior design, landscape architecture, and planning and construction management firms. Many documents of interest and a monthly newsletter are published by SMPS. Contact SMPS: 99 Canal Center Plaza, Suite 250, Alexandria, VA 22314. (703) 549-6117, fax (703) 549-2498, www.smps.org

Business Card on a Mini CD

Eugene M. Hollander, AIA
AIA Connecticut

A new publicity and marketing tool has recently emerged with lots of potential for small business practitioners. I noticed several examples at our recent AIA Convention in Philadelphia and am sure we will see more applications shortly.

Basically, it is now possible to include a significant multimedia presentation on a mini CD and to distribute it as your new company business card. While this may not be for everyone, the very possibility of coupling CD capability with a traditional marketing device like a business card opens many possibilities.

Given the rich visual and graphic presentations of their practice that architects wish to convey, this medium seems like a natural.

Here are some specifics, but you can get more information yourself from *BizNetCard.com*:

1. It is all possible because CDs are recorded from the inside out. This means that with only a 1/2" or so of space on the disk used, one can cut away the remainder and shape the resulting plastic to any convenient configuration. A business card size of 2" x 3 1/2" is only one type. A mini CD with 40 megs of RAM can fit on a rectangle of about 40mm x 80mm, similar to a standard business card.
2. With 40 megs of RAM, all kinds of cool things are possible: lots of images, walk-throughs, sound and music accompaniment, videos, and much more. In fact, the most interesting thing about these scenarios

is the creative possibilities that one can come up with. It is a whole new opportunity: one that architects should get quite excited about.

3. We are speaking here of both multimedia and Web-based access. This is a key value added that comes from making your calling card, so to speak, interactive. Because one can load all manner of digital files on the CD, a link can be forged between the mini CD and your Web site—assuming you have one. This approach is a great way of tracking who has contacted you and how they heard about you.
4. The content on your business card CD is, of course, up to you. The nature of this product is ALL media not message. The message is up to the author. And that, of course, is the marketing and communications challenge. Some will have experience and interest in developing their own multimedia presentation. Others will hire that service much as you might hire a firm to produce a video for you.
5. Software, like Macromedia Director, is commonly used for this kind of presentation, although one could develop a Power Point or other graphic presentation. Simple photos or projects and/or drawings could be stitched together. The sky is the limit. However you craft your visual story, keep in mind that this is a capsule presentation intended to interest and solicit a response back to your office. Nevertheless, 40 megs afford the space to tell a very satisfactory story.
6. Finally, a word about price: The firm referred to above advised me that one could purchase a kit for under \$100. This would allow you

to produce a dozen mini CDs, complete with labels and plastic business card cases. You would, of course, have to create the content and then press your own business card with your own CD printer! You could also hire a firm like this or someone in your area who is experienced with CD production to develop your program and print whatever number of mini CD business cards you may need. Here the costs vary greatly, but a ballpark of several thousand to develop the content is common (to that add about \$1.00 per CD with label and all).

If you have further questions, give me a call. I am also interested in hearing about any architect or architecture firm that has experimented with this approach.

Doing Dirty Work

Lisa K. Stacholy, AIA
AIA Atlanta

At present, we have the luxury of choosing the *best of the best* clients to work for. It almost seems like we are *antimarketing* at times, but we know that it will not always be that way. To maintain a constant and balanced workflow, we developed five main mechanisms that have become a part of our practice. First, (it's obvious, but tried and true) always have plenty of business cards: you never know when you may have the opportunity to distribute them. (We found that our engineers and consultants are more than happy to carry some of our cards around. The more work we get, the more work we give to our engineers!)

Second, have some good quality note cards printed up—we use them to remind folks we're around (in a

nonaggressive way, of course) i.e., send someone a congratulatory note when they receive a promotion or are mentioned in a trade journal.

Third, we photograph our current projects on a regular basis and maintain a project statement file that gives the vital statistics on noteworthy projects. On several occasions, potential clients have called with specific inquiries and are amazed when we have this information at our fingertips to share.

Fourth, (and we think this item is really important) we answer every inquiry call with the same level of personal interest we would like for someone to show to us. In addition, we landed good projects because months ago we returned an inquiry call, spent more than a few seconds listening and sharing our experience with the inquirer, and offered our opinion or suggestions for free. The real benefit to this approach is that when we wow the inquiring call with our willingness to help, the potential client is thankful and looks forward to trying to work with us in the future. However, we have to be careful to offer something of value to the caller: a reference book, a name/number at the local code office, or just a suggestion on how to proceed.

Fifth (and we think this is the most important mechanism of all), do a good job, respect your present clients, thank them often, and they will remember to take care of you when they have the opportunity. Good Karma pays.

Feed Your Roots

*Donald R. Wardlaw, AIA
AIA San Francisco*

I believe that when someone endorses someone else, they are staking a part of their own reputation on the wisdom of the endorsement. If I am the beneficiary of the endorsement or referral, I am motivated to do two things. First, I want to live up to the favorable characterization of my services and myself if at all possible. Second, I want the person who made the referral to feel like they made a good call. This second point is especially important in the context of marketing since the roots of my prosperity stem from referrals. Eventually, it occurred to me that it might be a good idea to ask my client, as a parting favor when the project is done, to contact the person who made the referral and let them know things turned out okay. This system is a good way to keep the roots healthy.

Simplicity

*David C. Hughes, AIA
AIA Columbus*

How many times have you sped toward an upcoming construction project and anxiously awaited to read the project sign only to discover that: 1) there is no sign, 2) the printing is so small that you need binoculars, or 3) there are tens of names that are impossible to read as you charge on by. It has happened to me many times. Only after the third or fourth trip do I really present myself with an opportunity to see who are the design professionals involved in the project. I have found this situation to be the rule for many of the construction projects in our area for more than 20 years.

As we began our practice those 20 years ago, particularly with the residential and small commercial projects, I vowed that every project was to have a job sign that would be simplicity itself, quickly and effectively calling out that our firm was involved in the project.

First, I made sure that the sign was placed facing oncoming traffic if at all possible. Second, the firm logo was to dominate the copy (about three-fourths) and be simple enough to be understood and recognizable from some distance. Third, color or, more precisely, contrast also was important. Black-on-white or white-on-black could be interchanged from sign to sign, providing variety and interest with the same clarity and impact. And fourth, firm name and telephone numbers complete the copy. The message is always clear, consistent, recognizable, and readable. And, as an extra bonus, it could be used over and over again.

Piled high and stuck on a top shelf in the storage closet is a wide array of print advertising and promotional efforts. But, for my money, the best and most successful marketing effort for our firm stands in front of each one of our projects waving to every passerby.

Using Research from Technology to Bridge Your Marketing Program

Tapping the Wealth of Information Available

Ronald Worth, CPC, CPSM
Executive Vice President of the Society
for Marketing Professional Services

A recent article in the *New York Times* stated that the average individual of the 1800s was rarely exposed in his entire lifetime to the amount of information published daily in a typical *New York Times* newspaper. Today we are experiencing an information glut with news coming at us from all directions. Currently the Internet supports more than 80 million Web sites and approximately 200 million Internet users in 160 countries and is expected to keep increasing exponentially into the future. Managing this information through your marketing program can be critical to staying on top of current market conditions, following client activities, and forecasting future trends within the design industry.

The sudden explosion of electronic data is a natural extension of the rapid changes and advancements in the technology world. It has been barely a decade since the microchip transformed the way we think about, analyze, and transact business today. Now, through remote access to the office server, connection of all office workstations, and integration of dial-up accounts with email, you can regularly manage and monitor company communication channels from most anywhere.

Marketing research initially begins with this development of local net-

works to improve data sharing and office communications. It isn't long until management discovers the advantages of easy access to posted project schedules, job estimates, and projections through software similar to Timberline; the status of AutoCAD drawings with Arch T and Precision Estimating; OSHA MSDS sheets; UPS delivery status; government agencies; subcontractors; and suppliers. Then the company is maintaining living schedules and job calendars for immediate feedback of personnel and resources and adding new procurement tools such as Buzzsaw and Cephrem. Added to these tools are in-house resources such as Dodge Services (both electronic plan services and project tracking), daily logs and reports, time sheets, payrolls, change orders, RFIs, submittals, and job photography (digitally uploaded and stored on the company server).

Several new advances are changing traditional project management operations and, in turn, providing a new arena of information for data manipulation and enhancing communication with clients, competitors, and coworkers. Among these advances are personal digital assistants (PDAs), company Web sites, voice-recognition technology, improved project information managers (PIMs), teleconferencing and online learning, product-specific Web sites (which literally are warehouses of information on companies and materials), and "intelligence agents" (like having your own private eye), which sift through this mass of data.

What a difference a few years make. Only five years ago, most of us pursued information on clients or new territory by going to our friendly

neighborhood library, sitting down at the card catalog, and searching for topics relevant to the areas we were researching. Subject, title, and author were the perimeters; the librarian was our partner in these quests. Usually the information was stored somewhere else, and we had to come back and review it later. We sifted through magazines or searched through microfilm.

However, quite a revolution has taken place. Since the 1960s, information has been gathered electronically by a variety of commercial services such as the Dow Jones News Retrieval, various universities' Dialog, and Lexis-Nexus. These giants have gathered the information into somewhat clumsy databases used—for a fee—primarily by law offices, government agencies, private industry, and university libraries. Now the growth of the Internet to millions of users and the competition created by major Web search engines like Yahoo, Alta Vista, Infoseek, Hotbot, Excite, and Webcrawler are forcing these database services to rethink selling their proprietary information. Web search sites make money through advertising, such as banner ads. And, the ease of use of the search engines is staggering. It is really not much different than calling 411 and asking the operator for information. You can organize these search engines with *bookmarks* through your Internet service provider and readily access them at your convenience from your office, on the job, or from your home or car.

Consequently, design firms today are reorganizing their approaches to research and document management strategically to improve business practices and boost productivity. Companies need to be nimble given the

dynamic nature of the current market, and each decision and action needs to be as correct as possible. Whatever your strategic plan, there are good research methods available to you on the Internet. Manpower development, competitor research, market expansion, personnel background checks, market share monitoring, trends and development tracking in your segment of the building industry—all this and more can be accomplished by your company via the Internet. Based on several years of researching the market and technological changes in the building industry, a new publication released this year by McGraw-Hill, *Building Profits through Marketing in the Construction Industry*, documents many of these methods and tools: too many to list in this short article.

Looks like a lot of work, but the results for you and for your organization will be focused. Results will be based on fact and can direct your strategic plan to add to the firm's bottom line.

As you harness new technology to feed your research program, set priorities and precede step by step. Try not to take on too much all at once. Split the pieces among your staff and support personnel. Prioritizing tasks will focus your team on the items that must be accomplished. As you go about your regular daily assignments, meetings, estimate and proposal preparation, and problem solving you will encounter pieces of the research puzzle that you can put into place.

While the task of setting up a research program may be mind boggling the first time, we can in good conscience argue that, over the long run, recognizing and acting on opportunities for cheap but good research

will put the organization in a significantly superior position vis-à-vis its competition.

You have completed the planning process with your team. Now as you review existing market conditions, company position, and potential environmental forces, another enormous wealth of information confronts you. The Internet is enormous.

As has been mentioned in many articles, one of the compelling reasons not to ignore the Internet is that you don't want your competitors to have the edge in terms of accessibility and visibility. Whatever your research agenda, review the many diverse sites available to provide you with the information you need. You will be exposed to everything from accounting statistics, legal services and settlements, market penetration by your local competition, to projected trends in your market segment. As we discussed earlier, there are endless possibilities to explore as you develop a list of preferred resources. Enlist the support and assistance of the entire office, especially if you are all linked by means of a server or intranet. Maintenance and diligent pruning will be necessary, but the result will be a powerful tool that will focus everyone on the key clients, competitors, and prospects and keep the team working in a common direction for the company. Don't wait, get started today with your marketing research program.

If you would like to report on issues relevant to the Small Projects Forum from your area on a regular basis, we invite you to join our network of Local Advisors. Please call Laura Lee Russell, AIA.

The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Advisory Group, the AIA staff members who prepared the report, or The American Institute of Architects.

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Sample Answers

① List options for receiving publicity

Produce quality work, design award programs, submit project to interested publication and/or media organization, volunteer material to select groups (with a note that these materials were donated by you), and give public lectures.

② List options for marketing

Maintain existing clients, AIA National referrals, component referrals, and referrals from satisfied clients. Network in the community through civic clubs and volunteerism, focus on services where you have a high level of competence, list in the yellow pages, and join allied organizations.

③ Describe the roll of photography and options for obtaining this service

Most projects need to be communicated in a manner readily available to the lay public. The two most common communication methods are drawings and photographs. Drawings are common to projects, but photography may not be common. Well-done photography is a key to successful marketing and publication. Hire a professional who specializes in architecture photography. Look for someone who has a track record of being published in magazines or other local media outlets. This service may be pricey, but producing in-house materials that use the picture can offset the cost. Look for others involved with the project to contribute to the fees: subconsultants, project team members, or product suppliers. Discuss the cost of creative fees, ordering of prints and copyrighting prior to the photo shoot. Look for others who may have produced photographs of the project: local newspapers, the clients marketing department, or local contractor associations.

④ Describe the components of a firm's image

Image building is a complement to your publicity and marketing efforts. These efforts are made up of large-scale targeted advertising, direct mail, and your printed material (stationery, business cards, report covers, proposals, logo, self-publications). Additional outlets for your image are special events and program sponsorship, professional publications, client publications, participation in other organizations, trade shows, and personal appearances.



AIA/CES Education Reporting Form

(Use to report learning unit hours earned for Small Project Forum report series only)

MEMBER INFORMATION

LAST NAME FIRST NAME MIDDLE INITIAL OR NAME

AIA ID NUMBER

Program/project title: Small Project Forum Report #19

☐ Publicity and Marketing

Completion date (M/D/Y): ____ / ____ / ____

AIA/CES Credit:

Each report will earn you two AIA/CES LU hours.

Material resources used: Journal articles: These articles or sponsored section addresses issues concerning the health, safety, or welfare of the public.

I hereby certify that the above information is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and that I have complied with the AIA Continuing Education Guidelines for the reported period.

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DATE

SEND COMPLETED FORM TO: The American Institute of Architects, Small Project Forum PIA, 1735 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20006; fax (202) 626-7518.