

Brand Building in the Era of the Empowered Client

Questions + Answers from the October 25, 2012 Webinar

Replies are color-coded: [Liza Hausman] [Jane Frederick] [Katrina Hermann] [Bud Dietrich]

Managing Time and Money

Q: Do you have ideas for simplifying the process of keeping your website and Facebook account and Houzz all up to date with the least amount of time and effort? [William Mammen] *Another portion of the 2013 AIA Convention half day workshop, [Tools and Trends in Web Platforms and Social Media for Residential Architects & Small Project Practitioners](#), will cover this topic. Ann Harris, who will present this content, has already posted a blog entry on the topic on AIA KnowledgeNet, [Put Your Firm's Social Media On Auto-Pilot](#). [Bud Dietrich]*

Q: How much time does each of you devote to online marketing each week? [Scott LaBenz] Q: How much time per week do the participants spend on social media? [Jean Dufresne] Q: What percentage of your work week goes to social media development/interface for a small office (1-5 people)? [Daniel Weaver] Q: Can the panelist estimate hours per month on updates, blogging, etc.? [Dominic LaPierre] Q: What is the learning curve (time required) for creating blogs and updating your websites when you have work to do? [Edwin Lee]

I spend about 10 hours a week – not all of it is online. It is important to go to the functions where you interact face to face with people. I also write a monthly newspaper article that doubles as a blog post. My web page and blog are on a Wordpress site that is very easy to use. I currently have a bought template (\$49) and have uploaded all of our photos, etc. I have an estimate from a local company to create a custom website also hosted on Wordpress that I will have done as soon as I have the money. I have a two person firm. [Jane Frederick]

Q: Who typically manages the Houzz content for architectural firms - marketing or project PM? Who is best served to answer all the questions from viewers? [Kim Gillis] Who undertakes this effort (principal, manager, intern, etc.)? [Dominic LaPierre]

I have a two person firm – so I manage all the Houzz content. [Jane Frederick]

As a sole practitioner, I manage all of my Houzz content as well as other social media / website content. [Bud Dietrich]

Website

Q: How do you recommend getting STARTED with a GOOD quality website? I've been hesitant for years because I want it to be perfect! [Patrick Barry]

Wordpress is very easy to use. When we first had a website 13 years ago, we would have to pay the website developer every time we wanted to upload a photo. With Wordpress you can do it yourself. [Jane Frederick]

We will be running a tutorial as part of the workshop at next year's AIA convention. Enoch Sears (www.businessofarchitecture.com) will demonstrate how to use Wordpress to easily create a website. [Bud Dietrich]

Q: What if your portfolio or website isn't as extensive or what you'd like it to be? (i.e. can't yet stand up to the harsh light of the new competitive day?) Get started anyway? [Mark Connors]

Yes get started anyway. But please don't have the dreaded "under construction" tags. I don't mean your building that are under construction but an empty web page that you haven't put any content on yet. [Jane Frederick]

I would suggest you show your process. That is a big part of the project that clients rarely see before they undertake a project, clients might like seeing how their prospective architects and designers are going to make it happen. Try to use your sketches, some detail drawings maybe, and some quotes that reflect the theory behind your mission statement. [Katrina Hermann]

Yes, just get started! Using a tool like Wordpress you'll be able to quickly and easily develop a robust website. There's a whole lot that you can use to create content. Tell your story, tell a client's story, talk about process, travels, etc. It doesn't have to be project photos only. [Bud Dietrich]

Q: Do you hire website designers or create it yourself? [Roya Taheri]

I am using a Wordpress template that I have tweaked myself. The most important thing is to think about what potential clients want to see on your site. [Jane Frederick]

Business

Q: Is the current trend in sustainable design more hunt by new generation of clients that we might need to consider when displaying projects? I see it is more successful to create joint firms to become team of consultants where joint experience could make clients to have more confidence when searching architect firms. [Jose Mejia]

Q: Mark, How much time is needed to maintain these different presences – quality presence. Do you get outside help setting up publishing and speaking connections? [Allegra Kochman]

Q: What are the top three "Must Do/Confirm Now" items? [Lisa Stacholy]

Photography/Copyright/IP

Q: Do all of the photographs need to be done by a professional? Or if you're good at composition, can you just use a digital camera & save money? [Richard Kaufman] Q: Do you use a professional photographer? [Lina Burnett]

Professional photography is ideal, however you can certainly take photos yourself, and here are some articles to help you do so - [Taking Photos](#), [Staging Photos](#). Some architects are reaching out to photography students, and to real estate photographers who cost less. [Liza Hausman]

We hire professional photographers for the projects that we are going to enter in competitions and photograph the other projects ourselves. [Jane Frederick]

Nothing beats a well done, professional photograph. If that's not possible, follow the Houzz pointers to create the best photographs you can. And remember that it's the story that the photograph is telling that's important. The Houzz users seem to gravitate to the most compelling stories, especially when the photograph shows them something that they can use to improve their lives. [Bud Dietrich]

Q: How do you deal with the copyright of your images and projects? [Shawn Chinudomsub]

We list who the photographer is on the posting. Our agreement with our photographer is we can use his photos for any of our marketing and that includes online marketing. [Jane Frederick]

It's important that the photographer has granted the rights to use the image and that the photographer is given credit. [Bud Dietrich]

Q: How do the panelists feel about their photos and ideas being so public? This increases exposure but can create a very competitive atmosphere amongst professionals. Do they fear non architects and contractor stealing their intellectual property? [Zachary Shirk]

I think Mark said it best in that this new way of doing things is all about sharing. But none of us put our construction documents online for anyone to use. [Jane Frederick]

Q: Do you have any advice for architects trying to break-in to the residential market who have very few photographs? [Sean Stewart]

Talk with builders and real estate agents they are often good leads for residential projects. [Jane Frederick]

Get known as an expert in the residential market by talking to builders, realtors, etc. Once you become recognized as an expert, you'll become the go-to person. [Bud Dietrich]

Houzz Survey/Client Experience

Q: Liza, if the percentage of people using HOUZZ / magazines / friends for their next project is 68%/11%/8%, respectively, is that of HOUZZ users only? If so, doesn't that skew the sample? [Garth Sheriff]

We present upfront that it is a skewed sample - but it is a sample of 9mm homeowners actively building, remodeling and decorating, and a more upscale group than average, so it's a pretty good indicator of where activity is happening and growing. [Liza Hausman]

Q: Who is Houzz biggest competitor? [Mark Connors]

No single competitor stands out; many different companies address one piece - from education, inspiration, photos, directory listings, products, and even social networking. [Liza Hausman]

Q: I see a potential problem with Houzz. Do potential clients just want your ideas, vendor info, and don't end up hiring you? [Ryan Tharp]

Once again it is about sharing but you need to balance the time spent. [Jane Frederick]

Like anything else, some folks will just want your ideas, etc. while others will hire you. Since there's no way of knowing up front which is which, I try to be open and share info with all. Engagement with the Houzz community is important and has been a very successful marketing strategy for me. [Bud Dietrich]

Q: How often do people ask to visit the projects after they saw your photos in Houzz and had spoken with you? [Edwin Lee]

We only have had one person want to visit one of our projects that they saw on Houzz. [Jane Frederick]

I haven't had anyone ask to visit a project. [Bud Dietrich]

Q: How can a startup firm use this tool? [Raymond J. Kelly]

It's a way to have an instant presence, right alongside firms that have been in business for years. A new design build firm in southern California went two years trying to get traffic to their new website. A year after creating a presence on Houzz they are now competing with the most established firms in the area. But it does require having the full package - work you can show, reviews, active community participation. But the #1 way all firms use Houzz is as a communication/collaboration tool. New firms can leverage what's there to help clients articulate their vision. [Liza Hausman]

The key is to be totally engaged in the community and to have a profile that's robust. Don't just have photos with a minimum of text. Providing detailed descriptions of the projects and providing keywords will help your images become more discoverable. [Bud Dietrich]

Q: How would the firms be different without such an online effort as Houzz? [Dominic LaPierre]

We would not have made it through the recession without our online presence. I live in a resort area and most of our clients are building second or retirement homes and research us online prior to moving to the area. We also have expanded our geographical area through Houzz. [Jane Frederick]
Whereas a few years ago my market area was local, my geographical reach has become quite large due to an online presence in general and a platform like Houzz in particular. As Liza said, people are looking for the architect they want to team with regardless of location. [Bud Dietrich]

Houzz Technical Questions

Q: Liza, Do you anticipate adding more options for "style" - Asian, contemporary, eclectic, Mediterranean, modern, traditional, and tropical don't really capture all the options. [Dawn Zuber]
Most people search using keywords. The most productive way to address this is to include all relevant keywords for each photo you upload - you can add around 100 for each so lots of opportunity. [Liza Hausman]

Q: Does Houzz charge for firm postings? [Don Colangelo]

No, it is free to list your firm and post an unlimited number of photos to your portfolio. [Liza Hausman]

Q: Can one add renderings onto Houzz? [Daniel Weaver] Q: Are renderings allowed or must the project be constructed? [Caroline Hedin] Q: Can you upload drawings to Houzz or it strictly for photographs of finished work? [Gray Houghland] Q: Why does it make a difference if an image is a rendering or photo? [Mark Connors] You can upload photos of finished spaces, products, renderings, "before" photos or anything else you want as part of your portfolio. [Liza Hausman]

Q: Do architects use Houzz for small commercial work? [Mark Connors]

I've seen some, but the community on Houzz is residential/consumer, so I'm not sure of the exposure opportunity there. [Liza Hausman]

On the Houzz [upload spaces webpage](#), it states, "Don't Upload...Photos of commercial or office spaces...Photos that do not meet these guidelines will be removed." [Bud Dietrich]

Q: Are American architects living and working outside the USA welcome at Houzz? [Richard Skorick]

Yes, we have architects from all over the world. People are more inclined than ever to work with someone they like vs. someone who is necessarily local. [Liza Hausman]