

A/E Rainmaker

The Guide to Attracting and Keeping Great Clients

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THE PARALLELS BETWEEN KEEPING EMPLOYEES AND CLIENTS

By Dennis Schrag

Your competitors are tougher than ever . . . and they are coveting your employees AND your clients! Retaining your firm's talent is very similar to keeping your clients. The processes are unbelievably parallel. It's not automatic and it's not easy.

Profitable service businesses know that there are only two significant assets: your employees and your clients. The way you win, retain and sustain clients and employees is very similar. You can't have one without the other. Retaining clients and retaining talent are both critical.

Both clients and employees:

- ◆ Provide profits
- ◆ Are time consuming
- ◆ Are hard to acquire (and getting harder)
- ◆ Require ongoing maintenance
- ◆ Must be managed

There are significant pressures in the marketplace for both employees and clients. On the employee side, the aging of the Baby Boomers and the 50 percent reduction in Gen-Xers to replace those leaving the job pool causes a significant shortage of skilled and technical talent. Add to that shortage, the worldwide demand for technical employees. More stringent visa and work-permit regulations compounds the shortage. The Gen-Xers want "a life" outside of work. So they strongly prefer a set work schedule that balances work and life. That is a big difference from the boomers who were willing to work long hours as needed. Bottom line: getting talent is tough now and will become even tougher.

Smart employers know how critical it is to retain employees. Just like securing strategic clients, the cost of securing strategic employees is a long, slow and expensive process. Once you have them, you need to keep them . . . both employees and clients.

Employee retention and client retention are not automatic. Retaining each requires smart management, knowledge of what each wants, and a written plan that is executed.

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THE PARALLELS BETWEEN KEEPING EMPLOYEES AND CLIENTS (CONT. FROM PAGE 1)

For many years managers worked hard at keeping the top 10 percent of their employees. These “A” players, just like the top 10 percent of your clients, are demanding and fickle. Both ask frequently, “What have you done for me lately?” Many organizations know that these prize winners will move up and move on. In the past we have invested considerable time and energy winning and keeping these elite clients and employees.

We oftentimes ignored or took for granted that vast middle group of employees and clients. These “B” players are the bread and butter of our workforce and our client base. They are dependable, agile, and provide the bulk of our profits. Smart firms have figured out that retaining “B” employees and “B” clients makes great economic sense. Do you have one senior manager who is responsible for retention of key clients? Do you have one senior manager who is responsible for retaining these key employees?

I have created a Client Retention form and an Employee Retention form. You can download them and adjust them to fit your business at <http://www.longview-group.com/downloads.html>.

All in all, keeping clients and employees is about communications. Listening to what they want and need and making a good faith effort pays off. Clients and employees leave because they feel unappreciated. Pure and simple.

In the book *Lessons in Loyalty*, Lorraine Grubbs West details how Southwest Airlines understands and acts to attract and keep quality customers and employees. In a nutshell, West explains how Southwest:

- ◆ Makes retention a priority
- ◆ Creates and sustains a culture of “nice”
- ◆ Knows that people give as good as they get
- ◆ Finds the “kid” in everyone - clients and employees
- ◆ Measures everything to see how it is doing. You can manage only that which you measure.

There are clear parallels between retaining clients and employees. And for both, it is planning and execution that makes the difference.

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GAIN CLIENTS’ TRUST THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

Earning and keeping a client’s trust is the key to a successful on-going relationship, but it’s not easy and there’s no guarantees. It’s like the classic Smith Barney ad: “You gain a client’s trust the old-fashioned way - you earn it!” An example of this is shown by one client’s experience, one unsuccessful attempt and one successful. The client is a V.P., National Real Estate Portfolio Manager of a national real estate management company.

Our company changed from project-by-project contracts to region-wide partnering agreements. We wanted to select a small number of design firms to work with us as partners. What we looked for were individuals who demonstrated the following qualities when working with us:

- ◆ Skill, competence, and experience in being part of a team.
- ◆ A firm with “bench strength,” overall resources, an easily understandable organizational structure, and financial stability.
- ◆ A solid reputation with other client partners who have collaborated with them.

Our expectations of a “successful” partner included:

- ◆ Be excellent at what you do, learn our business, and understand the financial constraints of each project and that of your client.

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GAIN CLIENTS' TRUST THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY (CONT.)

- ◆ Build relationships with other groups in our company that are integral to the project.
- ◆ Thoroughly consider all alternatives, and achieve results in a timely manner.

Result: You will gain our trust.

An Unsuccessful Assignment

The firm regularly complained about not getting "more" of the work on a particular job, and constantly charged additionally for all meetings. They did not take direction about overall style, resulting in a project no one liked. They specified products they were instructed to avoid and did not specify products we told them to use.

Result: Trust was eroded, and the relationship was terminated.

A successful assignment

The consultant learned our business in great detail, the technologies we used, and the infrastructure of our facilities. They offered valuable technical expertise, and did not hesitate to offer ideas on our processes and how to improve them. They acted as a research arm, keeping up with advances in technology. They provided a competent team, with the principal playing an active role.

Result: They are now a sole-source provider, and they earned our trust.

ADVICE FROM A FACILITIES MANAGER: MAXIMIZE OUR TIME TOGETHER

As long as your careers and salaries are based on your successful marketing, I will give you my perceptions of successful business development meeting procedures from the eyes of a facilities manager. You need to know, for your success, that the director of facilities demands that a service be tailored to his or her needs. If you look among yourselves, the truly successful marketing professional tailors his or her presentation to fit the client. You can do us both a favor if you do your homework before you open your mouth, or lift a telephone or lick the envelope of your mailer.

Personal contact is more advisable. Each facilities manager has unique problems even though many of our concerns are generic. It has been said that our own facilities and operations are 5 to 8 years ahead of the market. Well, eight years ago I had furniture delivery problems and I have them today. I had design problems 8 years ago and I still have them today.

Your time is precious and so is the facilities manager's. They need you to update them on product availabilities and innovation in a firm's service offerings. You need the facilities manager to let you know what the demands of the market are today and what they'll be in the future, and what's right and what's wrong with design today.

Come to the point in any meeting. Discuss the attributes of your firm. Discuss pricing. Nothing is worse than seeing a great design and then being told you'll have to check back with your main office to find out what your pricing will be on this particular design.

Don't knock your competitors. For example, in a letter I received, it stated: "Through this summer and for the last eight months, we have grown while other design firms are cutting back on staff." I think it's degrading to knock others. Take those precious sentences and extol the virtues of your firm. What about service? What is the team effort that you put together? When the facilities manager evaluates those attributes, hopefully your firm will stand out as being the better firm. Don't waste it knocking your competitors.

Come prepared but don't overstay. When you're done, get up and leave. Maybe we can't use you that moment or that day or whatever, so wait. You need to follow up, but you don't need to follow up the next day. There's nothing worse than overkill. Nobody wants to be bothered with "so-and-so is calling again." Please use your judgment.

I think that when you respect the time of the facilities manager, you'll receive the respect back in terms of purchase orders or design commissions.

ONBOARDING: IT TAKES A YEAR TO DO IT RIGHT!

By Cheryl May

Employee and particularly potential future rainmaker turnover can be one of the most expensive costs a firm can experience. Authorities widely estimate that the cost of replacing a professional can equal one year's salary and benefits, with a corresponding six-month cost for someone in a non-professional role.

When there is a shortage of qualified professionals – as currently being experienced in the A/E industry – losses can be even higher. What can you do to make sure that when you hire someone they will feel at home quickly, become productive as soon as possible, and become a valued part of your firm's "family" – experiencing personal and career fulfillment and developing a commitment to stay for the long term?

Whether your first contact with a prospective employee is a want ad, your website, a phone call, or simply your firm's reputation in the community, how you first respond to a person can determine whether he or she wants to work in your firm or not.

Among these many initial contact opportunities are your firm's application form, a referral by an employee, an on-campus recruiting effort, an internship, or for more experienced professionals, working on a project team together. Keep in mind that how your firm responds to first contacts can also include the lack of a response. If you never return

that first call, or e-mail, or follow up on an introduction, you're sending out a negative message about your firm. And people will tell others 'I never heard back from them.'

Onboarding is often an awkward time; after the "romance" of the interview process is over, comes the struggle to become comfortable in a new job and with new colleagues. The Society for Human Resource Management says that 70% of all new employees are sent home the first day because the organization was not prepared for them. Another often quoted statistic is that the highest turnover rate is within the first 90 days of employment.

Some firms find ways to give prospective employees a feeling for the company's culture and whether they'd fit in, such as a "Wall of Employees" with a photo of each person holding up an object that has personal meaning for them. Others include a photo wall, but with pictures from every company event – softball games, awards, birthdays, and other milestones. These firms have placed the pictures in highly visible spots, and make sure that prospects have time to look them over during the recruiting process.

Terracon Consulting Engineers literally gives new employees the "Red Carpet Treatment," with a crimson carpet leading into their office, not only to welcome them, but to provide a visual cue to everyone to stop in and welcome the new employee.

Terracon also assigns an ambassador, charged with filling the new person in on those elusive, informal processes that aren't documented in the company manual – how to use the Intranet, who to ask for various kinds of help, etc. The ambassador and new hire meet every other week for 90 days, so there is a scheduled time to review questions as they come up, and the new employee always has someone to ask for help.

Other firms emphasized that feeling welcomed and wanted on the first day can be as simple as finding your new desk stocked with business cards, a welcome sheet with log-in info for voicemail, computer and e-mail, or finding that your first email links to a webpage with photos of everyone in the firm. For new employees of larger firms, it can be daunting to learn a large roster of names and faces, so this kind of online directory can be very effective for telling the CEO from the CFO at the "welcome aboard" lunch.

From the first introduction to your firm to the day when an employee finally feels like "part of the family" usually takes a full year. The year offers you many opportunities to let them know they're wanted, and to engage them for the long term - and employee engagement is the key to career-long retention.

Special onboarding processes are needed for younger genera-

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ONBOARDING: IT TAKES A YEAR TO DO IT RIGHT!

tions. It is particularly important for members of Gen X/Y and Millennials to create meaning in their work early on. They value the history of the company and want to know how they fit in, and why their work has meaning in the larger scheme.

One firm respond to this issue by sending young rainmakers, managers and directors to a retreat where they have 90 minutes to build a bicycle, create a marketing plan, and sell it to the facilitator. They are then asked, "How would you feel if your work was to assemble these bicycles all day, every day?" Most of them don't find that terribly appealing, until the second question engenders a sense of purpose: "What if all those bikes you built were going to kids who couldn't otherwise have a bike?"

Onboarding begins with all-important first impressions, and can be structured to make hiring and initial welcome an extension of the recruiting process.

Cheryl May is the Director of Strategic Leadership Development at the Advanced Management Institute for Architecture and Engineering (AMI), headquartered in Napa, CA. Ms. May works with A/E/C firms in the areas of strategic leadership development, executive assessment, succession management, team building, coaching, performance management, and onboarding. AMI serves the A/E/C industry with leadership and executive development and education. Contact Cheryl May at cmay@ami-institute.com, or call 707-252-2054.

AN IMPORTANT BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT FORECAST

Astute rainmakers need to know where their particular industry is headed in the future, and how well those markets may or may not do in the coming months and years. They can then position themselves to capture the best of those markets for their firms.

PSMJ's Research Director, Bill Fanning and Dave Burstein PE, PSMJ's Consulting/Training Director examined current market trends in their recent webinar *2008 A/E/C Industry Forecast: How Are Trends Impacting Our Industry?* This information resulted from PSMJ's Quarterly Market Survey, most recently conducted in December 2007 from 301 A/E firms.

Among their many findings:

- ◆ Overall demands for A/E services are continuing to grow, but the rate of growth is definitely slowing.
- ◆ The housing market is in a free-fall! Some sub-sectors are holding up quite well and will continue to do so.
- ◆ Environmental and water/wastewater markets are very strong, but it's uncertain those growths will continue.
- ◆ Growth in commercial markets is slowing down and may soon go negative.
- ◆ After some weakness earlier this year, the transportation market is once again growing nicely.

- ◆ The government building market has started growing again and will probably continue growing through at least 2008.

- ◆ As a direct result of higher energy prices, the energy/utility market is quite strong.

- ◆ After languishing for years, there are signs of life emerging in a number of industrial markets.

- ◆ Both the healthcare and education markets remain strong, but they each have some pockets of weakness.

- ◆ Regional differences have become significant. Canada is booming (especially western Canada) while the southeast U.S. is slowing significantly.

The PSMJ experts also provided their view of 5 mega trends that will radically transform the A/E industry in the coming years, and what you should do now to prepare your firm for these changes. They are:

1. Consolidation of the A/E/C industry.
2. The weakening dollar.
3. Decline in energy costs.
4. Shortage of design professionals.
5. Mass retirement of senior principals.

For more information on this important forecast, contact David Burstein, dburstein@psmj.com, or 800-537-7765. For information on PSMJ's Surveys, contact blynch@psmj.com, or call 800-537-7765.

JARGON JUNCTION: TACKLING THE ELEVATOR SPEECH

By Kimberly Kayler

While we have all worked hard to get our logo usage consistent, keep our website updated and spend the necessary time to create meaningful marketing budgets and plans, the elevator speech still seems to be a bit of a mystery and quite unnerving. However, by tackling this mysterious concept and developing the right speech for your company, you'll eliminate the cumbersome and clunky initial sales process.

Jargon Junction

Simply, an "elevator speech" is a short description – roughly 15 to 30 seconds — of what you do or what your company does. This sound bite should succinctly and memorably introduce you. But, beyond simply telling someone what you do, an elevator speech should relate to your audience in a meaningful way. I think this is where many get stuck in developing or delivering our speech. Although it is easy to tell someone who you are, describing your particular market niche is bit more cumbersome.

A good elevator speech, however, should explain the real benefit of the services you provide and how you differ from your competition. In other words, how are you a solution provider and how does that relate to the person you are talking to? By finding the right words, you can engage your audience in your business while also showing your expertise.

Developing Your Speech

To develop your elevator speech, you must first identify how your services benefit your clients and the marketplace. Your speech shouldn't be a recount of your resume, rather, a summary of what your talents and expertise mean to the person you are talking to. Don't feel pressured, however, to tell the whole story.

Some of the best elevator speeches provide a snapshot of your business but leave the listener begging for more information. Be careful not to ramble as that is the quickest way to turn off a new acquaintance.

Practice, Practice, Practice

After writing down your differentiator and what it means to others, practice it. Outloud. Often. And then do it again. The most forgotten, or ignored, step is rehearsal of the elevator speech. Experts have found that one of the strongest signs of performance anxiety is procrastination and the real reason presenters avoid rehearsals is fear. Contrary to popular opinion, practice enables your speech to be more spontaneous and flexible as practice breeds familiarity.

Practice will also help you determine if the words you have selected actually work. For example, the words may look good on paper, but they sound canned, trite or plain ridiculous when spoken. This is often the case when firms try to memorize their vision statement or tagline and regurgitate the words with

little or no connection to the person they are talking to. In this instance, the elevator speech may not be adopted by your team. In contrast, your speech should be something that comes from your heart, makes sense, is easy to remember and rolls off the tongue easily.

How to Gauge Success

Interestingly enough, though the elevator speech seems to be one of the most challenging marketing tactics to tackle, it is one of the easiest in terms of gauging success. How do you know if you are successful? It's simple. How did the conversation go after your speech? Did your introduction result in further conversation and questions about your unique selling proposition and industry niche? Do you feel like you engaged your audience and found a way to relate to them? Remember that you never get a second chance to make a first impression. And, a great elevator speech allows you to position your company as one that has a clear vision and passion about what you do – attributes we all enjoy seeing in others.

Kimberly Kayler is President of Constructive Communication, Inc. She served A/E/C firms as corporate marketing executive, and worked for a full-service advertising/marketing communications agency. Kayler started Constructive Communication in 2001 to serve technical and professional service firms. She authored more than 750 published articles. She can be reached at: 614-873-6706 or kkayler@constructivecommunication.com.

BACK TO BASICS: SETTING THE FOUNDATION FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

By Gina A. Bedoya, CPSM

In recent years we have all struggled with jargon and catchy terms to communicate what is really important to our firms when it comes to the marketing and business development effort. We have gone through TQM, CRM, ROI, "branding," "differentiating," "positioning," and marketing "green/sustainable/LEED," just to name a few. We have been drowning in a plethora of novel tactics to make our firms "win" the next project. Because of this, we often forget the basics of what it really means to simply market your firm.

What are the basics?

The national offices of SMPS (Society for Marketing Professional Services) have conducted an analysis of professional services marketing for the A/E/C industry that communicates the body of knowledge and the skills most critical for professional marketing competence. These knowledge and skill areas are classified under six parts or "Domains of Practice." Domain 3 addresses client and business development: the methods required to develop and maintain client relationships to secure new and ongoing business. Following are the general tasks for the business development effort:

1. Interpret Market Research

- Developing a targeted business development plan.
- Develop client intelligence.
- Qualify leads and prospects.

2. Internal Business Development Planning and Readiness

- Understanding the firm's complete service lines.
- Understanding feature-benefits selling.
- Understanding the financial aspect of the firm's business.
- Knowledge of the firm's internal resources.

3. Execution

- Communication planning.
- Client development and relationship building.
- Developing proposals and presentations.
- Post-selection client feedback and maintenance.
- Community involvement.

4. Evaluation

- Measuring and evaluation of the plan's effectiveness.
- Measuring return on investment of the business development system.

Once you have organized your business development effort in this format, you can say you have established the foundation. You can then move on to tackle and build upon it with the latest trend.

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BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES SURVEY

The following data indicates the relative percentages that A/E firms allocate to each of these typical business development activities. On an overall basis the effort expended by firms indicates the following priorities:

- Negotiations of proposals (28%)
- Respond to RFPs (20%)
- Maintain existing clients (20%)
- Promotional activities (11%)
- Prepare and conduct presentations (8%)
- Business Development administration (8%)
- Efforts to obtain new clients (5%)

Business development administration has remained in the 8% to 10% range for the past several years, although some very large firms allocated as much as 17% to this activity.

Source: 2007 PSMJ A/E Fees & Pricing Survey

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GOT TRAINING? PART 4 IN A SERIES

By Joanne G. Linowes

For Parts 1-3, see 8/07, 10/07 and 11/07 Issues of A/E Rainmaker.

Your firm's in-house training program can be very effective in providing courses in technical topics, human resources information, presentations, and IT software – personnel will be trained and the professional development program will be evaluated as being successful.

Building skills is, of course, the essential reason to run an in-house training program. Excellent professional development efforts not only provide required CEUs, but also keep your personnel up-to-speed, sharpen their problem-solving and decision-making expertise, and provide an important perk for attracting and retaining professionals who deliver excellent client service. So, what's missing?

Take advantage of the time individuals spend in a structured learning setting and focus on how training can deliver something else. Firms that want to maximize the contribution that each employee can make to the growth of the company, need to view training with a broader agenda. Each course you conduct, each lunch-and-learn you offer, each seminar you present allows an often overlooked opportunity – the forum for promoting your firm's vision and corporate culture.

The best in-house training programs blend big-picture thinking with practical applications.

The big-picture includes infusing staff with the corporate culture – subtly. Maintaining and promoting the vision means planning courses and seminars that dovetail directly with the firm's business plans. When you assess needs and set quality standards, match your decisions with your vision for the firm in the next five years, not for the next big job. Integrate the vision into all instructional sessions – weaving in messages that reinforce the firm's mission, greater goals, and philosophy.

The key to spreading the vision-message is to educate all in-house instructors in how to integrate corporate culture into their technical, HR, marketing, and IT subject matter. Formal train-the-trainer seminars work, as well as informal discussions among principals, senior managers and instructors. Provide a forum for discussing ways to incorporate the global objectives and growth-thinking into ongoing continuing education efforts.

Expand your training goals. Allow professional development to include the firm's broader ideas so design professionals at every level develop an even greater commitment to helping the firm build its reputation and achieve its growth goals.

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A "TO DO" LIST THAT WORKS!

- ◆ Visit key clients often (firms will find that it is the most effectively concrete thing they can do to obtain more work).
- ◆ Get to know the client's business thoroughly.
- ◆ Write articles, blog, and speak to target client audiences.
- ◆ Make friends with editors in the media.
- ◆ Get involved in organizations related to target audiences, and network with members.
- ◆ Seek feedback from clients on your firm's service performance.
- ◆ Treat the client like a respected partner.
- ◆ Don't surprise the client – about anything - ever.
- ◆ Return clients' calls ASAP, if not sooner.
- ◆ Develop a personal relationship (not just a business relationship) with clients.
- ◆ Entertain both clients and referral sources.
- ◆ Give a referral to potential vendors in hopes of getting information in return.

CHARACTERISTICS AND TRAITS OF TRUE RAINMAKERS

A frequently asked question concerns the attributes of true rainmakers in A/E firms. What makes them so different, and so attuned to the tasks they perform? There is no single "sales" personality; however, certain characteristics enlarge a rainmaker's comfort zone in sales situations. The following are some of the more notable traits and characteristics:

- ◆ Most rainmakers are genuinely likeable. They connect well with other people in large part because they are able to convey that they really care.
- ◆ They are empathetic and understand the other person's point of view. They are good listeners. They are able to build trust and rapport quickly, as they are open and friendly.
- ◆ Most rainmakers have a confidence inspiring personality. Clients feel they can take care of their problem, and entrust really important decisions to them.
- ◆ They are inherently optimistic; able to see a fresh start or an alternative to a setback.
- ◆ They are risk tolerant and unconcerned with trying a fresh approach, and able to quickly shake off rejection if it does not work.
- ◆ They persevere and stick with initiatives, even when others are not.
- ◆ They are conscientious and follow through, pay attention to detail, and are able to maintain focus.
- ◆ They are socially confident, and feel comfortable walking into a room full of strangers and striking up a conversation.
- ◆ They are energetic and work with a high energy level which may sometimes be contagious, or stabilizing.
- ◆ They are forward thinkers, they like planning ahead, and enjoy executing strategies.
- ◆ They are motivators, and can get others to support their ideas.
- ◆ Most rainmakers are willing to get outside their comfort zone. Achievement occurs when they stretch and try something that is uncommon. It provides added confidence.

Finally, most rainmakers know what they want, know what their clients need and they deliver value to them and exceed their expectations.

Each of your professionals bring a mixture of these competencies to your firm. Make an overall stronger team in selling situations by combining team members with complimentary elements. Identify opportunities to focus on for all your professional's continuing development, and bring out all the true rainmakers in your firm.

WAIT! DON'T HIT THAT "SEND" BUTTON

We have all read e-mails that have made us wonder whether or not the sender actually read what they had written, or simply hit the send button as they had typed the last character. Before hitting that send button, we should ask ourselves:

What is the perceived tone?

This becomes especially critical if the e-mail offers an opinion or criticism. There are situations when an e-mail is the worst venue for communication. If the situation is delicate, if people disagree, then pick up the phone and have a conversation where tone of voice can be conveyed.

Is the message clear and concise? If the issue is complicated, a verbal discussion may be a quicker, clearer way to communicate ... and avoid the series of e-mails that generally follow an unclear message.

Are the important points in the beginning?

People often don't read e-mails carefully. Help them out by starting with the important information, rather than burying it in the middle or the end. Critical details can be bolded or bulleted. If the e-mail is long, use subheadings - e.g., Important issue: Preparation for Meeting.

Because it allows us to communicate quickly, e-mail is a wonderful, but dangerous tool.

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7 STRATEGIES FOR WINNING AN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS AWARD

By Carolyn Ferguson, FSMPS, CPSM

1. Don't just submit to submit.

If your entry is not a stellar piece that delivered stellar results, wait until you have the right piece.

2. Plan to enter a piece.

You should believe that a piece has award-winning potential right at the time of inception. As soon as you think your work is head and shoulders above the rest and communicates clear differentiators that separate your firm from the herd, you need to plan how you are going to present it as an entry.

3. Offer tangible data.

Jurors are looking for cold, hard facts about the impact your piece had on your market. You need to show that your piece reached its objective (return on investment). How much did the piece cost to deploy? How much new work did it help you bring in? How many RFQs? How many first interviews?

4. Get the objective opinions of others.

Even though you may think your piece is a slam-dunk award-winner, you need to show it to people who are emotionally detached and will offer you an objective opinion. These objective opinions can come from

anyone; from your friends to other firms that routinely enter competitions. Insist that your reviewers ask tough questions – people who have entered before are especially helpful because they know what the jury is looking for.

5. Don't slap your entry together the night before it's due.

Seems obvious, but you'd be surprised how many otherwise powerful pieces lose steam because they are presented in a shabby way. Pick the best pieces – no nicks, creases, or marks on the physical piece – they will detract from how good your piece is. Make sure you construct your entry in a way that clearly shows that you have paid attention to the questions being asked and the criteria set forth in the call for entries.

6. Start by entering a regional competition.

This can serve as a springboard for the national award competition and you'll get honest feedback from these events that will give you valuable insight into whether you should enter the MCA.

7. Your entry is not the end of the road.

If you make it to the MCA final judging, you'll need to put your piece on a display board, which is a two-dimensional

presentation of your three-dimensional piece. Make sure your graphics and messages are clear in two-dimensions as well as three.

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The MCA (Marketing Communications Awards) program provides unparalleled opportunity for A/E/C firms to showcase their best marketing effort. The entry deadline for the 2008 Society of Marketing Professional Services MCA is Friday, April 4, 2008. The competition is open to both SMPS members and non-members, U.S. and International Firms. Awards are presented in 18 categories. Typically there are more than 300 submittals. Awards will be given out at the SMPS National Conference in Denver, CO, August 6-9, 2008. For submission information go to: www.smps.org and click Awards.

PSMJ Resources is one of the sponsors of this awards program.

A POSTCARD SERIES REVITALIZED A DORMANT MARKET SHARE

The architectural firm, ThenDesign Architecture (www.thendesign.com), in Cleveland, OH, redirected their business development efforts to break into some new market segments. Since they had been disconnected from a field in which they had significant experience - the commercial/retail industry - they decided on a direct mail campaign to help them reconnect with this market and achieve their business development objectives. Their target goals were to introduce themselves to major retail clients, and reacquaint themselves with developer clients by setting themselves apart from other architects with a direct mail campaign.

Their target audience consisted of 500 senior commercial/retail developers (CEOs, and Directors of Real Estate, Design and Construction, Leasing, Development, and Tenant Coordination). Additionally, they included 300 senior level tenant retailers, (CEOs, Senior Project Managers and Directors of Real Estate, Development, Franchise Development, and Construction Services).

They began their research and planning by determining and evaluating the core issues developers and retailers encounter when working with architects by tapping their best resources - their staff and their clients. They collaborated within their firm what they theorized were the primary barriers that lie between architects and developers. They then interviewed their past and current clients to get their input and further insight. Finally, they turned to an independent illustrator as a creative outlet, bouncing ideas back and forth until they had a final product - a series of two-sided illustrated postcards.

They did an initial mailing, followed by three subsequent mailings, which were sent in two-week spans. After all the postcards in the series were introduced into the market, they began follow-up phone calls. A final phase of the campaign was strategically placed to coincide with a convention of retailers and developers, the largest in the nation. They intended to follow

through on their leads by meeting with potential clients to secure new jobs.

The messages on the postcards expertly played on a humorous angle. There are reoccurring concerns that emerge when developers and retailers work with architects. They wanted to show that they understood those concerns, but they were different. The cards illustrated just how much they were different. For example: On the front of one card. *Things we don't have #36: 21 Front Burners*, and the stylish illustration of a chef in the kitchen. Text on the back: *Does It Smell Like Smoke in Here? Architect's offices are like kitchens. Many of them promising to keep every project on the front burner. How many front burners do they have, and why is everything on fire?*

At TDA we keep your project in check ... so that nothing catches on fire.

Their marketing pieces parallels who they are as a firm. By poking fun at both the industry and themselves, they validated their sense of humor and zest. Their concepts are clear and straightforward, just as they are with their clients. The playful, eye-catching illustrations set their message apart from the traditional project photographs used in many mailing programs.

Within two weeks of their original mailing, they received two phone calls resulting in the commission of a significant retail assignment. As the postcards continue to grab the attention of prospective clients, they continued to receive an impressive number of responses and inquiries regarding future work.

You can see these remarkable pieces and hundreds of others on **PSMJ's Databank of the Best A/E/C Promotional Material on the Planet**. Check out 18 categories of promotional material from Anniversary Pieces to Web Sites on this exciting new CD. You can view samples of the entries on your editor's web site and get the **Special Offer for subscribers**. Visit (www.aecadvisors.com).

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