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A/E Rainmaker

The Guide to Attracting and Keeping Great Clients

OUTSOURCE YOUR NON-CORE FUNCTIONS

Knowledge and expertise no longer have to be homegrown. They can be contracted for. Outsourcing is an effective tool for redefining and reenergizing an organization. It helps A/E firm's focus on their core business by assuming that some or all of their non-core functions can be outsourced for the following good reasons:

- ◆ Outsourcing leverages relationships instead of amassing resources.
- ◆ Outsourcing delivers value instead of directing activities.
- ◆ Outsourcing ensures results, since it is under contract.

The effective and efficient use of an A/E firm's marketing and business development personnel is a major element for achieving firm-wide success. Firm after firm has come to the realization that investing in and maintaining in-house specialty departments may not make dollars and sense for rapidly growing companies.

Relying upon outsourcing organizations and specialty consultants to supply critical support services provides access to a wealth of intellectual capital without investing in the personnel, equipment or infrastructure. From payroll processing to accounting, IT services to recruiting, market research to corporate video presentations, outsourcing is a cost-effective method of acquiring these services.

Typically, two types of shared services are outsourced: transactional services and professional services. Transactional services are repetitive and generic, e.g.; administration, accounting, payroll, and benefits processing. Professional services, marketing and business development, on the other hand, are knowledge-based and must be served by professional services consultants.

By dividing all business activities into four categories, you can identify outsourcing opportunities offering the best long-term value and lowest-cost options:

1. Peripheral functions provide no competitive advantage to a firm and are not essential to the core business. These functions are easily outsourced and produce minimal risk.

2. Support functions are essential but are not a core activity. Failure in this area would cause serious damage to the business. In this case, a manager's time and resources could be better spent on activities fundamental to the business, recruiting this expertise externally.

3. Strategic functions provide an actual or potential source of competitive advantage. One reason for outsourcing strategic functions is to achieve better value from the strategic thinking of others and the added capabilities they bring.

(cont. on page 2)

OUTSOURCE YOUR NON-CORE FUNCTIONS (CONT. FROM PAGE 1)

4. Core functions are the primary activity of the business and should never be outsourced for any reason.

In weighing the benefits and costs associated with outsourcing, you may want to consider the reasons firms commonly cite for outsourcing non-core functions and the benefits they expect to receive, as reported by The Outsourcing Institute, (www.outsourcinginstitute.com).

◆ **Improves a firm's focus.**

Outsourcing allows the firm to focus on its core activities while support services are assumed by an outside provider, such as a specialty consultant. It can enable an organization to accelerate its growth and success through expanded investment in areas offering the greatest competitive advantage. A web site consultant, who designs and/or maintains your web site is a good example.

◆ **Gains access to world-class capabilities.**

Outsourcing means specialization. Outsourcing providers and specialty consulting firms can bring worldwide, world-class capabilities and expertise to a firm. Using world-class advertising and public relations firms is one example of how to leverage their expertise as your own. PR consultants also have easier access to editors of national publications, and can place articles in client-read magazines far easier.

◆ **Shares the risks.**

Outsourcing providers and specialty consultants make investments not on behalf of just one firm but on behalf of all its main clients, which eliminates the necessity of investment in equipment or other inventory to provide these special services by the firm itself.

◆ **Using subconsultants as an outsourcing opportunity.**

Outsourcing can involve the transfer of assets from the firm to the outside provider. Using MBE/WBEs subconsultants provides a valuable resource, as each is a specialist in their particular discipline - expertise that the A/E firm does not have to maintain in-house. Working with specialty subconsultants is essential in gaining government contracts.

◆ **Reduces and controls operating costs.**

Firms outsource because they do not have access to the required resources from within, and they don't want the expense to build these resources from the ground up. This includes access to services such as photography, printing, direct mail fulfillment and video and computer-based presentations. While some large A/E firms have incorporated such facilities in-house in the past, many have since abandoned them in favor of outsourcing them to specialty photographers, AV providers, printers and mail houses.

◆ **Offers resources not available internally.**

Access to an outside provider's lower-cost structure may result in greater economy of scale, and is one of the most compelling tactical reasons for using outsourcing to A/E firms. This includes services for market research, client image surveys, client satisfaction surveys, and other strategic research for the firm. It extends to graphic design, corporate identity, annual reports, brochures and other promotional material.

How to determine what the firm should outsource?

The question then becomes what and how much to outsource. To arrive at an answer that makes sense for your organization, ask yourself these questions:

- ◆ If you were starting the company today, would you elect to perform this function internally?
- ◆ Are you so good at performing this activity that others would hire you to do it for them? (Insourcing).

If you answer "no" to these questions it's time to think about outsourcing. ■

This information was adapted from an article by Karol White, Karol White Consulting, New York, NY, a former managing director of PricewaterhouseCoopers. She can be reached at: 646-414-2141

PROPOSAL TEXT AND OTHER PROJECT DATA

Use the MOM/YY formula for a client-centric text.

Veteran journalist, author, and professional services marketer Gerre Jones once developed a formula to apply to the written text in proposals and other written client documents.

Gerre observed that many proposal writers refer to themselves and their firm far more often than they refer to the recipient, the client. This is particularly critical when one is trying to impress the client that it's "all about them, and their project."

He expressed the easy solution in the formula MOM/YY, where:

- MOM refers to "Me, Our, Mine," and of course, "We, Us and I."
- YY is to remind us of the receiver pronouns "You, Yours."

Here's how Gerre said it works. When writing a letter or describing your services in a proposal:

- Go back through it and count the MOM words.
- Then go through it again looking for the YY words.

Divide the MOM words by the YY words. If the ratio of MOM to YY words is, say $20/4 = 5$, the ratio is too high.

Go back through the text and rewrite it again. Try to change all references to the firm by changing the MOM words into

YY words. That puts the emphasis back on the client's side. Go through the exercise a second time and apply the formula again. It is bound to be a lower number. Keep going through it until you have reached the level of 1/1, or better.

For practice, take any document and see where you stand using this formula. It is an eye-opening experience. The transition to truly client-centric writing is not easy, but your client will be happier, and ultimately you will be too.

Other Writing Tips

The following checklist outlines some of the other considerations that Gerre applied to good writing.

- ___ Is the writing clear, concise, and unambiguous?
- ___ Does the writing style keep the reader's interest?
- ___ Is the vocabulary simple and understandable?
- ___ Is the writing free of technical/professional jargon?
- ___ Are the sentences cut down to an optimal length?
- ___ Are the paragraphs short and easily scanned?
- ___ Are the headlines and graphics format consistent throughout the proposal? ■

This was excerpted from *Marketing To Win: PSMJ's Guide to Developing and Improving Marketing Materials for A/E/C Firms*. For more information or to order, go to: www.psmj.com/publications?id=117 or call Bruce Lynch @ 800-537-7765

AXIOMS BY AND FOR RAINMAKERS

Axioms are words to live by. Here are a few that rainmakers have adopted in their quest for new business for their firm.

- ◆ No sales, no company. No marketing, no sales.
- ◆ Know all the angles that differentiate your firm from all the others.
- ◆ Know the exact reasons that clients hired the firm.
- ◆ Know if the firm is client-based or project-based.
- ◆ Know which project types are the most profitable and why.
- ◆ Never burn bridges. The first one could be the last.
- ◆ A solid relationship can take the edge off a higher fee.
- ◆ Avoid the hard sell - it's rarely successful.
- ◆ Honesty about your firm's services is the best policy.
- ◆ Inspire others to represent the firm at its best.
- ◆ Convey enthusiasm and a drive to succeed.
- ◆ Give value to your network of contacts, to gain value.
- ◆ Think of your clients as your friends. If they need you, you will be there for them. ■

Using Events to Market Your Firm

By Paula Pradines

A group of panelists shared their experiences on hosting in-house events at an SMPS/ NY Chapter seminar. Among them was David Golab of Superstructures, whose "Lunch 'N Learn Inspires A Client Promotional Campaign" was the cover story in the December 2006 issue of A/E Rainmaker.

Paula Pradines, of Schirmer Engineering's regional New York office attended the program and describes the many useful tips she took home to work into the marketing program for her firm.

I was particularly interested in how I could accurately attribute an increase in RFPs and newly awarded contracts back to the hosting of an event. Here's how to set up your event to make sure that you can measure the benefits.

Develop an Event Strategy

First, you have to identify the goal(s) you wish to achieve, (e.g., expand credibility for your firm, network with prospects or clients, generate business leads, or align your firm with a particular trend).

Identify what aspects of the event will encourage people to attend, (e.g., interesting speaker and/or topic, providing a benefit for the attendees - such as continuing education credits, or the opportunity to network/share information). Be sure to focus on education or networking and not sales.

Planning the Execution

Plan out every detail of the event, not just the obvious elements like the invitation list and name badges. Draw up an outline of the event from start to finish including a schedule for meeting deadlines and sending mailings. Whether you are one marketer working alone or have joined with colleagues in a strategic alliance, create a spreadsheet listing all contacts associated with producing the event. It will come in handy when organizing subsequent events.

While coordinating the catering and signage do not forget to consider all possible venue limitations; approvals from management; and marketing materials/promo items to be distributed at the end of the event. Everyone wants a goodie bag.

Long-term Considerations

The event is an investment in the long term. Producing a series of recurring events whether quarterly or annually keeps your firm front-and-center in the minds of your clients/prospects. Invite a vendor to present at your event and ask them to help defray the costs in exchange for the valuable face time with decision makers.

Use Strategic Alliances

Leveraging partners through joint event hosting is a great approach for insuring good turnout and gaining access to new leads/markets. Keep in mind that the event must be a good fit for your firm. If your staff are not golfers, don't host a golf event.

Measuring the Results

Identify metrics that will assist in determining the return on investment; (e.g., turnout, feedback - ask for it - and repeated exposure to your firm through regularly held events such as continuing education or piggybacking other forthcoming events).

Reaping the Benefits

Hosting events is another touch point in addition to your direct mail, press and advertising campaigns. Holding an event can be an efficient use of time; you and your staff will see many clients/prospects at once. Events help you build credibility with decision makers. The event will be a win/win for staff and clients/prospects. Hosting regular events helps grow your database of leads through referrals. In exploring creative ways to reach out to clients and prospects it is important to maximize your return on investment. Clearly, with the right approach, detailed planning, thoughtful execution and the all-important follow up, hosting a regular series of events can result in increased opportunities. The challenge remains in effectively measuring those results. ■

Schirmer Engineering, a subsidiary of Aon Corporation*, specializes in fire protection, code consulting, risk control and security consulting. They are recognized as an industry leader. * Aon Corporation is a leading provider of risk management services, insurance and reinsurance brokerage, human capital and management consulting, and specialty insurance underwriting. (paula_pradines@schirmereng.com)

PROFIT MAKERS / PROFIT TAKERS

By Dennis Schrag

Go ahead. Do it. Fire that client! It feels great and is a superb staff morale booster.

Every so often you need to bite the bullet and say in forthright terms, "My organization will be money ahead and stress relieved if Demoralizing Company were off our books and on our competitor's." It's a double-whammy! There is a great sense of satisfaction when you learn that your former nauseating client is now your rival's glitch.

BUT...before you fire that sordid customer, know why.

Many firms fail to complete an analysis of their clients in terms of annual profitability. There is a BIG difference between the magnitude of revenue and the magnitude of profit. Ask anyone who supplies Wal-Mart. They will tell you that Wal-Mart delivers a massive amount of their revenue, but a modest level of profit per unit. That still works for products, but in service businesses when talent is tight and opportunities are wholesome, study your client list carefully. Perhaps you are better off with less gross revenue and more net profit.

Start with a simple spreadsheet that has three or four year's profit rankings by client.

Look at the PROFIT MAKERS. In most organizations about 80 percent of your revenue will come from 20 percent of

your clients. That formula does not apply to the profit, however.

Now determine how profitable those "revenue generators" really are. Do you have a retention plan for each of their key profit producing clients? Do you thank them and thank them and thank them again? Have your senior most executives visited with them and reinforced your working relationship? Have you asked them how you can serve them better?

If they are good clients, your competitors will be coveting them, wooing them and craving them.

Next, look at three year's data on the PROFIT TAKERS. These are the clients who chew up and spit out the profit from your star clients.

Don't fire them yet. Study them. Who is at blame for the loss of profit? Do you have the wrong staff working with that client? Are your service products well defined and effectively delivered? Is the relationship with the client strategic? Is the problem with your organization (and fixable) or with the client organization?

Many times the profit takers are new clients who require time and energy to understand. Sometimes it is a strategic client with plenty of future work and the ability to pay for it. But your organization has not "settled in" with an efficient way to deliver the work profitably.

Fix that by conducting an in-depth analysis and action plan.

But when you discover the problem is with an overbearing, overdemanding and unappreciative gorilla customer, cut 'em loose.

Annually, smart marketing and sales professionals generate and study with serious intensity their profit makers and their profit takers. Once you find the ghastly profit takers - take aim.

Complete your current project as best you can with the desperados and vamoose. Be classy when you fire them. Be sure to detonate them with panache. Slam no doors. Simply explain that your firm is "too busy right now to best service their needs."

For heaven's sake, don't snigger. Even a smile would be inappropriate. Make it an academy-award winning endeavor. (Tears would be a bit much, however.)

Get in the car after the meeting and laugh all the way to the bar! Celebrate. ■

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HOW TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN A PROSPECTIVE AND AN “IDEAL” CLIENT

As we all know, potential clients are everywhere, or so it seems. If we design a specific kind of facility we may know the approximate size of our potential audience. But is that enough? Hardly.

That’s a very shaky start to your prospecting strategy. You need to redefine your criteria. Instead of focusing in on those clients that you’d like to get, you must re-direct your skills towards those that you’re *most likely* to get. This preserves your marketing budget, and allows you to refine your search towards the more ideal clients for your firm.

Ideal clients are a subset of all potential clients. They are those prospects who will provide your firm with the maximum return on your marketing investment. The challenge is to establish very specific and measurable criteria to separate them from all those on the horizon.

Potential client: any person or organization that needs a specific facility that your firm could provide if selected.

Ideal client: one that is located within your geographic area, has an on-going need for facility improvements and enhancements, knows about the expertise your firm offers, has a good reputation in the industry, respects your previous clients, and pays on time. ■

“TO BOLDLY GO . . . INTO NEW MARKETS”

by Joseph G. Sporko, RLA, ASLA

As the business world is transforming into a more global environment, architecture and engineering firms must adapt and grow to stay in the game! Entering a new market is a tool to help achieve growth and balance.

Assessing the Need

Before embarking on what will be a major effort, it is wise to assess the need – why pursue new markets?

1. Diversification (*the same principal as your stock portfolio*)

Our firm, The LA Group, is a land planning firm servicing clients in both the public and private sectors. The firm has clients in the municipal, educational, institutional, and government sectors, but in the late nineties, 55 percent of our work volume came from private development. At the time, only 5 percent came from government (federal) projects. With private residential and commercial markets most susceptible to market swings, we felt the need to diversify. In order to help balance this out, we began to pursue federal work.

2. Profitability (*costs versus return*)

Before deciding to pursue more federal projects, our firm looked at the potential cost of obtaining that work versus the potential for return on this investment. While the government spends over \$300 billion annually on contracts, there are some things to consider:

a. *Long Lead Time* – it may take over a year from the time you first submit on a project until the time that you are actually under contract.

b. *Time Consuming Process* – it requires knowledge of Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) SF330 submissions, interview/selection process, negotiation process, and potential audit.

c. *Do you have the internal structure necessary to handle both the process and the type of work?* In order to determine this you must assess your firm’s strengths and weaknesses. There also travel considerations, which can put a strain on employees. “Satellite” employees may be a partial solution to having a presence in key locations required by the work.

d. *Potential Income Stream* – If a great deal of effort will be involved in securing the work, the potential for a continuous income stream must be high. An important factor we assessed was the potential of multi-year term contracts (known as Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity contract) to provide work on a regular basis.

(cont. on the next page)

"TO BOLDLY GO . . . INTO NEW MARKETS" (CONT.)

3. *Raising the Firm's Profile* – the acquisition of a few key national projects will go a long way in how your firm is perceived internally and externally, and will allow your firm to gain recognition in a particular market area.

Forming a Strategy

Once you have determined that the pursuit into the new market is a go, a diligent pro-active strategy is required to "make it happen." A few things to consider:

- a. *Strategic Teaming* – find firms to team with for particular reasons. You are not only selling your strengths, but also finding the best firm to team with based on their particular strengths, geographic location, or fulfillment of required needs such as small business requirements. Over time, you will form a network of firms that regularly call on you to team with.
- b. *Become the Expert in Your Niche Market* – do this by building a portfolio, getting published, speaking at conferences and building a useful and accessible website.
- c. *Stay Focused* – don't lose sight of your strategy (especially when you are extremely busy). Stay focused on the market, be pro-active, and continue to evaluate its success on a regular basis.

For our firm, our focus on the market has lead to a controlled growth. It has precipitated a change in the firm's structure from a service-based structure to a market-based structure. Previously, our firm's main disciplines: landscape architecture, civil engineering, environmental services, and planning, were each departments under the principals, and all types of work flowed through each. In order to better serve our clients, we re-structured the firm into services groups, each of which include several disciplines. Structured under the managing principal, each service group has a principal in charge, a director overseeing the group, and its own staff. The groups include: government services, educational/institutional, private residential/resort, and public spaces/planning. This type of structure allows each group to have efficiency, build expertise in the field, and really understand the client group's needs. ■

Joseph G. Sporko is the Managing Principal of The LA Group, an award winning, nationally recognized land planning firm located in Saratoga Springs, NY. The firm specializes in educational/institutional, residential/resort, government, and public space projects. Joe can be reached at jsporko@thelagroup.com or 518.587.8100. Check out the company's website at www.thelagroup.com.

GREAT NAME! NOW, DO I NEED A TRADEMARK?

Your firm now has a clever name and a great logo, and you want to protect them. Do you need to trademark them? If so, what is the least expensive and time-saving way to do it?

Biz-Fillings, an internet company that provides incorporation and related services to business owners, recently published a white paper for small business owners entitled "*Naming your company, Products, and Slogans: Clearing and Protecting Your Trademark Rights.*"

The white paper offers some solid advice on intellectual property protection, the difference between a registered mark, a common-law mark, patents and copyrights.

The paper also covers the step-by-step process to obtain a trademark, investigating to see if the mark does not conflict with others in the marketplace.

With the rise in global communication networks and easily accessible markets, the U.S. Patent Office strongly urges even the smallest companies to investigate possible trademark protection.

To view the entire white paper, go to http://www.bizfillings.com/whitepapers/trademark_wp.pdf. ■

CONNECTING FOR SHORTLIST SUCCESS

By Ethan Becker

How do you fare during the shortlist interview? Does your firm come across as a team with which the client can connect? Ethan Becker, Senior Speech Coach of The Speech Improvement Company Inc., coaches and trains design professionals to strengthen their presentation skills by examining how they think and speak, and how they come across as a team.

Get to the point!

Aristotle taught us that people think and reason in one of two patterns; either inductively or deductively. If you are an inductive thinker, you need all the background information before you can hear and understand the main point. If you are a deductive thinker, you need the main point up front and then the background information. Your listeners have the same patterns, and need you to pay attention to their own method of reasoning.

Know your own pattern.

Know which pattern you tend to use most often, and more importantly, which patterns your listeners want you to use. It's not easy, it takes practice and coaching to learn how to think and speak in a way opposite to your own comfort zone, but the payoff is big! Much of the decision-making from a selection committee is emotional. The members have already judged your credentials, or you would not be at the interview. They already know your ethos, or credibility.

The interview is all about connecting.

It's about the relationship you have with each of the members on your team, and the relationship you can build with the members on the committee. The strongest relationship typically wins the job in a shortlist interview, seeing how the final 3 or 4 firms share very similar credentials.

The speech improvement company conducted a world-wide survey.

Through our 468 group-training programs, participants were asked what they felt relationships were built on. Over 80% of the participants identified the same two words; "trust" and "communication." As we work with a firm to strengthen their interviewing skills, we coach them on which method of communication is going to be the most effective to develop that trust and thus strengthen that relationship. Your prospective clients will feel more comfortable with you and therefore are more likely to choose your firm for the job.

So, consider your pattern of reasoning, how do you make sense when someone is speaking to you? Can you switch from the inductive to deductive method? It's not easy. Take a moment in your day to try to speak with someone who thinks in an opposite pattern than yourself, do it in their pattern and see if you don't notice an immediate difference! ■

RULES OF NETIQUETTE

It is not surprising that you are defined by what you write in an e-mail message. Here are a few guidelines regarding the proper style and technique to use when communicating with your colleagues or clients.

1. Remember, it is a human exchange. Be polite. Do not use an angry or sarcastic tone. Consider that you are speaking to them personally.
2. Do not use all caps to emphasize your points. (Called "Flaming.")
3. Use consideration when forwarding messages - know your audience.
4. Ask permission before sending large attachments.
5. Maintain a professional and ethical tone.
6. Don't use your business mail for personal memos.
7. Make sure you know who the recipient is.

Since e-mail is such a large part of our communications today, it is critical that you use it prudently, ethically, and professionally.

As a Sr. Speech Coach with The Speech Improvement Company Inc., Boston, MA, Ethan helps firms be more effective during shortlist interviews. In addition to individual coaching and training, Ethan has taught in Harvard University's Graduate School of Design and frequently speaks at Build Boston. He can be reached at ethan@speechimprovement.com and you may sign up for his audio podcast by sending him an e-mail.

THEMED PROPOSALS BRING IN PROJECTS

There are three primary goals when preparing proposals for projects. The first is to get your proposal read by the client or decision-maker, and the second is to differentiate yourself from all the other submissions. The third goal, of course, is to be awarded the project as a result of achieving the other two.

One way to accomplish these goals is to develop your pitch around a theme that relates to the essence of the project, the client's hot buttons, or some other project-related concept. Remember, you never win on qualifications. The tool that will enhance your concept is a themed proposal package itself. Firms who have used this technique of packaged or boxed proposal have reported amazing success, as the following examples show.

Gould Evans, a 100-person firm in Kansas City was competing for a large hotel/conference center project (Opryland) in Grapevine, TX. They played off the project's locale as the theme to their proposal. The entire proposal was bound in leather and branded with a custom logo developed for their team. The proposal was then packaged in leather saddlebags and hand-delivered by a singing cowboy, much to the delight of their client. The firm was awarded their part in this large complex project.

On another project they designed specialty packaging for the proposal submitted to a County in Kansas City, KS, for a 14-screen theater as part of a larger retail/entertainment center (Legends Theater). Graphic designers within the firm utilized typical items that are part of the movie-going experience - popcorn, candy, tickets - to develop the custom packaging. The packaging was part of the firm's overall strategy to demonstrate their capabilities for designing this multiplex: innovation, creativity, and movie theater experience. The firm was awarded the project. ■

The case studies mentioned above are fully illustrated in color in *PSMJ's Databank of the Best A/E/C Promotional Material on the Planet*, along with hundreds of other examples from Announcements to Web sites. To order your CD go to:
www.psmj.com/?id=174.

Here's a user's comment on the CD.

"I shared the presentation with our principals and they were impressed. It helped to remind them of the talented group of marketing professionals that they are working with to position the firm for long-term success. I find the program to be helpful and informative. It's a nice benchmark of marketing activities from around the industry".

Carol Martin Tracy, Associate Vice President, Gould Evans Associates

REACH OUT TO CLIENTS ON ALL FOUR LEVELS

What do all prospective clients have in common? The basic interest and single common denominator for all of us as part of the human race is self-interest. The key strategy then would be to tie this concept in with your approach to clients, from the initial contact through to the final proposal or presentation stage.

Self-interest can be examined on four levels, by answering the following questions:

1. How does the offer help me?
2. How does it benefit my business associates, superiors, or my company?
3. Does it provide a benefit for our entire trade or industry?
4. Does the benefit extend to the general public, or help the environment?

Some clients have taken on all four of these concerns, for example, when considering the impact of a new facility on a community or neighborhood. The new regulations and guidelines for Green and Sustainable projects have now raised the bar to this level. There is a growing segment of society that wants to help their industry turn itself around.

That universal denominator of human nature - self-interest - is built into every human mind and produces a universal response. Take it to mind. ■

WHAT'S YOUR PERSONAL BRAND?

By Karen Susman

To me, your brand is your reputation. By reputation, I mean not only if you have a good or bad reputation, but what people think of when they think of you. In this world of commodity and downsizing, establishing your personal brand or reputation sets you apart and can keep you employed. Your brand should be in your career development toolbox.

Establish Your Brand.

To establish your brand, be clear on who you are - and - on who you aren't. What are you known for? If you're not sure, ask your family, friends and co-workers how they would describe you. Ask people with whom you volunteer. Ask your vendors, barber and mechanic.

Know Who You Are Not.

Knowing who you aren't can be stifling or liberating. I'm very funny but I'm not a comedian. I found out there was a difference and I found it out the hard way. A client hired me to give an after dinner speech for his employee holiday party. I sold funny and he thought he bought comedian. I didn't find out that he thought he'd hired a comedian until I arrived at the banquet room and saw the evening's agenda read, "Karen Susman, Comedian." The client was disappointed because he didn't get whom he thought he'd hired.

Not knowing and clearly stating my brand cost me a lot of

money, credibility and goodwill. Even though the audience responded positively, I refunded part of my fee to the client. That was the first and last time I've ever had to do that. Knowing who you aren't helps to manage your and your customers' expectations.

What are your core values?

You may change from wide ties to narrow ties depending on fashion, but your core values are here today, tomorrow and the next day. Be clear on your passions. What do you feel strongly about? What do you love to do professionally and recreationally? To get clear on who you are, ask yourself on what emotional ties you've built relationships with your "customers." For instance, Starbucks sells coffee, but the emotional tie is a feeling of community.

Be consistently you.

It's unsettling to have a brand be one thing one day and another the next. If Martha Stewart becomes warm and fuzzy, we will all be suspicious that her handlers have tied her down, drugged her and given her a reputation by-pass. According to Louis Patler in his book, *TrendSmart*, "A good brand is like a good friend, it inspires trust and resonates with core values."

Be conspicuously constant.

Be seen to be heard. Write, speak, show up and stand out. Your clothes, grooming, busi-

ness card, letterhead and office need to reflect your brand.

You need a big idea.

A big idea is what makes you stand out. I can't tell you what that is for you. I'm still working on mine. Your big idea must engage people. Your big idea has to be valuable. Your big idea has to be unique. The connection you generate with people through your big idea is beyond logical.

After all, you can brew 50 cups of coffee at home for the cost of two lattes at Starbucks. Coca-Cola has no nutritional value. Yet, people all over the world plunk down dollars and drachmas to swig colored sugar water.

As I said, I'm still searching for my brand. The search is enlightening. The search clarifies who you are, what you stand for and how you're different. Finally, don't keep that information a secret. Tell the world. That's how you establish your brand. ■

© Karen Susman, Remarkable Associations, is a presentation consultant based in Denver, CO. She can be reached at 888-678-8818, or karen@karensusman.com. Web site: www.karensusman.com.

SIGNATURE TAG LINES HELPS BRAND POSITIONING

It is surprising when e-mails do not include a single mention about the firm in the signature. This certainly is a missed opportunity when it comes to brand awareness. A brief firm tag line or brand value proposition should be essential.

According to Public Relations Manager Steve White with John Graham Associates, (www.grahamcomm.com), tag lines are like verbal logos. He maintains that people will remember an effective tagline even before they remember a company's name, even if the tagline has no discernable link to the service or product.

Steve feels that if you want to be competitive, you have to be remembered. A tagline may only be 3-4 words, but they are critical words, and are not always the easiest to come up with. Just watch the most popular products advertised in the media today, and you'll discover that some of the most common tag lines have been around for many years, but have taken on a new importance in today's media messages.

Another positioning technique is to use rotating messages as tag lines. If a firm has recently received an award, or currently has an offer for seeking employees, a simple descriptive link could be added to the signature message. ■

(Steve can be contacted at: s_white@grahamcomm.com)

DISCUSSION GROUP: AWARDS

Subject: Turning awards on their ears

I just read an interesting piece about design awards by Jeff Stein, director of the architecture program at the Boston Architectural College in the Jan/Feb issue of *Architecture Boston*.

Stein asserts that an architecture award almost never belongs to the recipient - rather it belongs to the entity that awards it.

People rarely remember recipient firms from year to year because they are almost always different - but they do remember the awarding body because it is the same every year.

So what?

As you care for, feed, and prune your own business development strategies, perhaps you should consider starting your own awards program to recognize your clients for outstanding achievement in their respective fields. If you work in specialized markets, you can publicize the award to your clients' peer groups - raising their profiles and yours.

Have any of you ever done this? What was your thought process and what were the results?

All the best,

Bruce Lynch - Publishing Director

Bruce,

We have acknowledged clients on certain projects they have completed where we were on the team. Usually something in one of the industry publications that our client reads.

In regard to awards, I am curious to hear how other clients would see this (outside of the awarded client) and if that would cause any stir there. In other words, would we be showing any favoritism towards a client and causing some backlash with others. Just a thought.

Bret Borth, Associate Principal
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If you have any comments to make on this please send them to Ernie and Joy at www.AECadvisors@earthlink.net.

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