

In This Issue

- Are You a Business Development Rockstar?
- Get Prospective Clients Involved in Your Articles
- Marketing in a Flat World Part 2
- Crumb Topic: Email Signatures
- Working Clans Show Loyalty, Their Own Language, Hierarchy and Priorities
- Promotion through Publication
- Reputation-Building Media Relations
- Position Differentiation is Relative
- Unhappy Clients Can Cost You Plenty!
- Are Web Site Homepages Dead?
- Fulfillment Houses Save Creative Time
- Without Follow-up, Nothing Happens
- Which Direct Mail Format is Best

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A/E Rainmaker

The Guide to Attracting and Keeping Great Clients

ARE YOU A BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ROCKSTAR?

Those in business development often hear the comment from their internal colleagues, "what exactly do you do?" Although rarely billable to a firm, they are under constant pressure to bring in business and impact the bottom line. Those that make the biggest contribution can rise to star power within an organization, but exactly what attributes must a person possess, and what accomplishments must they achieve to reach this lofty position?

Anne Scarlett, president, Scarlett Consulting, offers an in-depth look at these qualities in her program "Face the Music: Become a Business Development Rockstar!"

"If you are to perform as a star," Anne began, "you must absolutely know your firm in depth, have clarity on the health of your firm's business strategy, and a working knowledge of the full picture. From that you create business plans, prepare a vision, strategies to achieve that vision, and an action plan to make it all happen. You must see yourself as a value contributor making a difference, and envision it."

Anne defined these internal expectations of the business developer:

- ◆ Designing a strategic business development plan in support of the firm's vision.
- ◆ Proposing initiatives for positioning and increasing market share and lead generation.
- ◆ Remaining current on best practices on branding.
- ◆ Being a motivator and strategic collaborator with the technical staff, and inspiring them to build new business with new clients.

Anne pointed out that "rainmakers are expected to be the ones who bring home the bacon, even though they're not billable. They are also expected to be ambassadors of the firm's message in both client and industry-based organizations. They are expected to network, be a client liaison, and a third-party confidant. They are expected to not only be a door-opener, but a key player throughout the entire CRM cycle, and a valued advisor to the client all the way through the project. Clients need to know that they have an advocate, an added comfort level. These expectations really strengthens the overall service level the client is receiving from you."

Internal expectations include sales tracking and carving out the most opportunities for cross-selling to occur. It includes coaching and training colleagues, and managing the process of each marketing initiative from inception to completion. It includes organizing CRM project databases, and providing guidance in preparing the project approach and strategy behind how you'll be positioning the proposal submission.

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Are You a Business Development Rockstar?

Cont. from page 1

Stars that impact the bottom line are those the firm values most highly. Ownership opportunities are increasing for business developers reaching management roles, such as the CMOs we've covered many times in this newsletter.

"Stars don't reach success without having a flexible vision. It's not fundamentals alone that make a star performer, they must be resourceful. There is a deep-seated motivation that gets them where they are. The requisite intellect and ability is not enough, you need that drive to keep pushing and growing," Anne said.

Is the extra initiative worth it? Anne offered this checklist to find out.

- ◆ Is it tied to the firm's critical path and the bottom line?
- ◆ Does it have a positive impact on clients and the firm's competitive edge?
- ◆ Does it have input from others and are the ideas tested?
- ◆ Does it get expected results within the timeframe?
- ◆ Does it get internal champions to support the ideas?
- ◆ Can any potential risks be managed or mitigated?
- ◆ Can it be implemented without a negative effect on your other responsibilities?

Anne presented Six Strategies for "Star Gazing" which distinguish the average performer from the star performer.

1. Take no small initiatives.

Average performers volunteer here and there, and expect more kudos than they deserve for their occasional contributions.

Star performers offer bold value-added ideas for the benefit of the organization, and follow everything through to ensure implementation.

Anne presented a few real-world action items that demonstrates these initiatives.

- ◆ Create a visibility campaign for the technical staff to become more active in professional, civic, and social circles, and spread their energy across all the external networking outlets.
- ◆ Design personalized mini-marketing plans for a few key technical individuals that can help out on business development.
- ◆ Revamp the format of internal meetings for more efficient use of time and more solid solutions.

2. Use networking as a data resource.

Average performers are in the loop, but devoted to office politics.

Star performers develop dependable pathways to experts, navigate and connect well. A star knows who to go to, and

how to help others. They know the more you give to someone, the more you get from that person. They know how to promote cooperation and address conflicts.

Action items that Anne suggested are:

- ◆ Revise your elevator speech and develop different versions.
- ◆ Use networking forums and tools on the internet.

3. Recognize that planning and self-management creates opportunities.

Average performers realize that planning manages time better.

Star performers look at it as a work strategy to create opportunities, ensure high performance, and carve out a career plan.

4. Gain perspective from every angle

Average performers have clarity on how they believe the issue fits into the big picture.

Star performers examines the issue in a larger context of viewing it from others' perspective, then assembles and evaluates those viewpoints for better results.

5. Offer the right message for the right audience.

Average performers present a personal image and message.

Star performers select the right messages for a particular audience, or the right audience for a particular message.

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Are You a Business Development Rockstar?

Cont. from page 2

6. Know when to lead and when to follow.

Average performers make power decisions and delegate unwanted tasks. They stick within the boundaries of their job description.

Star performers can toggle between the two. They influence others as a leader, and follow by helping the organization to succeed and cooperate even when there are differences.

Anne pointed out that you'll know you're a star when you believe you can make a difference, when you create things that didn't exist before, and in both leadership and following, give everyone a reason to want you on their team.

Anne Scarlett is president of Scarlet Consulting, offering A/E/C industry-specific marketing expertise. An advocate of relationship-building through effective communication and networking, Anne has provided leadership to organizations such as Corporate Real Estate Women (CREW). She is also past president of the Chicago Young Executives Club (TEC). She can be reached at 773-251-8132, or e-mail at anne@annescarlett.com. Her web site is www.annescarlett.com.

Her program "Face the Music: Be a Business Development Rockstar" was presented in a Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) webinar. For information and a list of all previous webinars, contact Mark DellaPietra at mark@smps.org or <http://eo2.commpartners.com/users/smps/index.php>.

GET PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS INVOLVED IN YOUR ARTICLES

There is no doubt that bylined articles in publications, especially those that your clients read, are a must for establishing credibility in their marketplace. But it need not stop there. You can leverage and significantly enhance your credibility by including your present clients and even prospective clients in the process. Here's how.

You first select the magazine or web site where you want to post your article. Find out all of their unique requirements following the guidelines set forth in the piece by Dennis Schrag, "Promotion through Publication," on page 6 of this issue. You rely on your expertise and experience to develop the story.

To kick your article up a notch, consider these tactics.

- ◆ Once you have determined the focus of the article, seek out quotes from your clients, or even unknown prospective clients who may be part of the audience for your article, and by the way, prospects for your firm's services in the future.

- ◆ Jot down a list of questions and start calling. When you explain to the gatekeeper that you are writing an article on their industry and need some expert opinions, you will be seen as an author, not just another design firm, trying to sell your services. People are eager to be seen as experts.

- ◆ Before you hang up, ask for the name of someone else in the organization that might strengthen your story. Continue this pattern and keep talking shop and building rapport with as many key contacts as you can.

When your article hits the street or the web, you now have an opportunity to strengthen your new relationships by sending the contacts copies of the article. Now you will appear as a known commodity and expert to both your existing clients and those prospective clients who contributed quotes to your piece.

You have also avoided the dreaded cold call approach, and broken through to the key people who are now allied with you in print. By getting buy-in from clients in the industry, and having them contribute to your article, you have strengthened your position in that marketplace, and are no longer a stranger.

The article of course has many uses as a PR tool. It can be posted on your web site. It can also be included as a supplement in a proposal or presentation for an appropriate type of project.

Getting "third party credibility" from publications is very useful indeed, but getting clients and prospective clients to buy into your story is priceless!

MARKETING IN A FLAT WORLD PART 2

By Jack Jolls

In part 1 of *Marketing in a Flat World*, we found out that it wasn't a nightmare. Our marketing department operations had been sent to Bangalore, India, where, Dimple Desai (I did NOT just make up this name), a former employee with very stellar credentials and superb communications skills (B.S. in Civil Engineering and an MBA), had been hired to run our office there.

The main function of the office would be proposal preparation and the creation of marketing communications materials. Dimple also was charged with setting up a design shop there in Bangalore. Dimple had worked in our firm here in Indianapolis in the marketing department for three years while he got his MBA. "He REALLY DID know his stuff." MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT. It wasn't a mirage. Dimple made B/D calls and wrote proposals and was very well liked by the professional staff. But, he also had family back home. He wanted to be there. (Oh by the way, in India, Dimple is as common a name as Bob, Joe or Bill).

So here's my personal perspective.

Eight years ago, I started a branch office two hour's drive from the home office. There were days, however, when I thought I was in Bangalore, India. But, I had solid home office relationships, great "IT" people for technol-

ogy support, and a CEO committed to the success of the operation. When it was time to "phone home" it was almost just like being there. This phenomenon is not going to happen in some future Flat World. It is happening NOW.

In a Flat World, any office can be anywhere, because "the wires" go everywhere. East coast, west coast, Europe, Bangalore, Beijingit's just the length of the wires. Is the sky falling? I don't really think so. Not yet. The United States is still number one in the world in post graduate education. Great design still comes from our country. But, if you read the National Science Board (NSB) assessment of science and engineering report published in 2006, you will note that change is underway and there is concern. In the United States we are falling behind other Western and Asian economies in the capabilities of our secondary level students in math and science.

With the exodus from the work force of the baby boomer generation now in full swing, we are already struggling with shortages of professionals in the industry. This adds pressure for "off-shoring."

So what strategies might be helpful?

Tell everyone you know about what you do, why you like what you do, and how it contributes to our quality of life. The deeper into the educational systems of our country we can

send this message, the better off we will be in the long term. This means outreach to secondary school students, and the younger they are, the better. In this case, the long term is the key. The issues we face regarding off-shoring and work force sustainability will be with us for years to come. This will not be an easy time.

If you are a parent, or otherwise have an important relationship with a young person, impress upon them the importance of learning. Suggesting that certain gratification-related priorities be adjusted would be helpful. In a Flat World, life-long learning is here to stay. A key skill will be knowing-how-to-teach-yourself something.

We live in an exciting time. Things are changing at the speed of light. Pay attention to the things that affect you and your business. Commit to learning the skills that will make you valuable, at any price.

Never forget, relationships do not have wires. And, they go everywhere too. Good relationships are very, very hard to disconnect.

Jack Jolls is the managing principal of John D. Jolls and Company, a management-consulting firm in Storrs, CT serving the A/E/C industry, with ethics training, leadership development, strategic planning, and developing healthy conflict skills. He can be found at jjolls@aol.com or 860-338-0069. Jack is a past president of both SMPS-Boston and ACEC/CT.

*Friedman, T.L., "The World is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century," Revised Edition, Farrer, Strauss, and Giroux, 2006

CRUMB TOPIC: EMAIL SIGNATURES

Email signatures have a simple purpose - to identify the sender and how to contact them. It's for easy reference. Most people have them, but they're not "designed" to complement the email. They can be so overpowering (with logos, bold colors and graphics, and philosophical statements) they distract from the message being sent. When people do too much with signatures, it can hurt their brand image. If this isn't enough, paragraphs of intimidating legalese are added that make you question whether you should be reading the email at all.

Here are some pointers on designing email signatures:

- ◆ Keep the focus on the message you are sending.
- ◆ Don't make it an advertisement. Email is personal.
- ◆ Don't attach your logo. Among many reasons, people think you're sending an attachment and look for one.
- ◆ Make it legible, consistent, subtle, and understated.
- ◆ Use minimal color, and a smaller font size than your message.
- ◆ Make legal text small and light. Disclaimer: check with your lawyer on this.

The final point is that no one should be reading your signature before they read your message.

From Crumb Topics: Bligh Graphics. Contact: carolyn@blighgraphics.com, or go to: www.blighgraphics.com.

WORKING CLANS SHOW LOYALTY, THEIR OWN LANGUAGE, HIERARCHY AND PRIORITIES

By Katherine Meeker-Cohen

In the Middle East today we face an insurmountable difficulty in getting Shia, Sunnis, and Kurds to work together. Tribal and clan differences outweigh any allegiance to a larger cause. Yet on a much less dramatic scale, there are also distinct tribal loyalties in an architecture firm, each with its own language, hierarchy, and priorities.

Architects, the ruling tribe, communicate visually with drawings, using the language of geometry, and an ability to see drawings three-dimensionally.

Those from the IT department speak their own dialect of programs, applications, licenses, and servers. Most of the time they sit in front of computer screens or on the phone, keeping the technology functioning so the staff can work. Most of us have no idea what they really do, and most of the time, we don't care. We just want our computers to work.

The marketing department is usually made up of people who are eternally optimistic, gregarious, and speak the language of hope. They must encourage and support the architects without really getting very much credit at the end.

One of the most powerful tribes is the business office. Their communication is through spread sheets, bud-

gets, revenue, and the dreaded word, overhead. Every two weeks they must find enough money to pay the salaries, the rent, the utilities, and the consultants. For them the world is black and white.

Each of these four "tribes" has a different dialect, a different priority, and a different reward. So how do we communicate among ourselves?

First, it's critical to show respect across the board to everyone. Second, it's important to learn the language of the other tribe. Learn what's in the budget, find out what the newest technology is, share the wins with the marketing department, and take a shot at drawing a building, freehand. You'll see things you didn't notice before. But most important of all, embrace the idea that we are all interconnected.

Katherine Meeker-Cohen is president of Katherine Meeker-Cohen Consulting Group. She works with firms to design strategic plans, implement marketing initiatives, and build public relations campaigns. Before establishing her own business she worked as director of business development for Gwathmey Siegel and Associates, Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates, and H3. In addition she has been a literary agent and registered representative licensed to sell mutual funds. You may contact her at meekercohen@yahoo.com.

PROMOTION THROUGH PUBLICATION

By Dennis Schrag

One of the best ways to build your firm's reputation is to publish. Clients and prospects provide energized respect to organizations and suppliers that have recent 'ink.' Publishing in respected trade publications builds your professional image.

It takes some planning, a little skill and some time, but the payoffs can be impressive.

Here is the process:

- ◆ Identify the technical/professional publications your prospects and clients read. Don't overlook state and regional publications. They can have strong readership.
- ◆ Investigate the publications online or contact the editor. Secure a copy of each publication's editorial schedule - the list of topics it will cover in the next year. Review the publication's regular features. Is there a fit with your firm and your firm's talent?
- ◆ Identify if your expertise or recent projects might "fit" with the publication's plans.
- ◆ Contact the editor. Tell them you will submit an article for an upcoming edition. Ask about their preferences. Format? Length? Deadline? Readability level? Selection procedures?
- ◆ Ask the editor about any specific/unique editorial needs

or plans. Identify your information/expertise that "fit" with his/her requirements.

◆ Write the piece. In some cases it is wise to employ the services of a ghostwriter. Some technical experts get "the shakes" when they sit in front of the blank screen. But place them opposite a writer who interviews them, and they talk a blue streak.

◆ Prepare the article. Double-space it. Keep it crisp and easy to read.

◆ Explain unusual terms or include a brief glossary if needed.

◆ Prepare a cover letter to the editor. Keep it short. Explain why readers would benefit from the article you have submitted. Combine the article with some high quality photos or schematics, along with a short biography of the author, and send it off.

◆ Include a CD of the entire package.

◆ Check back with the editor after a week or two. Confirm that your submission was received. Ask for feedback. What would he or she prefer in the future?

A word about readability. Busy people don't have time to read long, difficult, and complex language. Your computer software has a great feature. You should use it often.

For any document, you can check the "readability scale." In Microsoft Word, select TOOLS from the main menu, then SPELLING AND GRAMMAR. In the SPELLING dialogue box select OPTIONS; check the READABILITY box. The readability scale is presented in grade levels: "10.6" means tenth grade sixth month.

The readability scale counts the number of syllables in words, number of words in sentences and the number of sentences in paragraphs to determine its scale. Shorter words, sentences, and paragraphs make easier reading. (This piece is written at the 8th grade level.)

After your article is published, publicize it. Order reprints and send a copy to all your clients, prospects, and relatives. They will be impressed. You will be remembered.

Dennis Schrag, Ed.D, CPSM is the President of The Longview Group, a national firm headquartered in Iowa City, IA. He is on the faculty of the University of Iowa Tippie College of Business. He was corporate marketing manager of The Stanley Group, a 700-person E/A/C and environmental firm. Contact him at dennis@longview-group.com or at 866-351-6510.

REPUTATION-BUILDING MEDIA RELATIONS

By Rolf Fuessler

Professional service firms do not have unlimited options in reputation (brand) building. They can sell a person (staff), a process (expertise) or product (design). They can tout a 'starchitect,' technical guru or knowledge team. They can advocate for a unique approach to a project or market. Or they can create a design sensibility that is instantly recognizable.

Few firms incorporate all three. Frank Gehry the person, a Gehry building, and his process of putting a building together is a rare example of this. Most firms clearly have strength in one area more than another. And that strength is played up in marketing and business development efforts.

How do firms communicate what makes them special, if not unique, to a broader audience? How do they build a reputation for what they do or know best? How can a local or regional firm become a national player? One answer is media relations, a highly effective tactic to bring recognition and build reputation. Any firm, small or large, local or national, narrowly focused or multi-disciplined, can use media relations to build reputation.

Discipline. Developing a media relations program that goes beyond simple news releases requires discipline, strategic thinking, and a sustained effort. Discipline comes in when a firm steps back and realisti-

cally vets what it has to communicate – the stories it can tell that will be of interest to editors and to their publications' audiences. For instance, a firm's design quality may be good but a long shot to be featured in one of the design publications. But its approach to designing a hospital, school or office building results in a long list of happy clients and users. Analyze, shape and put into words how this happens. Are there 10 steps that this firm uses when it approaches a project? Once a firm comes up with its 'messages', it should consistently work them.

Strategic thinking. Not everything will be fodder for a good story and article. The knack is to find the one or two ideas that will travel well and help achieve some strategic corporate or marketing goal. Three quick examples come to mind. One regional Midwest firm, with a strong portfolio of healthcare work, made a strategic decision to establish a national reputation. The second firm foresaw growth in an emerging market well ahead of many and used media relations as an important tool to establish its knowledge about and work in the field. The third firm, a largely local firm, used its focus on national media relations in several markets to solidify its local reputation and to combat out-of-state firms' encroaching on its markets.

Each had a strategic goal; each analyzed its potential stories

and aligned them to match goals and editorial calendars and publication interest. All three were highly successful in growing market share, building reputation, and winning work.

Sustained effort. Reputations are not built on quick six-month efforts. They need to be sustained over time. In all three cases, efforts are multi-year. All three get calls from the media to speak or write on topics, one receives calls from firms wanting to partner, and articles have led to work and new clients. A sustained effort does not have to be extensive or expensive. Many smaller firms (all three cited are medium-sized firms) do just as well by identifying one idea, one individual, one expertise or even one project to push and publish over a sustained period of time. There are many ways to slice an idea, project or expertise for fresh perspective or angles.

Initiate a media relations program. It can help you build the reputation you want and deserve!

Rolf Fuessler, APR, FSMPS, is President of Boston-based Fuessler Group Inc. He has over 35 years of journalism, public relations, and marketing communications experience. As a consultant, Rolf has won many national and local communications awards. He can be reached at fuessler@fuessler.com or 617 451 9383.

POSITION DIFFERENTIATION IS RELATIVE

One key to honing your competitive edge is by positioning - establishing and exploring a unique niche for your firm. It is a powerful tool for business development and can be utilized in both long-term strategies to establish your brand, and short-term tactics for proposals and presentations.

Brand Differentiation

Arriving at a message that differentiates your firm is never easy, given that you probably provide similar services to most of your competitors. But by digging deep in evaluating the value of your services, a tangible message can be developed and applied throughout your firm. For example, consider these five differentiating characteristics:

Niche Leader: a firm whose staff knows industry protocols so well that they engender instant trust and credibility.

Knowledge Leader: a firm that conducts primary research and developed new tools for clients based on that research.

ROI Champion: a firm that presents options and documents measurable savings in line with original projections.

Trusted Partner: a construction manager who uses a total open book approach for labor and materials savings, and shares those savings with the client.

Profit Maker: a firm who strengthens client brand image and measurably increases sales to the clients' target customers.

Position Differentiation

Unlike strategic positioning, the use of positioning as a tactic doesn't demand that you create "uniqueness" in the overall marketplace. Instead, it means that you recognize the special strengths you have and develop unique ways to tell clients how they differentiate you, and why they are important to them.

Your position is relative

Regardless of your size, or the size or location of the project, you can develop statements that "position" your firm as the right choice. The competition for a project sought by several firms usually comes down to one or more of three match-ups:

- ◆ Local firm vs. out-of-towner
- ◆ Experienced firm vs. new-kid-on-the-block
- ◆ Large firm vs. small firm

No matter which describes your firm, you can persuasively argue the merits of your "position." The important thing is that your position is always relative to the others. Given that you know the client's needs and the requirements of the specific project, you can develop positioning tactics to

win the job, even when the odds are against you.

If your firm has little experience on a particular project, you might emphasize the following point: we don't bring any preconceptions to the project, and will work to meet your needs, exactly as you define them.

Substantial Experience: Go with a proven winner, we're ahead of the learning curve on this type of project.

Small Firm: Your project is a big one to us. It will be handled by the dedication of a partner.

Large Firm: Our staff has depth, with backups that won't leave you in a hole.

Close Location: Keep your financial investment here at home, it's good publicity for you.

Remote Location: We have no local bias and no local pressure. If you need it, we'll get it for you.

Maintain a professional integrity as you develop your approach. Find out what the client wants and come up with a positioning offer to provide it. Don't sell services you can't deliver or don't feel are in the best interest of the project. Assemble the best package you can. Believe in it and sell it with enthusiasm!

Unhappy Clients Can Cost You Plenty!

It is essential to have an up-to-date list of client references. A large E/A firm in the Midwest currently uses these references in all their proposals. As part of an overall communications program to be based on using client testimonials, the list was given to their consultant who visited the clients, armed with a tape recorder to secure another great interview for the firm's program.

After only a few minutes into the interview, one client began to unload a litany of criticisms of the firm's service on his public works project. The consultant's first thought, confused by the tirade, was to shut off the recorder, but resisted until the client was through venting.

At the end of the short interview, the consultant asked if perhaps the tape should be destroyed. The client said, "no, I want you to take it back to their office and play it for them."

The firm could only avoid using the reference ever again, as it was too late to mitigate the damage already done. This could happen to any firm who has not kept a close vigil on their references. An industry caveat should be that unhappy clients will not tell you when they're unhappy, they will simply hire a different firm next time.

Here's what you must do whenever there are signs of discontent.

- ◆ Find a way to assist the client in expressing the problem, by having a constant client contact; either a project manager or marketing person, (as the project manager might be part of the problem).
- ◆ Confront the trouble head on. The sooner the problem is out in the open the better. Listen to the client's complaints, and make sure you understand the specifics.
- ◆ Offer immediate solutions. Tell the client exactly what you will do. Then do it.
- ◆ Internalize the solution. Make everyone aware of the situation and the intended solutions, and precautions on how to avoid these situations in the future.

The unfortunate part is that an unhappy client is a tremendous liability on the firm's bottom line. How much can they cost a firm? PSMJ has calculated and tabulated the cost using an example of a firm with a \$36 million gross revenue. The management hours to salvage unhappy clients total over 1,800 hours a year at a total cost of \$400,000. To get a copy of the table call Bruce Lynch at 800-537-7765. To find out how to interview clients before they surprise you, get *Marketing To Win: PSMJ's Guide to Developing and Improving Marketing Materials for A/E/C firms*. Order code www.psmj.com/publications/?id=117.

ARE WEB SITE HOME PAGES DEAD?

The way people now enter web sites may mean that we have to revise how our site is structured. The homepage which contains basic information about the firm has at last replaced the "splash" page of few years ago, when web designers always opened with a "flash" page, which was totally useless, and only slowed navigation down. Now the homepage can have the built-in animations and menus right up front.

As searches get more sophisticated, people are now landing on your site through many different entry points; advertising, direct mail, articles, and links, for example, and not just from search engines. The site should be built from the outside in, developing content and easy access to information, based on the user's needs. This means thinking "outside the box."

The homepage is now more than the cover of a book, as there is such a focus on search and other entry points. It does not have to work in an orderly, linear way. One good example is amazon.com that lets you define your requirements rather than taking you on a linear journey. The online experience should not be a photocopy of a brochure with a nice cover and fixed content, but a dynamic organism that should be developed around the end user - your clients.

Visit your editor's new site at: www.AECadvisors.com.

FULLFILLMENT HOUSES SAVE CREATIVE TIME

By Marilyn Mendell

Sometimes life has a way of getting ahead of you especially if you work in a marketing department for an architectural firm. There are emergency presentations, fee proposals to get out and a myriad of other essential last minute requests that come from architects. On top of that marketing has to come up with great concepts for invitations, events and collateral materials. What to do?

Perhaps administration can support marketing by adhering stamps and labels but when the mailings get into several thousands it becomes too cumbersome. For Hickok Cole Architects in Washington, DC their event mailings and client gifts often consist of many parts complicating the process even further.

I have found that for around \$700 per mailing, a fulfillment house can put the labels on in just the right place, adhere stamps in perfect order and all in straight lines (details matter when you are representing a design firm that often uses several stamps for a single mailing), stuff and fold inserts, and finally, deliver everything to the post office.

Everyone can see that this is a whole lot less expensive than having a senior marketing manager stick stamps on envelopes, some may even be able to imagine a delightful peace of mind, but the real benefit is

the professionalism that becomes apparent to clients. It's the subliminal message that holds the ultimate value - "We Care About Design." The entire process is painless *and* using fulfillment houses supports a non-profit that provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities. One caution: plan ahead, as the fulfillment house needs to schedule staff ahead of time and centers may be closed around the holidays. In the Washington area we use Service Source 501(c)3 6295 Edsall Road, Suite 175, Alexandria, VA 22312 and you can speak with Sallie Farmer 703-461-6153. She may be able to point you in the direction of places in your area. I use a fulfillment house for every mailing over 100 pieces, and never consider sending out mailings in any other way. It's best to keep creative staff thinking and dreaming up cool ideas.

*With over thirty years of experience, Ms. Mendell, president of Win Spin CIC, Inc., a creative intelligence consulting re-branding, re-imaging and public relations corporation, is known for her award-winning campaigns, most recently for one of her clients, Hickok Cole Architects in Washington, DC. Ms. Mendell has appeared on countless segments for Channel 7 and has been featured on *Good Morning America*. She has written hundreds of articles both regionally and nationally, she speaks at national conferences, and in 2006 she was nominated as Woman of the Year for the Washington Women in Public Relations.*

Without Follow-up, Nothing Will Happen

Never underestimate the power of follow-up to retain clients, or the lack of it to lose out on opportunities for projects. Your initial marketing messages can take many forms, from personal networking to more sophisticated forms of communications such as direct mail, articles in publications, or addressing attendees at a trade show. It matters little what the format is if a system of follow-up is not in play throughout the process.

Follow-up closes the gap between the initial connection, the offer and the acceptance. But of all three phases, it is the one that's misunderstood and often neglected. Every marketing action you take will get you some attention, and every single action you take after that is follow-up.

- ◆ Follow-up can help you stay ahead of your competition.
- ◆ Follow-up seals relationships, and it shows that you care.
- ◆ Follow-up can put out fires before they start by opening the lines of communication.

When a prospect shows interest in your services, you follow-up with more detailed information, then you follow-up to determine if there's any interest. If there is, you need to follow-up with another level of information, or find some way to follow-up and achieve a face-to-face meeting.

(cont. on the next page)

Without Follow-up,
Nothing Will Happen
(cont..)

But that's not the end of it.

The objective is to move the prospect to the next level at every stage of follow-up. But care has to be taken in the method used and the timing. You cannot move too fast or you may encounter resistance. You cannot move too slow, or the prospect may lose interest, or surmise that you have lost interest. In each case it's best to develop a strategy for follow-up that works for that particular prospect based on their need for information, not your eagerness to move forward.

What do you do when someone does not get back to you? We are quick to jump to conclusions that there is no interest, but it could mean anything, so resist the temptation to give up on the effort. Think of a way that might get it off high ground.

Once you have developed a system that produces results, build it into a step-by-step system that you can use over and over. Develop a follow-up strategy to fit all your marketing and business development activities, and the rest will definitely happen!

If you have developed a follow-up system that has produced results, please share it with us, and we'll feature it in our discussion group in a future issue. Contact us at AECadvisors@earthlink.net.

WHICH DIRECT MAIL FORMAT IS BEST?

There has always been a difference of opinion among direct mail marketers about the format of the piece, and which works best, a letter, self-mailer, or postcard. Some experts claim that self-mailers never work; others claim that the one-page letter outperforms a glossy mailer by 100 percent. But, as Robert Bly, notable copywriter commented, "I've always been prejudiced in favor of sales letters. But, it is not always better than a postcard or other self-mailer - and in recent years, I've come to love postcards for the results they can produce for marketers on a budget." It also matters in what buying stage the prospect is; in the loyalty phase they may respond better to a #10 letter package, in the awareness stage they may respond better to a colorful self-mailer.

That's what BSA Lifestructures decided when they designed their direct mail campaigns; one for a series of postcards, and the other for a Brochure/Card System.

Direct Mail Postcards

Changes in the field of radiology spawned the development of this program to expand awareness of the firm's extensive experience in radiology design for healthcare facilities. Internal interviews provided the theme of using a question on the front of each of three cards and the answer discussed on the back. The graphic solution was to use a simple bold color scheme for each card. A graphic photo of equipment was included behind the colored field. The name of the firm's radiology expert to contact was prominently listed on each card.

Brochure/Card System

The "voices" campaign, as it is called, focuses on acknowledging those that have a "say" in why and how a project is conceived and ultimately used - the client, the designer, and the end user.

The front of the cards quotes two of these "voices" in intertwined dialog - that is, every other line is the other voice. One is in black type (a client) the other is a bold color (a principal of the firm). The card measures 7½" x 7½" and features a specific health care center, with the project information and photos on the other side of the card. They are mailed in a translucent green vellum envelope, and mailed out every five weeks on an ongoing schedule.

BSA Lifestructures, Indianapolis (www.bsalifestructures.com)
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