



# Sightings



The Longview Group, LLC

INSIGHTS...IN SIGHT

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## Longview Group to Present Session at National Conference

*Reputation Studies and Client Satisfaction Programs: National Benchmark Data and a Firm's Case Study*

THURSDAY, JUNE 9, 2011

The Society for Design Administration/  
American Institute of Architects

For its strategic planning, a New York City architectural firm engaged The Longview Group to research its image with clients, past clients and prospects. A client satisfaction program was implemented.

Nancy Goshow, owner of Goshow Architects and Dr. Dennis Schrag, The Longview Group, will share what they did and how they did it.

The Longview Group completed a national study on the use of client satisfaction studies and reputation studies. That benchmark data will be shared during the session.



## Good idea? Four ways to kill it

by Dennis Schrag

Many, many years ago, I was starting a new position as a marketing manager. The organization was conservative. (I am not.) By conservative, I mean slow to change and financially tight.

The place was white-shirt, dark tie, blue suit conservative. The financial people in the organization had a good grasp on command and control. They spent thousands of dollars to track hundreds of dollars internally. It was a fine organization that did superior, conservative, profitable work. However, the business culture was caught in the 1970-1980s, and could not get out.

One of my self-initiated tasks soon after I took the position was to develop a client-retention program. It was a multi-part plan that included a client-

satisfaction process for each major project. It also included the use of our principals to make calls to clients to thank them for the work.

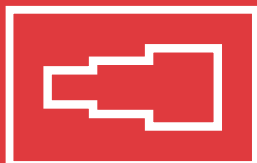
I had to fight hard internally to get both of those ideas through the marketing committee and then through the management committee. But eventually they were approved, after the organization's president resolutely blessed them internally. Deo gratias.

The third part of the retention program overlapped with a new and aggressive marketing effort. It was a simple idea that was standard in the industry: a toll-free number for clients and prospects to use to contact us. How can anyone fight more and better communications in a trust-based business?

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As I pitched the idea of a national toll free number to the marketing committee, it faced a “dig in the heels and hold on tight” rejection.

I had data:

- an analysis of our competition that offered the service cost projections
- research studies of clients in other service industries showing barrier reduction due to a free phone call

I was not prepared for the internal reactions. I was so naïve, some would say dumb.

Recently, I read an article by John Kotter, a professor emeritus at Harvard University, *Four Ways to Kill Good Idea*. After reading the article, I know what happened to my great idea, times four.

**Fear mongering:** My distracters keep yelling killer statements in the marketing committee meeting, like “what happens when a client calls on our expensive toll free number and talks for two hours?” and “You are going to have employee’s kids using it all the time.”

The “what if ideas” multiplied like an engineer’s calculator. Each member of the committee had a favorite. Fear mongering is infectious. It creates a tone of scare tactics and intense risk among stakeholders.

**Death by delay:** Quickly after most members of the marketing committee had brainstormed every possible reason why a toll-free number would not work, a motion was made to study the concept further. The committee listed 25 pieces of information that would be needed in time for the next marketing committee meeting in three months. Oh wait; it will have to wait until the meeting after the next one. We are doing a training session at the next meeting. See you in six months and we will discuss this crazy idea again.

Want to kill a good idea? Stall. Study it. Research it to death. Conduct internal and external polls. Conduct straw polls. Fly it up the flag pole. Do whatever you can do to kill any momentum that may exist.

**Confusion:** Six months later, I was back at the marketing committee meeting. I had a notebook full of data about toll-free phone service and customer service ratings.

The meeting was called to order and my proposal was up first. Before I could present a single response, I was hit with a blitzkrieg of “what if” questions. What if some kids get on the line all weekend long and leave crap in our voice mail system? What if the use forces us to get another receptionist to answer the phones? What if the callers are trying to connect with our sub consultants? How will we allocate these costs over each operating center?

The goal of the confusion ploy is to bewilder and mystify. Confusion does not need to be based in logic; it just needs to create fear. Often, taking a simple topic and beating it to death with confusion results in an artificially complex topic. “I don’t think he has thought this through.”

**Ridicule:** “Mockery, raillery, sarcasm, satire, irony... to make fun of unkindly with the intention of humiliating.”

Don’t have a good argument about the concept? Go after the one who proposed it. “He is the same guy who wants us to...” I can fully remember the comment: “Don’t you have any other ways to increase client retention except through the phone lines?” It was a fair question posed with heated delivery.

Ridicule can be a dangerous tool because it often snaps back at the aggressor. Colleagues don’t like to see their work mate “go down” over ideas. Their usual fear is “what goes around comes around.”

#### Lessons learned

Internal competition is usually fiercer than external competition.

Good ideas need to be floated. They need serious consideration. Four years later, this idea was recycled and immediately adopted. It lost a lot of its glamour as all our competitors had already established toll free service. We were the last. We could have been one of the first.

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