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For more information on Art Night, visit the [Hickok Cole Web site](#).

Hickok Cole generated additional interest in Art Night with [this video](#) of the art installation.

## Art Night at Hickok Cole Becomes Social Marketing

A community-building event brings unintended benefits

by Michael Hickok, AIA

**Summary:** Hickok Cole Architects, based in Washington, D.C., has become identified with our annual Art Night and our firm's ongoing support and relationship with the local arts community. But in the beginning, we never set this as a goal—we never predicted the results and never knew that what we were doing in fact had a name ... "social marketing."

Marketing and public relations don't come naturally to most architects. Few of us treat our profession as a business, and the idea of actively selling our services is anathema to most of us. And, yet, the need to bring in the work is basic to the success of our practice. At Hickok Cole, we have come to believe—almost as an article of faith—that marketing/PR helps us secure the kinds of high-visibility projects that we seek. This is where Art Night, as a form of social marketing, comes into play.



Hickok Cole Art Night, October 22, 2009.



Art Night did not originate as a marketing-based event. It started as a way of bringing the local architectural community together. We teamed with a local gallery owner who organized a small group of local artists to show their work, and we provided our offices as the display space. We also opened the

Greg White (Equity Residential), Anthony Lanier (EastBanc Inc. / Art Angel), Yolanda Cole, and Michael Hickok (principals, Hickok Cole Architects).

exhibit to our staff and other friends of the firm who might like to show their work. We then invited other

architects in the neighborhood and our friends in the architectural and design community to join us at the first Art Night.

Art Night was a small success. It linked us to both the architectural community and the arts community. And for a number of years, it remained just that ... a small success. In 2004, all of that changed when we hired an outside consultant, Marilyn Mendell of WinSpin CIC, Inc., to help us develop a larger and more strategic marketing/PR plan. She saw Art Night as an opportunity to implement a true social marketing effort that would benefit not only Hickok Cole but also the arts community at large.

She formally asked Washington Project for the Arts (WPA) to become a major partner in the production of Art Night. It was at this point that Art Night was expanded to include the larger real estate community. We continued to invite our architectural colleagues, but we also invited major real estate developers,



Michael Hickok and Yolanda Cole.

leading general contractors, and brokers to Art Night. Another major change came last year when I instituted the first Art Angels program. Unlike other sponsorships, this program only asked that individuals and firms agree to pre-purchase \$2,000 of art. Each Art Angel would be recognized in all of our promotional materials and on our Web site and would be given a "curator's tour" of the show prior to opening.



David Bell (Bell Architects/Art Angel donator) and Lisa Delplace (Oehme van Sweden & Associates/Art Angel).

Over that past 10 years, Art Night has grown from a small in-house show to one of D.C.'s premier local art events. Last year we sold over \$90,000 of art in three hours, and, once we've tallied the results, we expect to do the same this year, even in this economy. More importantly, we opened the local arts community to the broader

real estate community and linked Hickok Cole to both.

Social marketing is indirect by its nature. It offers you the opportunity to brand your firm with a good cause, reach out to your existing clients, and expand your network to new clients. In our case, it brings our clients into our offices and provides a venue where we can spend time with them; have them get to know us better, and never discuss business.

Art Night is just one idea. There are many other opportunities for architecture firms to engage in mutually beneficial social marketing. It does not have to be expensive; it does not have to be big. Find something you and your firm are passionate about and start there. If you have the resources, hire an outside consultant who can help link your brand to your passion. If money is an obstacle, look for others to provide in-kind donations. But in the end ... make the commitment and just do it.



Daniel Peyton (Suffolk Construction Company, Inc./Art Angel), Lisa Gold (executive director, Washington Project for the Arts), and Colin Winterbottom (artist).