

## In This Issue

- Outsourcing/Offshoring: A Boost to the Bottom Line?
- Branding for the Small Firm: Part II
- Finding and Keeping Qualified A/E/C Professionals: Part II
- Documenting Corporate Culture is a Must in Today's A/E/C Industry
- When Your Employees are your Brand
- Take Me to you Decision Maker ... Not Just Yet
- ART NIGHT 2007 Supports Local Artists and Washington Project for the Arts\Corcoran
- Niche Marketing Pays Off
- Is Word-of-Mouth Marketing Making a Comeback?
- Holiday Networking: Mingle Well and Your Pockets Will Jingle Well
- What's In a Name Change? Ask Nitsch Engineering!

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# A/E Rainmaker

## The Guide to Attracting and Keeping Great Clients

### OUTSOURCING/OFFSHORING: A BOOST TO THE BOTTOM LINE?

By Peter J. Kienle, FSMPS, CPSM and Judy Kienle, CPSM, MPH

In late summer, one of the McKim & Creed principals asked marketing to research outsourcing/offshoring for the firm since project managers were getting unsolicited calls from India and other offshore locations saying they could save up to 90% on certain professional services, if we hired them for this work. Project managers are always looking to reduce costs, as bottom line profit is a determinate of their yearly bonus.

Outsourcing and offshoring are similar in that they both involve subcontracting services to outside firms, but specifically, offshoring refers to getting work done in a foreign location. Both topics are top-of-mind concerns for firms looking to control costs, however, the decision to do either requires careful consideration. Relationships matter, in the end, you are risking your reputation if an offshore firm does not perform, misses a deadline, or submits less than a high quality product to your clients. Developing a good working relationship and gaining commitment are necessary elements to obtaining quality work that will maintain your firm's reputation. In order for the firm to make an informed decision, research was required and tactics for collecting both primary and secondary research were developed.

A Google search of articles on engineering outsourcing and offshoring delivered 5,200,000 and 2,330,000 hits respectively. Culling through all the hits would be impossible; however, early in the research, it was apparent that there is a tremendous amount of useful information about these topics. Probably one of the most important discoveries was a free public workshop held in October 2006 sponsored by the National Academy of Engineering (NAE), which focused entirely on global outsourcing of engineering services. NAE commissioned numerous papers, most being authored by university professors and researchers, which later became available to the public. The following points serve as a synopsis of some fascinating findings.

◆ **Offshoring will grow.** Global spending for engineering is about \$750 billion/year, and is expected to exceed \$1 trillion/year by 2020, a 25% increase. Currently, an estimated \$10 to \$15 billion is being offshored, which is projected to grow to \$150 billion to \$225 billion, a sizable increase. An Engineering Services Summit was held in Bangalore, India on August 4, 2006 and similar numbers were projected.

◆ **U.S. engineering resources cannot keep pace.** By anyone's account, many more engineering graduates are entering the job market from China and India

(cont. on page 2)

## Outsourcing/Offshoring: A Boost to the Bottom Line?

(cont. from page 1)

than from the United States. Research conducted by Duke University for this program states that annually there are 222,000 U.S. graduates with bachelors/sub-baccalaureate engineering, computer science, and IT degrees. China will graduate 644,000 and India 215,000 in similar programs, an almost four fold combined increase over the U.S. The lesson: work will go on where there are workers to do it!

◆ **India and China in position to be leaders.** While firms are offshoring to over a dozen countries, including Mexico, Philippines, Poland, Hungary, Vietnam, India and China, India and China are in leading positions to gain substantially in the years ahead.

Primary research was conducted with more than 50 A/E firms asking specific questions about their experiences with outsourcing and offshoring services. The results:

**1. Technical Competency.** Many U.S. firms worry about technical competency in the offshore firm. To a person who has done offshoring, they said the technical competency to do good work is there, but there are other bigger factors to consider, among them, communication and training issues.

**2. Many are considering it, but few are doing it.** Some have tried and said it did not

work well. Many saw no need to outsource as they were handling their workloads adequately in-house. Something needs to trigger any consideration of offshoring, and usually it involves cost savings or the potential ability to develop reliable additional capacity.

**3. Firms of all sizes are doing it.** Most big firms have opened offshore offices or developed substantial offshore relationships. More middle and small firms are starting relationships or plan to offshore services in the near future.

**4. Cost savings are there.** The findings indicate that there is, in fact, substantial cost savings potential. While offshore telemarketers say as much as 90% cost savings is possible, consensus seems to be about 50% savings on average after all costs (labor, QA/QC, and any other costs) are factored in.

**5. Communication is still the #1 issue.** In the U.S., engineering staff often have challenges communicating from one cubicle to the next and working with professionals thousands of miles away in a foreign country with a different language, culture, and government, significantly compounds the communication issues. The amazing thing is that good communication can be had if both partners work diligently at it.

Based on the research, consider the following before making a large investment of resources in offshoring services:

◆ **Treat offshoring services as any other service you would contract for.** Due diligence is necessary prior to contracting for offshoring services, just as it is for outsourcing services within the U.S. Investigate the firms' technical systems, knowledge and process, and create an action plan for managing differences. Always, as you would for any service, check multiple references. Many firms assign one person to lead "outsourcing efforts" and that person sends RFP's, reviews materials submitted, and visits/interviews firms in the prospective offshoring country. As you can recognize, this is the typical A/E selection process.

◆ **Training and education.** Be certain to check that the offshore firm uses compatible hardware & software to yours and to those of your clients. Keep in mind training may be needed and will require an investment of time and resources to maximize your offshore investment. Ultimately it will be your job to make sure training programs for offshore employees are consistent with how your firm wants to work. Incentives or bonuses may be needed to induce offshore firms to produce at desired levels.

◆ **Do you have a foreign-born employee?** One firm talked about an employee from India who was trained and educated in the U.S. and needed to return to India for family reasons. This individual returned to India and started an office there to offer CAD services for his old firm — a relationship that worked well

## Outsourcing/Offshoring

(cont. from page 2)

for both. He knew the quality needed and offered assurances that things would be done “his old firms’ way”. Other firms have located offices offshore with a family member running those offices — another option that has shown potential.

As the demand for engineering services increases, one logical path to growth is offshoring. The U.S. is the technology nexus of the world and the rest of the world is still overall far behind. Jack & Suzy Welch summarized in their October 15, 2007 Business Week Column “...globalization means outsourcing will be with us forever. Companies and their manager just need to get better at it...”

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Subsequent issues in 2008 will explore ways to communicate the value of offshoring to clients in both acquiring and keeping clients informed of the process and benefits of the results. Editors

## BRANDING FOR THE SMALL FIRM: PART II

By Marilyn Mendell

See **Part I: Gathering**, in the November 2007 issue of *AVE Rainmaker*.

### 2. ASSESSING

Once the basic information has been gathered and the tracking tools are in place the second phase can begin. Hopefully by now you will notice holes. Perhaps in filling in the budget you say, “Gosh, we don’t submit for awards.” Or “How do I find media contacts? Is she crazy, 4,000 contacts? First, why do I need that many and second, where would I get them?” That’s the normal panic stage. Relax. Everyone has something to submit for awards. Start small. Start to look for opportunities. Enter your dream awards on the list. Media contacts are easy. The first page of all magazines list the editor-in-chief and all their contact information. When you join a group or association you get a mailing list. Business journals all have a list of the top firms or businesses in various categories.

**Setting goals.** Don’t look at what you have just compiled. Just write down a wish list. “I want two new projects this year. I want to speak at the AIA national convention. I want a full page article in my local newspaper and *The New York Times*.” Now sort. Projects, articles, speaking engagements, and so forth.

**Aligning the facts with goals projected.** Now compare your charts with your wish list. Make sure that your charts have these wishes on them as tasks and as budgeted items. Make sure *The New York Times* is in your database and several reporters are tagged as media.

**Developing a plan.** Let’s say your plan is to get two new projects this year from law firms and you want to be recognized as a player within the realm of law firms. That’s your overarching goal and now your plan will be to support that result. Spend time noticing your surroundings. What magazines get to law firms? What organizations do lawyers congregate at? What conventions do they go to? Who speaks at those? Find a list of law firms to contact.

**What did you get for answers?** By now you should have a few shockers to the questions you asked. If not, go back and start again. Someone should have told you something that you were sure everyone already knew about you or what you do. It is the anomalies that you’re looking for — the answers that don’t fit nicely into your goals and plans, or won’t support those goals if people continue to think of you the way they are currently.

Part III will discuss “**Implementation** of these ideas.”

With over 30 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. She has written hundreds of articles and speaks at national conferences. She can be reached: [mmen125@aol.com](mailto:mmen125@aol.com).

## FINDING AND KEEPING QUALIFIED A/E/C PROFESSIONALS (PART II) RECRUITING FROM BUSINESS PARTNERS, CLIENTS, & COMPETITORS

By Peter Ashton Lyon

Business partners and consultants are also good resources for finding key hires. However, great care and ethical standards must be applied in recruiting from these sources. These sources are best handled through open, direct relationship building and making it easy for the key hire to take their own initiative to make the move to your firm.

As for securing skilled personnel from clients and competitors, high ethical standards must also be employed. Recruiting from clients under certain conditions has always been an accepted practice. Accepted resources are retiring government employees who are contemplating retirement from the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, State and Federal Departments of Transportation, and/or state, county or municipal public works or utility operations.

Many retiring government employees are looking to extend their careers after their public service careers. Depending on their positions in public service many gravitate to design, engineering, and contracting companies that are eager to hire them not only for their capabilities but also for their insider knowledge of operations and relationships with decision makers.

As for recruiting from competitors, extraordinary care must be taken to assure the adher-

ence to ethical and professional standards. It is important not only for the integrity of the firm, but also for the integrity of the individuals involved.

However, as much as we understand the implications of notorious recruiting of key hires from our competitors, it is still a necessary business tool to identify, pursue and hire talented personnel, many of whom come from competing organizations. It is a fact of life in the daily battle to increase market share that hiring top-notch people from competing organizations can:

- ◆ Increase your firm's talent pool.
- ◆ Decrease your competition's talent pool.
- ◆ Provide inside information on your competitors operations.
- ◆ Possibly win your competitors clients.

It is agreed throughout the A/E/C industry that the practice of recruiting talented personnel from competitors is best accomplished by building personal relationships through professional organization involvement and industry meetings.

### Using solid ethical standards when recruiting people

Some of the recommendations noted by senior members of Fellows in the Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) and members of the Professional Services Management Association (PSMA) include:

- ◆ Develop clear and definitive employment policies with respect to recruiting as well as new employee orientation, training, and career path development.
- ◆ Establish and maintain a comprehensive Employee Manual outlining all company policies including an exit policy and maintain the manual on the firm's intranet website and as hard copy.
- ◆ Create fair and reasonable employment agreements for upper level staff members.
- ◆ Make it a policy not to use proprietary information that an employee may bring to the firm from his/her former employer. As tempting as this might be, it is not appropriate to use sensitive client information and/or written company policies from other firms. In this highly litigious environment, a firm can little afford to fight claims for use of another firm's proprietary materials or sensitive company information.

Part I addressed recruiting from educational institutions and industry (*A/E Rainmaker* Nov. 2007).

Part III will look at initiatives firms use to keep their skilled workforce and sustain their firms' growth.

Peter Ashton Lyon, Associate AIA, FSMPS. Peter has 29 years of experience in the A/E/C industry. He serves on the SMPS Foundation Board of Trustees, on the PSMA National Board of Directors, and as the AIA Georgia Representative and Chairman of the QBS Georgia Steering Committee. He can be reached at 404-626-9024. E-mail: [peterashtonlyon@gmail.com](mailto:peterashtonlyon@gmail.com).

## DOCUMENTING CORPORATE CULTURE IS A MUST IN TODAY'S A/E/C INDUSTRY

By Kimberly Kayler, CPSM, CSI

Everyone knows that one of the key fundamentals of business growth is actually delivering what you promise. And, if your company is growing, that can be easier said than done. New business often requires additional employees and little time to train them about much beyond the healthcare policy and timekeeping software. However, with a documented approach to corporate culture and the way things are done at your company, you'll take the first step toward integrating the new team members into your "way of thinking."

### **Why Culture is Important**

In the overly competitive A/E/C market, culture is king. Your organization's core values shape every decision you make. Values shape the way you define your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. They form the backbone of the message you intend to disseminate.

Not only does your culture help guide your everyday actions and delivery of goods and services, it helps you differentiate your business from the competition. If a strategic plan is the "blueprint" for an organization's work, and the vision is the "artist's rendering" of the achievement of that plan – the culture is the guiding light and the thing that keeps you on track. It also tells you when you have derailed. For example, if one of your key messages to the market-

place highlights your commitment to environmental stewardship, make sure your culture embraces such a philosophy. When it comes to culture, your actions will speak louder than your words.

### **How to Get Started**

Documenting a culture begins with a discussion held by key stakeholders in the organization about what is important. It is often as simple as asking participants the following: "What do we want to make sure new people understand about the way we do things around here and what do we value in terms of our service and our people?" Letting the discussion flow as a solid brainstorming session will ensure that a variety of ideas are documented. If at all possible, bring in an outside facilitator to help guide the session and keep it on track.

After a healthy discussion has occurred, go back and prioritize the responses. What key themes show up over and over again? What concepts clearly represent the core and essence of your firm? Next, work your way through the list and figure out how best to capture these concepts in terms of teaching them to the next generation. A workshop for new employees? Maybe a letter summarizing the key tenets? Or, maybe ongoing training sessions lead by key leaders in the firm. Many have found it is actually best to create a handbook for new

employees that can serve as a reference tool.

### **Documenting Success**

But, passing down the corporate culture goes well beyond documenting the approach a firm takes to project development and delivery. In today's hurried business world, it is also important to share corporate values with new members of your team. For example, if recycling is an important part of your culture, or partnering with community organizations is valued, make sure everyone knows it. Better yet, make sure they know why you value such activities and how it fits in with your cultural mindset. The clearer you are on defining the culture and explaining the reasoning behind the belief system, the more likely new employees are to embrace the same doctrine. Such buy-in not only ensures a solid corporate culture, but is likely to result in a profitable business as well.

Kimberly Kayler is President of Constructive Communication, Inc. With a journalism degree and a decade of high-level experience serving engineering, architecture and construction firms as a corporate marketing executive, as well as experience working for a full-service advertising/marketing communications agency, Kayler started Constructive Communication in 2001 to serve the needs of technical and professional service firms. She is the author of more than 750 published articles on a variety of concrete, construction, design and other technical subjects. She can be reached at: 614-873-6706 or [kkayler@constructivecommunication.com](mailto:kkayler@constructivecommunication.com).

## WHEN YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE YOUR BRAND : WHEN YOUR PRODUCT IS YOUR PEOPLE, YOUR COMPANY'S BRAND IS WHAT COMES OUT OF YOUR EMPLOYEES' MOUTHS

By Michelle Jones and Jeff Posey

Unlike in the world of products, marketing does not sell professional services – your people do! Your business reputation and success is completely dependent upon your employees' ability to deliver on the promises they make to clients.

That's why employees are the most effective carriers (sometimes the only effective carriers) of the brand message for professional services companies. And the best way to influence what employees say, think, and do is through employee communication.

### Employee communications = brand management

There are three critical levels of information employees must internalize:

- 1. Vision:** This is the end state you are working toward. Employees need to know how to recognize successful branding.
- 2. Differentiation:** These are the characteristics that set your company apart from your competitors. While senior managers may understand it, line employees may rarely think about it.
- 3. Direction:** This is what the company is doing to propel the company toward the vision. In the best cases, employees know exactly how they contribute to reaching the goal.

If employees know and believe these three things, they can't help but become walking, talking billboards for the company's brand.

### Delivering the messages

Now comes the hard part – getting employees to absorb the brand information.

- 1. Management and supervisors:** If management and supervisors constantly tell and model the brand, so will employees.
- 2. Internal communications:** Show employees how the brand works. Tell them real stories about employees who have illustrated the brand in action. Repeat often. Forever.
- 3. External communications tools:** What is written by the press or appears in ads deeply influences what employees think and feel about their own company.
- 4. Quality Matters:** If quality of delivery is core to your brand, then employee communications must be of equally high quality.
- 5. Consistency:** A lack of consistency across all of these elements breeds mistrust and creates lost branding opportunities.

### How employees are the brand at Carter & Burgess

At Carter & Burgess, this is how we manage our brand through employees:

- ◆ On our intranet, CBconnect, we tell stories about how employees who live the brand help and delight clients.
- ◆ We publish a magazine for clients, industry leaders, and employees called the Quarterly, which has stories written by key employees who think ahead about client needs.
- ◆ We launched a company-wide style guide in June that precisely spells out our brand messages, our “elevator speech,” and the quality and consistency of all formal written communications with clients and prospects.
- ◆ We've centralized the flow of all executive communication to employees.
- ◆ We collaborate with Human Resources on all employee communications and internal initiatives.
- ◆ We buy ads and work to place stories in the media about innovative ways our employees help clients. The best recent example is: [To Clarify Sloppy Signage, Airports Hire](#)

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## WHEN YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE YOUR BRAND (CONT. FROM PAGE 6)

'Wayfinders,' by Melanie Trottman, *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 9, 2007, page B1.

What has this done for Carter & Burgess? It's helped unify the company's employees around the company's identity. Most specifically, it has resulted in "unexpected" sales from employees mentioning to their best clients other areas of Carter & Burgess expertise that the clients didn't know about.

Michelle Jones is director of National Marketing for Carter & Burgess. With nearly two decades of experience marketing professional services, she has helped implement a new and broad branding strategy at the company that has energized sales. She can be reached at 817-735-7055 or [Michelle.Jones@c-b.com](mailto:Michelle.Jones@c-b.com).

Jeff Posey is manager of communications for Carter & Burgess. He manages the "corporate storytelling" department and draws heavily from the decade he spent as a magazine writer and editor. He can be reached at 817-735-6139 or [Jeff.Posey@c-b.com](mailto:Jeff.Posey@c-b.com).

To find out more about Carter & Burgess, visit [www.c-b.com](http://www.c-b.com).

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Do you have examples of how your firm created its brand and how you use it. We would love to hear about how your unique brand has enhanced your marketing program. Please contact Ernie or Joy at [AECadvisors@earthlink.net](mailto:AECadvisors@earthlink.net).

## "TAKE ME TO YOUR DECISION MAKER ... NOT JUST YET"

There was a time when marketers felt that their only objective was to meet with the decision maker. This was not only a difficult chore, but a foolish one at that. Here's why: in order to meet with the decision maker, you had better have all your ducks in a row, know and understand their needs, have a plan to meet them, and have an answer for all their questions. There is a better way. Here are three ways business developers and principals have used to get that vital information.

1. Meet Norman, a business developer for a small architectural firm in Virginia Beach, VA. He was young, attractive, and had great success visiting the local companies and striking up open relationships with the receptionists and secretaries of the companies. He garnered a lot of valuable information this way, and shared this with the principal and marketing team. He found ways into a company that others couldn't, and in one instance opened the door for a consultant to come in and interview the development company's decision maker about plans for a spec building. Prior to the interview the developer was reluctant to hire the firm. The firm changed their approach based on the interview, and the firm was awarded the job without going through a formal interview process.

2. Meet Janis, a business developer for an A/E firm in Omaha, NE, specializing in health care in the rural midwest. He would never go directly to a local or rural hospital and try to meet with the administrator. He would first go to the local pub and get to know the folks in the town, and ask a lot of questions. Then he would go to the local hospital, look around and ask more questions. Once he found out what their pressing needs were, he would schedule a meeting with the administrator. He later hired a hospital administrator to work as Marketing Director in the A/E Firm's Health Care Division.

3. Meet Peter, a principal of a high-end-design architectural firm in New York City. Whenever he was invited to discuss the possibility of a new educational facility, he left early to scope out the locale. He would go first to a sports bar, as he was an avid sports fan, and learn who the local teams were, what their scores were, and other details. The tactic of course, was to de-emphasize his high-tech design image in favor of being just a regular guy able to talk about local sports. It worked, as he received commission after commission to design high-end educational facilities, and invitations to compete for projects.

The bottom line is that the best information about a company, institution, or facility operation can be obtained from the people who work there, the user groups, the plant managers, the facilities engineers, the students, and so forth. They can all make a valuable contribution to prep you for your meeting with the decision maker.

## ART NIGHT 2007 SUPPORTS LOCAL ARTISTS AND THE WASHINGTON PROJECT FOR THE ARTS\CORCORAN

Hickok Cole Architects believe that great design can come from anywhere and to help inspire the office, support contemporary art, and add to the firm's strong community service commitment, Michael Hickok formed ART NIGHT. "ART NIGHT is one of those rare occasions that bring together the arts, architecture and real estate communities. We open our offices not only to our clients, but also to our competitors and welcome them to join us and our colleagues," said Hickok. Each year the office transforms into a bustling art gallery with paintings, drawings and sculpture replacing architectural renderings and photographs.

Each year Hickok Cole Architects teams with the **Washington Project for the Arts\Corcoran** (WPA\C) to put on a world class juried art show. The show's proceeds go to further WPA\C's mission – to promote and present experimental exhibitions, programs and performances created by local, contemporary artists working in a variety of mediums, and all proceeds from the sale of artwork flow back into the Washington, DC art community. Art Night's Curator, Jayme McLellan, Director of Civilian Art Projects assisted by Adrienne Johnson, selected exciting and dynamic works. It was also open to the public by invitation and reserved tours, and this year's show attracted 750 attendees.

Hickok introduced a new concept for 2007: **ART ANGELS**. Just as the investment community supports new, exciting entrepreneurs as Angel Investors, Hickok Cole Architects appealed to friends, colleagues, and clients to invest in the local arts community by becoming Art Angels. Each Art Angel committed an upfront amount of \$2,000 towards the purchase of art at Art Night. This year's Art Angels — James G. Davis Construction, Boston Properties, Mark G. Anderson Consulting, Rand Construction, Steelcase, Weidlinger Associates, and Hickok Cole Architects — donated a total of \$14,000, increasing the total sales for 2007.

In addition, Hickok Cole employees and their friends and family members go through a juried process to be included in the show. This year there were 26 artists from this pool who showed and sold their work. The artists waive their commission for each sale and donate that portion to the WPA\C. To further inspire Hickok Cole employees and add to the "best-place-to-work mentality," the principals give the office a budget for a new piece of art to be purchased at ART NIGHT. Voted on by the employees over the years, the annual event has raised over \$180,000 and Hickok Cole has gained a growing sizable art collection along with the community good will ... priceless.

## Niche Marketing Pays Off

Identifying groups of clients who share a common problem and offering them tailored messages is a technique known as "niche customization."

Our technological advances have enhanced our ability to gather, analyze, and store data which makes the process of targeting and marketing to niches much easier.

- ◆ Some niches may need to hear from the rainmaker more often than others.
- ◆ The appropriate message for each group must be delivered at the right time.
- ◆ To accommodate differences within the niche you need to keep each message fresh.
- ◆ Keep up with the current trends and technologies within each niche group of clients.

Developing marketing tactics for niche markets is a long process. It means giving constant attention to clients and their changing needs. In the end, this targeted approach will pay off.

**HICKOK COLE ARCHITECTS, PC** is an eighty-person award-winning Architecture, Housing, Interior Design and Master Planning firm in Washington, DC., led by Principals Michael E. Hickok, AIA and Yolanda Cole, AIA, LEED/AP. Contact Marilynn Deane Mendell, Strategic Planning and Public Relations, 540-207-404. [mmendell@hickokcole.com](mailto:mmendell@hickokcole.com).

## IS WORD-OF-MOUTH MARKETING MAKING A COMEBACK?

Many A/E/C firm principals can remember when the most viable form of marketing was by word-of-mouth, and through tips and referrals. Firms did not have a sophisticated arsenal of marketing tools at their disposal. This was the trusted method of getting new work, and it proved to be very effective at the time. Could it be the answer to the current dilemma in what works best in business development today?

A survey of more than 700 marketing professionals conducted by MarketingSherpa\*, found that of the 15 most common B2B marketing tactics used today, no single tactic is delivering a knockout performance. However, this study and several others reported positive results from at least three tactics: e-mail and postal mail to in-house lists, public relations, and activities that build word-of-mouth trust.

Another industry survey published by BIGresearch\*\* says that word-of-mouth marketing is one of the most talked about options for marketers. For example, 90.8% regularly or occasionally seek advice about products and services before making a purchase. New digital options make it easier to give and receive opinions on products and services and it's no longer confined to one-to-one conversations. New media options such as online search, blogging, email, texting, video streaming and social networks have expanded the word-of-mouth universe.

### Best Marketing: Word-of-Mouth

Dennis Schrag Ed.D., CPSM of the Longview Group, LLC,\*\* (www.longview-group.com), has no doubt which is the best approach. "When it comes to marketing a trust-based business like a professional service organization, there is no better marketing method than word-of-mouth. It is simply the BEST. Client opinions drive reputation. When you sell invisible services, reputation is everything," he said.

Dennis exclaims; "as a business owner, I can tell you how great my business is all day long. Hohum. A client tells you how I helped him or her make more profit: You listen. YEE-HAAA! It is the power of testimony. We don't use it enough."

"Create reasons to talk about your products and services," Dennis pointed out, "make it easier for the client-to-client conversation to take place."

"You must spotlight what makes your organization better and different. Word-of-mouth can't be faked or invented. It has to be legitimate and sincere to work," he added.

The basic elements are:

- ◆ Educating people about your products and services.
- ◆ Identifying people most likely to share their opinions about your service.

- ◆ Providing tools that make it easier to share information.
- ◆ Studying how, where, and when opinions are being shared.
- ◆ Listening and responding to supporters, detractors, and neutrals.

How can you use word-of-mouth to build your reputation and your business? "When was the last time your organization completed a reputation study? Do you know what clients say about you," Dennis asked?

### Word-of-mouth marketing works for all size firms

Word-of-mouth marketing is particularly helpful to small firm principals, such as Lawson Willard of Lawson Willard Architects, in San Francisco, CA.\*\*\*\* One way that Lawson spreads the word is through AIA/San Francisco's *Small Firms, Great Projects* initiative that they do in conjunction with *San Francisco* magazine. "We usually get lots of interest in the firm after we are mentioned," Lawson said.

Lawson has a long list of happy clients and a good base of contractors and interior designers – both residential and commercial – that form an informal network of referrals, all by word-of-mouth.

\* Contact MarketingSherpa at: [info@marketingsherpa.com](mailto:info@marketingsherpa.com).

\*\* [www.BIGresearch.com](http://www.BIGresearch.com)

\*\*\* Contact Dennis Schrag at: [dennis@longview-group.com](mailto:dennis@longview-group.com).

\*\*\*\* Excerpted from: *PSMJ's Circle of Excellence: How the Best-run A/E Firms Manage Clients, Staff, and Projects*.

## HOLIDAY NETWORKING: MINGLE WELL AND YOUR POCKETS WILL JINGLE WELL

By Karen Susman

The business world seems to close down from Thanksgiving through mid-January. But, holiday time is not the time to stop networking. If you plan to kick off your wing tips as soon as you take the turkey out of the oven, lace them back up and get out there. Don't miss opportunities to build relationships that will pay off in 2008. If you are job hunting, don't hide. Put on your cheery face, prepare to answer the question, "Haven't you found a job yet?" and mingle, mingle, mingle. Here are a few ways to turn holiday time into gold.

**1. Reconnect.** The holidays give you the perfect excuse to call people you haven't talked to in years to wish them "Happy Holidays." Find out what they are up to and fill them in on your life (the abridged version, please). Follow up with a note. Stay in touch. Reconnect with three people every day from now through January 7th.

**2. Stay visible.** Attend every holiday party and networking event you can get your hands on. Look in your local newspaper's business section. Check your newspaper's website, too. There are often many more opportunities to network listed there.

**3. Check university activities.** Many universities have conferences that are open to the public. Your own alumni group may be having an event. If not, gather alums in your city together.

**4. Look at every event as a networking event.** Concerts, art gal-

lery openings, book signings, religious services, volunteer activities are all networking opportunities.

**5. Don't give out business cards at holiday parties unless asked.** You need a softer approach at social functions even if the function is sponsored by a business. Ask for someone else's card and then you can follow up with a brief note.

**6. Add something creative to your e-mail signature.** Offer something for free that will require a response. Now you've given something of value that entitles you to build a relationship.

**7. Send seasons greetings cards after December 25th.** Your card won't get lost in the slew of cards that arrive before December 25th.

**8. Go to events where your clients, customers and future employer hang out.** Contact your market's associations on the local and national level and see where and when they meet. Look under "Associations" in your local yellow pages. Surf over to [ASAEnet.org](http://ASAEnet.org) to find association websites for every industry and interest.

**9. Call now to set up appointments for after January 1st.** If someone you call sounds hassled, ask when you should call back. Write that date down and follow up. Remind him or her with a brief e-mail or note that he or she asked you to call back on that date.

**10. Give your services as a door prize.** When an organization seeks door prizes, donate your product or services. Put the dollar value on the prize. Your name and service will be announced over and over again, you'll do something valuable for the organization and the person who wins your prize may become a customer and lead.

**11. Use December to strategize for 2008.** Devise a marketing plan for yourself just as if you were a business. (Even if a company employs you, you are still the CEO of your own career). Plan how and where you will network in 2008. Join associations this month so you'll be ready to attend meetings in January. Develop promotional ideas. Write an article. Create a tip sheet that would benefit your contacts and establish you as an expert. Generate speaking engagements based on the information in your article or tip sheet. Get a mailing ready to go out on January 7th.

When January 2008 arrives, you want more to show for December than credit card bills and ten pounds of extra giblets around your middle. December networking can give you a head start on a new year of success.

Karen Susman, Remarkable Associations, is a networking expert. Visit [www.karensusman.com](http://www.karensusman.com) for free articles and tips. Her guidebook, *102 Top Dog Networking Secrets*, is just \$5.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME CHANGE? ASK NITSCH ENGINEERING!

A name change for a firm isn't just about a new logo, but should involve a strategy on how to turn the change into an opportunity. (Changing the firm name had been discussed several times over the firm's 17-year history). Once decided, they wanted to have a smooth transition, both internally and externally, from the firm name Judith Nitsch Engineering, Inc. (JNEI), which they had since 1989, to Nitsch Engineering (no acronym!). Minelli Associates, Boston, helped strategize the name change roll-out.

They kicked off the campaign by asking their firm leaders to complete a survey about why a name change was needed and how they were perceived by existing and potential clients. This confirmed that a name change was necessary. The name Judith Nitsch Engineering implied a small local WBE – the opposite of what they had become, a 70-person multi-discipline firm located in Boston, with projects in 13 states, five countries, and only 14% WBE work.

They also wanted to convey that the new name meant that they were still the same caring firm that goes the extra mile for clients, and that the firm has evolved to be more than Judy, the founder. To accomplish this they needed to update the current logo to reflect the next generation of Nitsch employees and establish a consistent look (color, font, and logo use) throughout their new communication pieces. They decided to update their logo, yet have it remain recognizable since the "JNEI arrow" had been an important part of their brand. They added a tagline, "New Name. Same Spirit," for the roll-out period.

Their target audience consisted of existing and potential clients: specifically architects, landscape architects, owners, developers, vendors, staff, and friends; a total of 7,500 database contacts.

They created an "Advocate in Action" program to recognize employees who go above and beyond for clients because they understand client and project needs beyond the firm's scope of services. They developed an employee newsletter describing the name change; sent countdown e-mails from their management team to employees announcing various name change activities, such as the external roll-out to clients. They asked the staff to "leak the news" to their VIP clients; sent e-mails to 7,500 database contacts; sent a press release; mailed a letter to contacts, sponsored Build Boston, an industry event that attracts thousands of architects, with water bottles labeled with their new logo and tagline. They launched a new website; updated all external communication pieces; and wrapped-up with a New Year's Card in January with the message, "New Year. New Name. Same Spirit."

They successfully trained employees to understand the name change and the importance of "living" the brand, and both existing and new clients now know them as Nitsch Engineering. They want to do things the right way, and rather than throwing a party, they thought about what their clients needed, such as the water bottles at Build Boston, and a thorough explanation and reassurance that their quality service wasn't changing, just the name.

As a result of the name change roll-out, Nitsch Engineering received hundreds of written responses of support, and several hundred phone calls and comments at meetings. They also received at least 4 new project opportunities, and won two of them.

For more information, contact Christina Fitzgerald, Nitsch Engineering Marketing Manager at: [cfitzgerald@nitscheng.com](mailto:cfitzgerald@nitscheng.com), or call 617-338-0063.

# A/E Rainmaker

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