

# THE ZWEIG MARKETING LETTER

Insight and intelligence for architecture, engineering, and environmental consulting firms

RIGHT | NOW

## Where work comes from...

And where firms try to get work from – it's not online.

By JOÃO FERREIRA  
Managing editor

Design firms are like your trusty neighborhood butcher or friendly barber of yesteryear – repeat clients, developed through personal relationships, bring in the bulk of work.

In an informal online survey held by **THE ZWEIG MARKETING LETTER**, most respondents said they pursue new work mostly with existing clients. Word of mouth and responding to requests for proposals are also among the principal methods marketers use to try to win new work, respondents to the survey said, followed by seeking external referrals and networking efforts.

Curiously, when it comes to actual work won, while word of mouth and external referrals are among the main sources of new work, RFPs are not.

“Word of mouth/referrals aren’t always a guaranteed win. But they usually (80- to 85 percent) result in advancing to shortlist/interview,” one anonymous survey participant said in a comment section.

In any case, existing clients are by far where most of the new work comes from.

The responses seem to suggest that resources allocated to obtaining work from existing clients are well worth the effort,

HOW DO YOU PURSUE/WIN WORK?



Chart shows average values

“There is rarely a single thing that results in a win. It is always a combination of what we know and/or can find out about something in the pipeline, relationships with existing clients and consultants, and our experience.”

but also that firms may be putting too much emphasis on the old RFP machine as a potential source of new work.

“There is rarely a single thing that results in a win,” an anonymous respondent to the

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EDITORIAL

## Corporate branding...

From the inside out.



Debbie Frederiksen

The term “branding” means many things to different people. If you asked most professional staff in architecture, engineering, planning or environmental consulting firms, they’d say branding means

logo. But those of us with marketing backgrounds know better. A corporate brand is much more than a name, symbol, colors, or typeface. It embodies everything that a firm represents, starting with its core values. From the overall culture to the CEO’s email auto-signature, from the way the receptionist answers the phone to the visual impact of a construction site banner – it’s all a part of corporate branding.

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In my 18 years experience in this industry, I can tell you firsthand that when it comes to branding – some firms get it, some don’t, but most at least try. Success comes to those who understand the importance of starting at the top and working it into the culture until it becomes a part of everyday business.

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--> --> --> From parks to balanced homes to GATEKEEPERS



## What I learned from teaching BD

**Stories from the profession carrying emotional appeal inspire students. Find your inspiration too.**

After teaching business development (BD) in a master's class in the real estate industry at a major university in D.C. for a semester, I might have learned more than my students. What's the definition for BD? Who cares? Can it be taught electronically? Probably not. Could I write a "How To" for it? The answers turn out to be yes and... no. In the end, BD is all about attitude and relationships and how believable the lingering stories are. Basic rules such as ethics, table manners, and smiling can be taught. Getting them to stick is another matter and those nuances, gained face-to-face, require stories. Each person's approach or reaction to a story will be different. Over the course of the semester, I had 16 guest speakers, all tops in their field, who came in from Boston to Florida. Students heard the same speakers and yet, who remembered what varied greatly by how they could relate to that particular speaker.

The stories remained overwhelmingly glued in the students' heads. It wasn't reading "Nicomachean Ethics," although a few of them will most likely tell their friends how I forced them to read Aristotle. It turns out that real people giving their examples of why honesty and integrity must be earned and proven – over and over again – sticks. The students repeated speaker's stories on tests, like the one a major life company lender told about how he had helped a client out when they had a fire instead of foreclosing and now that client is one of his best. Another recounted a senior VP from a 3 billion dollar construction company who said, "Help – don't sell." The students may not have remembered the speaker's names (although that was rule No. 1: spell names correctly and remember them), but they did recall the speaker's stories.

Although they read *The Experience Economy*, students loved seeing a major

mixed use marketing maven who showed them a marvelous slide show with images of touchy feely experiences, rather than dull shots of bedrooms. Despite her extensive research and careful planning, the experience her clients felt got the housing units leased up in a jiffy.

There's no question that reading a book like *Alpha Dogs* can stimulate ideas on how to become a creative entrepreneur. Having a real deal developer reinforce the book's premise with details of how it took him 10 years to develop a huge parcel provided an indelible memory. Students sat in awe as they listened to the arduous ordeal of how Walmart stores got wooed into the D.C. area. Each speaker told of heartaches by turning them into funny stories, "Do neighbors ever *not* complain about traffic?" People's stories made the book's points come alive.

The students hated me for making them send thank you notes to the speakers, until speaker after speaker talked about how an impossible door opened because of a hand written note. Light bulbs went off only when real people – experts in BD – told their stories. A few students started to send notes. One got an interview and another got a job. Who knew? For further reading, *365 Thank Yous* is another inspiring book, well worth anyone's time.

Who gets down when pitching? Everyone! Read *The Power of Positive Thinking* or *Winning Every Day*. The students' attitudes about themselves and their classmates changed as soon as everyone wore business attire. When speakers commented on how sharp the class looked compared to any they had seen before, transformation occurred. First came pride in themselves, then they listened. They heard a barrage of cheery upbeat successful people who rule the real estate world on the East Coast. So they began to write papers in a positive voice and use active verbs (although teaching active voice took a little bit of doing). More thanks began pouring out to the speakers as the reaction kept coming back from them through

The take away? Don't stop reading – add stories. Learn to tell stories that will stick; touch, move, and inspire – all while helping to forward your idea in a meaningful way. Stay positive and practice speaking.

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notes such as, "Hey, wow, I just got another thank you from one of your students!" Immediate feedback from real people caused change. In BD the best dressed, best prepared, and the first to respond get the job.

Finally, I assigned students short two-minute speeches each week about the book they read. They twitched, danced, sweat, shook, and stammered the first three times. By the fifth time they stood polished, calm, looking at the audience smiling, and telling their own success stories. And they did it well.

The take away? Don't stop reading – add stories. Learn to tell stories that will stick; touch, move, and inspire – all while helping to forward your idea in a meaningful way. Stay positive and practice speaking.

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