



GUEST SPEAKERS

Noel Carson and
Marilynn Mendell

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

RIGHT | NOW

Web of opportunity

How will A/E firms spend marketing dollars in 2012?

By ANDRA MILIACCA
Correspondent

It's out there – the web. As it grows exponentially, it also becomes more accessible through a variety of devices. A/E firms increasingly allocate marketing dollars and hours to this ever-changing resource. How do they make decisions on whether to increase, decrease, or not change their online marketing spending?

Kevin Fox, senior marketing communications manager with **Burns & McDonnell** (Kansas City, MO) says, "We will be increasing our budgets due to a heavier involvement in social media and overall integrated marketing. Many of our traditional print pieces and even our proposals and other marketing materials drive traffic back to our website."



Kevin Fox,
Senior Marketing
Communications
Manager,
Burns &
McDonnell.

Burns & McDonnell provides engineering, architecture, construction, environmental, and consulting solutions from offices across the United States and worldwide. The firm began an initiative last year to add 1,000 new employee-owners within three years. "A big part of that is online recruiting through social media, a careers blog on our corporate website, and our online application process," Fox says.

"We use the web to nurture relationships with clients, prospects, and potential employees by provid-

See "Right Now" on page 2

"Online content marketing is a key component to our business; we are smart people, and providing value through valuable content reinforces that idea."

EDITORIAL

Are you showing your best side?

Actions, words and perceptions matter and so does the way you dress.



Debbie
Frederiksen

I have been living in Fayetteville, Ark., and working for ZweigWhite for nearly a year now. During that time, I've made many new connections in the area with people who work in a variety of industries, particu-

larly many who work for, or have some association with... Walmart. Some of you may already be aware of this fact, but just a short drive north of Fayetteville is Bentonville, the corporate headquarters of the world's largest retail chain. What you might not know, however, is that 1,300 vendors who supply products to Walmart also have offices in Bentonville. Needless to say, this substantial population has introduced me to a whole new world of consumer product goods

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In this competitive market, it's critical that we do everything we can in our actions and words.

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Right Now

From page 1

ing value-added content and resources,” Fox says. “Online content marketing is a key component to our business; we are smart people, and providing value through valuable content reinforces that idea.”

Marketing initiatives must now be integrated campaigns and Fox is focused on the following areas:

- New website development and website functionality
- Updating and upgrading social media presence and platforms
- New email marketing systems and initiatives connected to integrated marketing communications campaigns
- New integrated CRM system to tie it all together so they know how and when they are talking to clients in these online and offline spaces
- Focus on multi-channel communications

Focus on infrastructure

Chris Stockwell, chief marketing officer for **GEI** (Woburn, MA) says, “We are increasing our spending during 2012 to upgrade our back-end infrastructure, including improve SEO strategy and results, improve the user experience, and expand our content and supporting architecture.”

GEI is a mid-sized consulting engineering firm with 500 staff and 25 offices around the United States providing services in geo-technical, environmental, water resources, ecology, and related practices. They plan to spend \$40,000 in upgrading web features.

“We completed a major launch of our web site in June 2007 at a cost of over \$100,000 that included a very strong design and a premium back-end content management system (CMS),” Stockwell says. The site won a Horizon Interactive Gold Medal in 2008 for best business-to-business sites.

That investment has served GEI well for five years – a long time for the web. During this period the company has doubled its fees and its staff. Their strong web presence has played a major role supporting brand and growth.

The firm’s significant investment in the online channel has provided very strong return on investment and is a constant source of new opportunities. “Our website and the applications supporting our web presence is not something that we skimp on,” Stockwell says. “It is an important avenue for prospective clients to perform due

diligence on our firm. It provides a superb avenue for attracting new talent, and educating those prospective employees on exactly who we are, what we do, and what we are like.”

In November, 2011 GEI launched a blog for their new Energy Advisory Services consulting group that focuses on the water/energy nexus. It has had great reactions from its market of leading water agencies and public utilities. “We’re psyched about that, and see the value quite clearly,” Stockwell says.

They keep the blog fresh, posting dozens of press releases, new project wins, completed projects, client awards, new hires, acquisitions, and white papers. They showcase dozens of projects, and host videos that describe the company and its technical products.

“We focus on quality of experience, not quantity of visits and page views,” Stockwell says. “If our most important client goes to our web site, I want them to be pleased and proud that we work together, confirming for them yet again that they are engaging with one of the worlds’ best firms.”

Social media focus

Guy Geier, managing partner at **FXFOWLE** (New York, NY) says, “We plan to slightly increase our spending in 2012 for online marketing. We are finding that social media is reinforcing our relationships with our clients and colleagues, and creates more visibility for the firm. Although there’s no concrete way to measure the effectiveness of our social media initiatives, we firmly believe it contributes positively to the firm’s culture and brand.”

FXFOWLE has a staff of 96 in offices in New York and Washington, D.C., providing architectural, interior design, planning, and urban design services with an emphasis in design excellence, social responsibility, and sustainability.

FXFOWLE has been active in social networking for the past two years, with the launch of a blog in 2010, posting firm profiles on LinkedIn and Architizer, and accumulating over 1,100 Twitter followers. The firm uses Google Analytics to track visitors to their sites and has noted a significant increase in traffic to the blog, website, and other accounts.

“These social media initiatives have created more buzz about the firm,” Geier says. “We are focusing on freshening up and expanding our website to better reflect the quality and range of our work. The site will not be entirely redesigned, but will integrate additional features in order to enhance the user experience, both visually and through navigation and interactivity. We also hope to simplify and streamline content management.”

Each firm has to assess which aspects of the web will work best to meet their marketing goals. While Geier’s FXFOWLE is fully vested in the social media world, Stockwell’s GEI prefers to be conservative in that arena for now, using it mainly for teaming with partners and employee recruiting. Burns & McDonnell’s Fox is planning to use both social media and overall integrated marketing for the web.

“We all live with scarce resources, and we make the most intelligent, informed decisions that we can,” Stockwell says. ▀▀

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Marketers and the bottom line

They can be billable. Here's how.

The dumbest thing I've ever heard was when an A/E/P and environmental firm principal said, "Only technical folks contribute to the bottom line – marketers don't contribute to the bottom line because they don't have billable hours."

My first thought was, "That's really dumb, but it's also why marketing staff are often first to be laid off when times get rough – they are seen as overhead, and A/E/P and environmental firms are totally focused on direct (billable) labor."

My next thought was, "Why don't principals ever ask, 'What will the technical folks charge to next week or next month if the marketers don't bring in new work?'"

I thought about this for a while. When things pick up and marketing activities need to get into high gear, finding an educated, trained and experienced marketer is not easy. Even if you find a person with a marketing degree, they will probably have to "unlearn" a lot, and then learn a lot more, before you can finally leave them to work independently, without close supervision.

So what can a manager do to ensure marketing staff are retained, that they are seen to have as much value to the firm as technical staff?

I gave this a lot of thought, and the answer I came up with was: "Marketing managers need to find ways for marketers to work on projects and become billable!"

Think about it. Marketing activities are always going to be an overhead function, but marketing staff possess skills that many technical folks lack – like writing, editing, graphic design and the ability to speak to others. There are many ways in which marketers can contribute to projects.

For example: I've been told that many colleges and universities in the United States confer a degree in architecture or

engineering without a single English class. These schools think that architects and engineers just draw pictures, and that the only writing they will ever do is a letter that says, "Dear Client, here are your pictures."

In fact, architects and engineers perform planning studies and write reports, civil engineering projects require engineering reports, and many projects include permit applications requiring extensive discussions of project alternatives. If these documents are prepared by someone who never took college English, shouldn't they require a qualified person to edit them before submittal to a client or government agency? Shouldn't qualified writers help create these documents?

Marketers can do this.

Large, complex public projects (airports, public transit systems, university campuses, etc.) have a required public involvement component. This component may include public meetings that require display boards, slide shows, fact sheets, brochures and other documents. Many of these projects will require newsletters for the project area and interested parties, or the creation of websites for use by the public as well as the project team.

Marketers can do this.

Clients with large, complex projects that affect neighborhoods may need public relations help, such as the development of neighborhood events to create goodwill, design of slide shows for jurisdictional bodies to ensure they understand what is being proposed, development of ad campaigns (copy and graphics) for local print media and online placement, or development of client submittals for technical and other award programs.

Marketers can do this.

Clients might even need assistance with aspects of their own operations, such as writing grant applications to help finance a project, developing marketing strategies to help sell improved land to residential

builders, or helping with research to pre-qualify contractors using standard questions and a scoring matrix.

Say it with me – "Marketers can do this."

To be fair, there is a downside to making marketers billable: If they are working on project-billable tasks, with contractual deadlines that can't be missed, they might not be readily available to work on a short-fuse RFQ or RFP that sat ignored on a principal's desk until it became an emergency.

You think that's silly. I can hear you chuckling! But I worked for someone who once told me not to look for billable hours specifically because then I "wouldn't be available for the last-minute marketing emergencies."

Putting that silliness aside, however, you must remember two things as you look for ways to make your marketing staff billable (and protect them in an uncertain economy):

- Your firm's principals must believe that the additional things marketers can do have real value for the firm; and
- Your marketing folks are still marketers before anything else, and must be available to take on marketing assignments, regardless of how much (or how little) advance notice you have.

Your marketers will never achieve the billable levels achieved by the technical staff. But making marketers billable – even if only at a 25 to 30 percent level – will put them on the same playing field with the technical staff.

And once they are perceived as contributors to the bottom line, their jobs become more secure and they might even find themselves getting raises and bonuses at the same percentage levels as those technical folks. ▲▲

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Focusing on the product

CBT's Recent Work brochure adds relevance and gives merit to their current capabilities.

By CHRISTINA ZWEIG
Staff writer

CBT's Recent Work brochure is a fresh contemporary representation of their design products and process.

The new Recent Work brochure, which is big on imagery and succinct on text, acts as a refined stand-alone piece easily shared with potential clients to introduce the firm's diversified work locally, regionally and on an international scale.

"The selected images in each brochure were chosen to convey the sophistication of our design, the concise text was written to express the core story of each project and the graphics composed to showcase our creative yet refined design attitude," says Kristi Sprinkel, public/media relations.

In the past, the Boston-based architecture, interior design and urban design firm's brochure, distributed spiral-bound firm brochures to potential clients as an introduction to CBT's work. The previous brochures were custom designed, printed on 11x17 paper and hand trimmed to achieve a full-bleed. They were expensive to produce and not compatible with the reduced marketing budgets of recent years. CBT began to look for a more efficient use of marketing staff, time and resources.

The firm wanted to develop a unique, clean, informative marketing piece that

DETAILS

FIRM SIZE: 160 employees

MARKETING TACTIC: Brochure targeting prospective clients, including new international markets.

DISTRIBUTION: Approximately 665 units so far.

COSTS: \$12.63 per unit, 1,000 units printed so far.

RESULTS: Recent Work earned a 2011 Society for Marketing Professional Services award in 2011, placing first in the brochure category.



CBT's Recent Work brochure provides a professional, modern twist on a traditional pre-qualification marketing piece.

meshed with the firm's identity and could be quickly and easily distributed to potential clients. CBT formed an editorial board of three principals, the marketing director and graphic design staff to dictate the tone and direction of the brochure.

The group discussed the future direction of the firm, and also surveyed several clients to gain an outside perspective on what is most important when receiving an initial marketing brochure. Visual impact to grab the reader's attention repeatedly came up as a top priority, followed by backing up the visuals with informative, brief project narratives to educate the reader on the firm's capabilities. The 60-page Recent Work brochure followed those guidelines and reflects CBT's approach to project work – introducing a dynamic and comprehensive overview of the firm's work. As follow-up to the brochure, CBT continues to customize responses to RFPs and other specific client requests.

The Recent Work brochure has an active life of approximately two years. Volume II was released in late 2011.

Target audience

CBT's primary target audience is prospective clients with a strong focus on international work. As a multidisciplinary firm, the firm's work spans commercial, academic, residential, and civic markets, ranging from large urban development projects to single-family residences. With such a wide array of prospective clients, the Recent Work

"People interested in joining CBT can learn about our firm, our design philosophy and portfolio of work."

brochure allows the CBT to focus its message on its diverse capabilities and integrated project work.

CBT mailed 250 brochures to a select list of potential clients that were internationally based or working internationally, focusing primarily on the Asian and Middle East markets. The brochure is also available electronically as a PDF.

"In addition to prospective clients, the brochure is an important tool for attracting prospective employees. People interested in joining CBT can learn about our firm, our design philosophy and portfolio of work," Sprinkel says.

Content

The brochures make a strong first impression through a bold visual statement of project photography and graphic text. The placement of text and design elements encompasses classic design in a non-conventional brochure. The brochure provides a professional, modern twist on a traditional pre-qualification marketing piece. The substantial feel and inventive nature of the brochure conveys the high-quality, high-performance multidisciplinary work that defines CBT. The brochure is intended

See "Portfolio" on page 8

BE THE SOURCE



Founded in 1853, **Lockett & Farley** (Louisville, KY), an architecture, engineering and construction management firm, is one of the oldest continuing architectural firms in the country, but their marketing tactics are among the most contemporary.

With headlines ranging from, “Materialuscious: The Pantone Color Report” to “Chicken Soup for Your Structure: Steel Corrosion Remedies,” Lockett & Farley has a blog that’s equally (or perhaps more so) fun to read as a trashy airport gossip magazine.

“Our company blog has been a success story from day one. The whole idea was integrated into the redesign of our website, which brings our smart people and their insight to the forefront of our firm,” says Brent Collins, marketing manager.

The blog is comprised of various employees representing different disciplines and market expertise. Lockett & Farley seems to have an entry on nearly every topic. The blog also has an easy to use search option that allows users to find entries by category, date, or tag – turning the blog into a virtual A/E design encyclopedia. The blog links the firm’s Facebook, Twitter, Google+, RSS feed, LinkedIn, and YouTube pages.

Collins says that a contractor in Texas was searching for a particular structural engineering system and found a Lockett & Farley blog about it. The contractor contacted the blog author to get more information, an excellent and easy lead for a prospective client. “In the next month we’ll be taking our blogs to the next level with increased distribution and content. Very exciting,” Collins says.

WHAT'S WORKING – OUTSIDE THE DESIGN INDUSTRY

The University of Tulsa and its graduate business program, the Collins College of Business, has a regional reputation for being outstanding, but they wanted to create a splash with students they did not normally come in contact with.

“We knew direct mail would be a waste of time and money if we couldn’t come up with an interesting and thought provoking professional mailer,” says Kaci Kegler, assistant director, Graduate Business Programs.

Kegler says that while searching for inexpensive giveaways that might catch the eye of potential students, the admissions staff stumbled upon a fortune cookie website with customizable fortunes for a very fair price. With the creative word play between the fortune in the cookie and the financial fortune hoped for post-graduation, Kegler says the cookies became the focal point of the graduate business program’s seven-step direct mail campaign.

“Over the past five years we have tweaked the steps, tightened messaging and upgraded our cookie mailing tubes. We are proud to say that our customers love the final product!,” Kegler says.

The fortune cookies have been a hit! Though they have a primary objective of branding, the



program has received several comments via phone, email and in person.

“While being the ‘fortune cookie university’ is still odd for a private institution in Tulsa, Okla., we agree it’s better than, ‘Who?’ We

yield graduate business school applications from approximately 1.5 percent of our audience and, of those who apply, 25 percent actually complete the application process and enroll in classes!” Kegler says.

Short takes on real-world marketing tactics that are producing results

BEYOND A BROCHURE

JE Dunn Construction (Kansas City, Missouri), a 2,200-person leading provider of construction management services, design/build, and integrated project delivery, wanted a showpiece for company accomplishments, future predictions, and yearly summation. The Year in Review annual report book features an overview from each of JE Dunn's four regions, a list of clients who completed projects with JE Dunn the past year, company accomplishments and awards, examples of the JE Dunn commitment to the community, and some predictions for the future of the construction market.

Each year, the process for producing this piece begins with timeline development in August and concludes with a distribution to thousands of clients and partners nationwide by the end of January. The content is provided by contributors in all JE Dunn offices and data is mined by Chris Jacobs, senior data analyst. All content and data points are then compiled and rewritten in a single voice by Emily Fors, editor for JE Dunn's national corporate communications. After extensive rounds of reviews and



approvals, the content is handed off to Cindy Barber, who serves as creative director for the report. Barber spends months reviewing the content and sourcing/selecting corresponding high quality photography to tell the year's story visually. Barber also oversees the layout, design, printing, and production efforts for the piece.

The Year in Review is a perfect-bound book with 50 pages of full-color, full-bleed, high resolution photography displayed with several varnishes, plus a vellum overlay with metallic ink. The cover alone has an aqueous coating for texture, and a UV coating for sheen and reflection. Perfect binding was selected to give the book a higher-end production quality and to accommodate single-sheet vellum.

Feedback on the JE Dunn Year in Review has been overwhelmingly positive. "Clients and partners reach out daily to compliment the production quality, photography, and insightful commentary throughout the publication," Fors says. "Our distribution list grows each year due to client and partner requests to receive additional copies."

SOMETIMES IT GROWS ON TREES



At over 350 employees, **ESA** (San Francisco, CA), an environmental science and planning firm with 14 offices, is large enough to make personalization of marketing materials a challenge. Their 2011 holiday card allows just that, however. The annual holiday is a customizable greeting sent by staff (not an electronic distribution system), with room for a personal sentiment that enables staff to connect with clients, colleagues, friends and family.

"It's important that our staff feel involved in the final product. We want them to feel proud of the final greeting – and that it embodies them as well as ESA," says Camile Majors, with corporate marketing and communications at ESA.

In July of 2011, ESA launched a new website and committed to planting a tree for every 50 visitors. The success was overwhelming and ESA is now committed to planting 19 trees. The annual holiday card was then used as a way of communicating out the successful plantings to ESA's clients and colleagues.

"We played with the concept of an ESA 'wish tree' to communicate this for our annual holiday card. We designed wish tags and through an extensive internal campaign gave each office and every staff member the opportunity to complete as many wish tags as they wanted," Majors says.

From the more than 200 wish tags received, ESA selected 20 sentiments for the e-card inserts that then linked to a short interactive animation of their professionally photographed wish tree decorated with all of the wish tags. Close-up rollovers of additional staff wish tags, the end of year sentiment and a note about the 19 trees planted in local communities was also a part of the e-card.

The e-card was personally sent to more than 3,000 clients, colleagues, friends and family throughout Washington, Oregon, California, and Florida.

"We've received more positive client and internal staff feedback than any other e-card to date about the originality, creativity, and innovation – leading us to believe it has been the most successful e-card to date," says Majors, adding that the staff appreciated the opportunity to be involved, featured, and able to customize their greeting. "Our staff owned the 2011 holiday e-card, it wasn't something that our corporate communications team developed – this what we consider the biggest success."

Frederiksen

From page 5

marketing, and I enjoy regular conversations with my friends who market toys, toothpaste, bread, paper towels, and candy. We often have discussions about our jobs and compare the similarities and differences in their strategies and business practices to those I find in the professional services industry.

I could probably write a whole series of columns recalling many of these stories, but I wanted to share one in particular that came up recently that caused me to ponder. I was having dinner with a friend, and he mentioned that his dress code for work is jeans. That, in and of itself, wasn't all that surprising as many offices now have casual dress codes. It's the rest of the conversation that got me thinking.

Me: What about when clients come to visit your office? You dress up then, right?

Jay: No, we wear jeans.

Me: What about when you go to a client's office?

Jay: Jeans.

Me: Okay, what if their business attire is more formal? They don't typically wear jeans.

Jay: Jeans.

Me: (mouth gaping open) Wait, what?! Even if they wear jackets and ties, you *don't* dress up for those meetings??

Jay: Nope. We wear jeans. It's our culture.

I was momentarily speechless. It seems to me this company is running a huge risk of conveying the following message to some of those clients, "We don't care how you do business – this is how we do it." Maybe a firm can pull this off if they are the clear leader in their industry and have little or no competition, but I don't know many companies, particularly in the architecture, engineering, planning and environmental consulting world, that have that luxury today. It is important that clients feel understood and confident that the firms they choose to work with will meet their needs. As professional service consultants, this can be conveyed in many ways through our actions, our words, and

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sometimes perception issues outside of our control.

- **Actions** – Business attire is just one aspect of professional etiquette that can help demonstrate your understanding and regard for a client. Other actions might include the quantity and quality of "touches" – the efforts you make to reach out periodically and share information – or just say hello.
- **Words** – Most firms I work with know that they *should* write their proposals with the client's needs in mind, yet they often don't put forth the effort to actually do it. I recently conducted a marketing audit of a 250-person engineering firm's promotional materials. On the cover letter of one proposal I noted they used the words "we" and "our" 23 times! They mentioned the client's name or "your" only seven. This is an interesting exercise that you can try with a few proposals from your files. Another thing to look for are the key messages and value propositions you claim. From one proposal to another are you conveying your firm's core values and true differentiating factors clearly and consistently?
- **Perceptions** – Lastly, and most challenging to control, are the messages conveyed about your firm indirectly. This may be through competitors, references or just general interpretations deduced from a variety of sources. They may be positive or negative perceptions, but either way, you should be aware of them and discuss the implications internally. I worked once for a company where one principal refused, during their annual marketing planning process, to assess the weaknesses and threats during the S.W.O.T. analysis because he "didn't want to focus on the negative." I never agreed with this imprudent philosophy.

In this competitive market, it's critical that we do everything we can in our actions and words and other means to let clients know that we are here and 100 percent committed to respond to their needs. A simple concept really, and maybe it starts tomorrow with whatever you decide to wear to work. ▀▄

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Portfolio

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to be a part of a dynamic series.

Results

International clients expect to be able to receive in little turnaround time a pre-qualification brochure that providing a necessary overview. CBT's Recent Work allows the firm to do just that. Since its launch in June 2009, CBT has experienced a significant amount of growth in international work. The firm's current backlog of international work has increased by 300 percent since then, with 10 new projects in Taiwan, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi. The brochure has been distributed to all new clients as part of CBT's pre-qualification efforts and is used in new business introductory meetings.

Using the Recent Work brochure has also significantly cut down the cost of CBT's previous pre-qualification marketing efforts. The previous custom brochure cost \$88 per item just to print. It would take a marketing staff member 4.5 hours of labor at \$65 per hour to produce the custom brochure. The new Recent Work brochure was produced for overseas at \$12.63 per unit and has the professionalism of a full-bleed, magazine style publication.

While during much of 2009-2010 the firm did not hire new employees, CBT still held informational interviews and distributed the brochure. Since late 2010, CBT has hired approximately 20 new employees. The brochure is a valuable part of the new employee welcome pack.

"We have heard from the recent hires that had received the Recent Work brochure during an informational interview that by providing them with a take-away brochure that was worth saving, CBT left a lasting impression and stayed in the forefront of their mind as a place where they would like to work," Sprinkel says. ▀▄

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