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## **Phase Zero Design begins before the beginning: Maintaining client relationships and creating new ones**

May 24, 2012 - Retail

Phase Zero Design's tag line of "We begin before the beginning" was featured in a recent edition of The Zweig Letter, a very popular newsletter for the A/E/C industry. "We follow the Zweig Letter on Twitter and I responded to a tweet asking for firms to share their motto or tag line with them," said Jim Kimball, principal in charge of the firm's Duxbury, Mass. office. "We begin before the beginning is the essence of our practice and we believe a differentiator. I was pleased when they responded to our tweet so quickly and interviewed us for their article."

"Our tag line may sound a little existential, but it's not," said Matt Wittmer, principal in charge of the firm's Simsbury, Conn. office. "Since we are experts in the markets we serve, we know the trends, the questions and answers and we possess the experience to help our clients achieve their goals quickly and efficiently without compromising quality."

"We have a proven track record that we can point to that says it works for our team and our clients. This is the essence of our practice. We give the term added value new meaning," said Kimball.

Phase Zero Design is an award-winning architecture, interior design and planning firm with locations in Simsbury, Conn.; Greenwich, Conn. and Duxbury, Mass. The firm's expertise includes the retail, corporate, residential, hospitality, and institutional practice areas with a diverse base of local and national clients.

The firm's national clients include specialty retailers Ann Taylor, Lindt & Sprungli, Hair Cuttery, BCBGMAXAZRIA and Sherwin Williams. "Our team has been together for a long time and they are truly retail store design and roll out experts," said Kimball. "I've been involved with a number of retail organizations in my career and I can say without prejudice that this is one of the best teams in the industry."

Phase Zero Design also has a long history with grocery retailers. The firm is currently working on several projects with Big Y and Winn Dixie.

Restaurants are also a part of the firm's retail portfolio having completed the design for Checker's Drive In Restaurant's first location in New England and Eat Kitchen, an exciting new concept in downtown Boston.

Ask any banker and they will tell you that they are a retailer too. Phase Zero Design is designing new branches for a number of banks including Greenfield Savings Bank, American Eagle Credit Union and Litchfield Bancorp.

Retail development is alive and well in New England as evidenced by Phase Zero Design's list of shopping center projects. This list includes the award-winning Elmwood Plaza in West Hartford, Conn. and the repositioning of Norwichtown Mall in Norwich, Conn. with Winstanley Enterprises LLC and West Marine Plaza in Old Saybrook, Conn. and Family Dollar in Belchertown, Mass. with The Colvest Group Ltd. "We're very fortunate to be working with developers who are thoughtful in their

development approach and let us contribute to their project's success in a meaningful way," said Wittmer. "We're looking forward to working with them for years to come."

Phase Zero Design's retail practice continues to grow with the recent addition of retailers LOFT, Pet Supplies Plus and Carter's and several retail developers including WS Development, OPAL Real Estate Group and Inland US Management LLC.

The award-winning design firm may primarily focus on the retail sector but a growing part of their portfolio includes the residential, corporate and hospitality market sectors. "Our team has a diverse background in sectors outside of retail," said Wittmer. "We're very comfortable offering our expertise in these areas to our retail clients whose portfolio also includes office and industrial buildings."

Other projects which add some diversity to the firm's practice include the design of corporate offices in Springfield, Mass., the expansion of a short-term care facility in Brooklyn, Conn., a charter school in Salem, N.H., dental offices in Grafton, Mass. and Somerville, Mass. and the conversion of a former school into residences in Stoneham, Mass.

Relationships are a key ingredient for the firm's success. Although the firm employs an aggressive social media marketing strategy, a number of their clients were developed through industry friendships and referrals. "The greatest endorsement that any business can receive is when they are recommended by a colleague or client," said Kimball. "Our core values of integrity, innovation and customer service are more than just marketing clichés. We take them very seriously and our clients recognize the value we bring to their projects."

Maintaining client relationships and cultivating new ones is the life blood of any organization. Phase Zero Design's team has a laser beam focus on their clients and their needs while still seeking new opportunities. It's a delicate balance but the firm's recent success means that they are walking that tight rope well. "It's a running joke in my family that my answer to the question, How was your day?, is Just one more client!" said Kimball.

"It's amazing when in the midst of multiple deadlines that someone on the team will stop me and say that they have a lead for a new client or they've been talking to one of our clients about a new project. This team is special. They get that marketing and business development is a team sport and we are very fortunate to have a bunch of All Stars playing for us," said Wittmer.

If you would like to meet this team of all stars, see if you can gain an invitation to their Oktoberfest celebration now an annual event. The gathering is held at their Simsbury, Conn. office, a former restaurant and bar with multiple roof decks. "I told Matt when we were negotiating the lease for the space that the bar equipment including the tap has to be included," said Kimball. "We're going to throw some great parties!"

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540