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Company of the Month: Phase Zero Design begins before the beginning: The essence and differentiator for their practice

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We begin before the beginning is more than just a tag line for Phase Zero Design. It's the essence of their practice according to Jim Kimball co-founder and principal of the firm, "We believe it's a differentiator for us."

"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 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.; Hingham, Mass. and Springfield, Mass. The firm's expertise includes the retail, corporate, residential and hospitality practice areas with a diverse base of local and national clients. The firm celebrated its five year anniversary in June and is still enjoying unprecedented growth adding 12 new staff in 2013 and 5 more since the beginning of the year. "We're growing to keep up with our clients and new opportunities. It's been fun for our whole team," said Wittmer. In addition to the staff additions, the firm also completed an expansion of their Simsbury location, opened a new office in Springfield, Mass. and moved their Duxbury, Mass. office to larger quarters in Hingham, Mass. "The added space allows our team to communicate and collaborate more efficiently which strongly benefits our clients and projects," said Kimball.

The firm's numerous national clients include specialty retailers Ann Taylor, Foot Locker, Hair Cuttery, Sherwin Williams and Harry & David. "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 our team is one of the best 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, Save A Lot and Winn Dixie.

The firm's retail team recently completed the design for Mike's Pastry in Cambridge, Mass. and several locations for Muse Paint Bar, an exciting new concept expanding rapidly with locations in N.Y., Conn., Maine and Rhode Island.

Banks are also part of the mix with recently completed branches for Greenfield Savings Bank, American Eagle Federal Credit Union, Torrington Savings Bank and Litchfield Bancorp.

Phase Zero Design also has a growing 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, Lake Shore Marketplace in Gilford, N.H. with WS Development and Compo Acres in Westport, Conn. for Equity One. "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 has slowly become the go to firm for repositioning distressed or vacant real estate. The team excels at unlocking the hidden value in these properties with innovative design and leasing solutions. "Our experience in the marketplace allows our team to offer non-traditional options to our clients. If we gave them the same old same old they may pass on a potentially profitable deal," said Kimball. Active repositioning projects include Woburn Mall, Chelmsford Town Center and Rhode Island Mall.

Phase Zero Design's retail practice continues to grow with the recent addition of retailers Cumberland Farms, O'Reilly Auto Parts, Forever Flawless and MiniLuxe and several retail developers including Haynes Development, Waterstone Retail, Equity One and RPAI.

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. "Hospitality is the fastest growing segment of the firm and we are anticipating another busy year in 2015."

For the past several years, Phase Zero Design has been working with Morrison and Chartwells, both divisions of the Compass Group, a world-class provider of contract foodservice and support services. The firm is actively involved in numerous projects located in healthcare and higher education facilities up and down the east coast.

Other projects which add some diversity to the firm's practice include consulting services at Seaport Square for WS Development, Red Thread's show room in Stamford, Conn., numerous dental offices and new medical offices for Connecticut Ear Nose and Throat in Rocky Hill, Conn.

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 amazing when in the midst of multiple deadlines that someone on the team will stop me and say that they have a lead to follow up on or they've been talking to one of our clients about a new project," said Kimball.

"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 or their golf outing at Pinehills in Plymouth, Mass. now both annual events. The firm is also hosting an open house and networking event to celebrate their new office in Hingham. The event is scheduled on November 13, from 5 to 8 p.m.