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Information is all around: The issue is how to sort through everything to make the right decisions

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Now that we have lived through the first half of the 2008, there continues to be lots of uncertainty in all markets. As the housing downturn continues to remain a problem, other segments of the real estate markets are shaky as well. Many contractors and architects that shifted their focus to the residential market are finding that there is limited business in that market. The commercial real estate markets are showing some life with a few large office projects downtown or the Rte. 128 market. The contractors are chasing fewer jobs and looking to keep their crews together and pay their bills, the realtors are scrambling to get any sale or activity, the engineers are moving toward getting clients to do energy upgrades or address deferred maintenance and the whole industry is scrambling to stay afloat. The financing seems to be the one constant with everyone, there is nobody wanting to write loans, no investors willing to put up money and no new capital partners to be found. This has stopped many construction projects, made them impractical or slowed them down.

What do we do as professional in the industry? Who do we look for direction? Where is that next project coming from? These are all good questions and if we had the answers we would be able to plan things for the future and not just react to what hits us day to day. Information is all around us and readily available like no time in history. The issue becomes how to sort through everything we see, read, and hear to make the right decisions for our business. The newspapers and journals like this help to give snapshots of what is happening in the broad picture, while trade journals or magazines give a more in depth or long term view on the industry. The real factor which is hard to gauge is what consumers feel, what our clients see and what do the fellow professionals hear from others they are dealing with. This is all about networking! There are lots of opportunities to get out and meet others in our industry. Professional trade groups are holding events at various times, on many different subjects or as just social events. Your friends and family are another source of information. Ask what they think about all the information that hits them, what direction it points them. Information is like money in the bank, it allows us to make informed decisions.

What do I hear out there in the circles I travel? Well one client who is very conservative when it comes to projects recently started construction on the North Shore. They only embark on projects when everything comes together, namely price, location and type of project. They will build something only every few years and most often hold it for long term investment. The site is not really in a high profile location but he has started clearing the trees and has site equipment and a trailer present. Since he started about a week ago he has been overrun with contractors, subcontractors, suppliers all looking for his business. Seems that everyone is looking for work from whatever source they can find. He came back to us and asked if this was normal in today's economy and we had to say yes based on several clients deal with regularly.

A client who does mostly urban infill has several smaller projects underway and sees a similar thing. Tradesman and suppliers are stopping by the sites asking if he needs a quote on various items, is interested in utilizing them as new supplier or has any other projects that need assistance. He has even had another architect stop by his project asking if he was looking into new projects and needed a fresh design approach.

I have been contacted by three different people in the last week concerning different jobs which have been on again /off again for a few years. The company is not someone we have a close relationship with but is contractor who bid a job several years ago and was not the successful bidder. But in their company records and in various other places they found me and they found some dormant projects our firm had done and made their inquiries. This surely illustrates the state of the industry

So what is next for the industry? What do you do? Well be aware that what work you are doing is being chased by many others out there and no job or client is safe from being solicited by your competitors, even people you did not know were your competitors. Listen and ask all your clients what is happening with them, how you can provide better service, assist them and follow through before someone else does it. We tend to feel that in this economy that our clients or other networking contacts are not doing anything or have no work so it is not worth bugging them. This could be a big mistake; stay in touch so that what work they do have becomes your work and not someone else's work.

David O'Sullivan, AIA, CAASH, is president of O'Sullivan Architects, Inc., Wakefield, Mass.

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