

How to present yourself as an industry leader in today's marketplace

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Where is the future of our industry? We are all coping with the downturn in the industry in different ways. Much has been written about the drop in home sales, building permits and overall market conditions. Business is off in almost every industry and as one segment experiences a downturn the repercussions spread everywhere.

As I look at the way I do business and what has happened to my clients, our projects, our consultants and I realize this is a time to reexamine everything. Are we in the correct markets for future growth? Have we been providing all the services our clients need? Do we have the right staff and resources to service the markets we want to be in? These are all the things which move us from survival mode to forward thinking mode. Now is a good time for this company to do some soul searching and prepare for the future. It seems that all the economic experts believe we are about at the bottom of this cycle but no one says we should expect to see a major upturn.

As an architect, we can provide a wide range of services to clients both in house and in conjunction with our consultants. Start a dialogue with the consultants you work with regularly and find out what services they can provide which you may not normally use from them. Discuss what other areas of expertise they may have which you could use to provide additional services to your clients. The next step is to ask, Are we providing the right services to suit our client's needs? Do our clients know what services we can offer? Many times, especially with longtime clients, we do the same things again and again for them, the same type of projects. Talk to your clients and see if they are exploring other niches, new types of projects or different markets. Getting to know clients better and discussing the direction you want to move your firm in will possibly open new opportunities for both you and your existing client. Tell your client what research you have done in a new niche or a project you have completed which may spark interest and give him confidence that moving to a new niche does not mean finding a whole new team. This helps them feel more comfortable with you and with entering a new market segment.

The next step is looking at where to take your firm, this sometimes is more difficult. You must take a step back and evaluate what your goals were and see how well you have met them. Give some hard thought to how you have changed, how the market has changed and what are the goals that you have now. Create a new set of revised goals to reflect the present day. Think about what resources you will need to achieve them. Evaluate what experience your staff has. What will enhance their work experience and dedication to their job? Does that fit with the goals you have for the firm? Retaining good staff is important for future growth but only if they are a fit with the firm culture and their experience is beneficial to where you want to take your firm. Remember everyone is different and each makes a contribution in his or her own way. Reflect on if they bring assets toward achieving the goals, provide skills you need, balance the experience of others and are willing to be

flexible.

Another aspect of our business that we often neglect is our marketing. By marketing I mean all aspects of how we are viewed to clients, prospects, consultants and vendors. Marketing is all about image and positioning. How is your firm looked upon by all those that interact with it. This includes your office space, your staff, you, your correspondence, and anything published about your firm. It could include awards, articles, or references. Certainly as architects one of the most visible pieces of marketing we have are our buildings we design. But it goes beyond that because the service you, your staff and your consultants provide is marketing too. Even the clients we choose to work for are a direct reflection on the firm. It is important to remember not all projects are our best work but if the client does not pay attention to details or the end user does not maintain the project it could be looked upon as something you did not do right. This is one of the hardest things to control so if you are going to give clients an address to go look at your project, be sure you have been there recently and know if the building and grounds have been well maintained.

In conclusion you must be perceived as knowledgeable, professional, organized, attentive, creative and proficient in your field. Be ready by looking at all aspects of your business, be visible to those in your industry and above all make your clients and the end users of your buildings happy. Then you will be well positioned for success.

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