VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4, SUMMER 2010

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First, however, review this note we received earlier this year:

"I was wondering if (you have) any printing overruns on the fabulous article that you did on us. If not, would it be possible to purchase a 10-12 copies? We had tremendous feed back and it's proven to be a great marketing tool!"

Peter Viscardi, President
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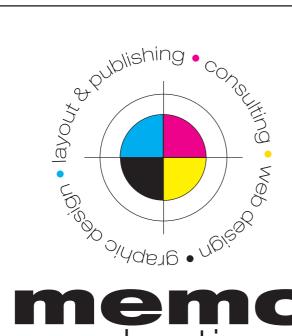
To get started, email Mark Buckshon at buckshon@dcnreport.com or you can phone him directly at 888-432-3555 ext 224.

Welcome to the fourth issue of The Design and Construction Report. With distribution to the entire Design and Construction Network, plus other online lists, more than 15,000 architectural, engineering and construction professionals are receiving the magazine – and the number of readers is growing each issue.

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Mark Buckshon Publisher





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DESIGN Construction

Summer 2010

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You can receive the online magazine free. If you wish printed copies, you can request a single issue for \$25.00 (plus \$10.00 postage) or an annual subscription for \$175.00, postage included.

We can provide positive publicity for your business or organization in these manners:

- You can become a Design and Construction Network Sponsor. Sponsorship packages start at \$695.00. Sponsorships can provide you promotional recognition at Design and Construction Network events, free advertising in the Design and Construction Report, and free business profile feature publicity.
- Qualifying organizations can receive a free editorial profile in the Design and Construction Report, based on supplier-support advertising. This method of marketing is highly cost-effective and enhances and encourages the development of healthy business relationships.

For more information about either marketing option, please email Chase at chase@dcnreport.com or phone 888-432-3555 ext 221.

EDITORIAL SUBMISSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

You can contact the editor, Mark Buckshon, at buckshon@dcnreport.com or phone 888-432-3555 ext 224. Submissions which provide relevant information on topics of relevance to the design and construction network community are invited. Business and self-promotional profiles are encouraged to consider the editorial profile or sponsorship options outlined above.

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About the **Design and Construction Network...**

"Successful networking is all about relationships, not "links." The goal of the Design and Construction Network is to develop mutually beneficial relationships both online and in person."

- Tim Klabunde, Founder

The Design and Construction Network (DCN) is a group of industry leaders that are serious about building real business relationships. Want to be apart of a group that is changing the way we do business? Join Now.

What We Do

We connect with others in the local industry, we discuss through posted questions, we share information, we help each other succeed, and we host networking events. (Ok, so the Networking Events might be what most people know us for). The important thing in all of this is that we are building relationships that build success, both personally and professionally.

What We Don't Do

Successful networking comes down to relationships, not "links." As a result the members of the Network do not simply collect business cards to stack on our desks. In the same way, we do not link to others on LinkedIn, Facebook, or Twitter for the sake of having a bunch of links. We know that the Internet is only one of many networking tools should be used everyday to succeed at networking.

Membership

Membership in the Network is free to Design and Construction professionals. If you would like to join the Network all we ask is that you are in the Design and Construction industry and that you are serious about doing more than just "linking" to other people.

Sponsorships

You can leverage your membership – and marketing effectiveness - with Design and Construction Network Sponsorships.

Sponsorships allow you to take a lead role at live networking events, and you receive additional publicity in The Design and Construction Report. For sponsorship information, please communicate with Chase at chase@cnrgp.com.

Letter to the editor

An association responds about dues, sponsorships



Mark,

I recently received the DCN Report through my participation in the Design and Construction LinkedIn group. I thought it was a very nice publication with some interesting information.

As an Association Executive I looked forward to reading your article, "Associations – Have fun, doing what you do best" Overall, I found the article to be on the mark. The emphasis on "giving rather than receiving" is key to successful and rewarding participation.

My organization is a bit different than some, in that the membership belongs to the Company and membership benefits are awarded to anyone in the Firm.

The Association focuses on "Advancing Relationships - Building Opportunities - Creating Leaders" which in turn furthers the goal of the individual members and benefits their firm, as well as accomplishes the greater goal of improving the process of construction and the communication between the design, construction and owner communities.

We encourage our members to become active and personally involved with committees and project leadership because that is where the deepest value lies and where there is the greatest opportunity to build the relationships that will lead to economic reward.

We also find that the more quickly and actively the member becomes involved the more the organization means to them as individuals and to their firms.

I take exception, however, to a couple points in your article.

In your paragraph entitled "Spend time more than money" you wrote:

"When you join the association, you will receive many invitations to spend money. You will be invited to advertise in the association directory, sponsor events, and sign up for

training programs and courses. Stand back, and think carefully about these services' true marketing value."

In your closing points "The basic association rules, revisited" you wrote:

"If dues are very low, you may find less commitment and long-term value. However, don't throw your money away on sponsorships and advertising."

Our association strives to keep its member dues as low as possible. Smaller firms can join for as little as \$300 per year and the largest member firms pay only \$950, and all of the individuals in the firm receive the benefits. This is compared to organizations that charge individuals hundreds of dollars per year and professional organizations that charge thousands. The pricing structure attempts to keep the barriers of membership low and encourages equal participation for smaller firms and allows them to have access to, and work together with the bigger players in the market.

The fact that our dues are low enables member firms large and small to become involved without making a major dent in their budgets, a factor that is especially important in the current economic climate. The lower cost maximizes the value of the money spent and offers a greater return on investment, as well as encourages long term participation.

The fact that most organizations are non-profit or not-forprofit does not mean that they do not need money to survive. Believe me when I tell you that the costs to run a successful association, especially in these difficult times, are no different than anyone else in business. Our revenue stream is quite limited. We rely on 3 sources of income: Member dues, Registrations to programs and events and yes, sponsorship and underwriting opportunities.

In your article you advised potential members to think before they "sign up for training programs and courses". We offer a great variety of programs and educational work-

Letter to the editor

shops presented by established experts in the design and construction field. These events offer insight and intelligence that improve their ability to do business, encourage personal development and offer networking opportunities that are part of the real benefits of Association membership. I question why you would discourage members from participating in these valuable activities.

Because our dues are low, we encourage our members to be generous in their underwriting and sponsorship support. We do indeed offer several different types of sponsorships for events, as well as underwriting and advertising in publications and directories. By offering a broad range of options we try to give each of our members a chance to lend additional support for the organization while giving them a real opportunity to promote their business.

As in most marketing and promotional endeavors it is difficult to gage the exact return for money spent. Sponsorship and underwriting dollars spent with an organization, however, are directed specifically to the firm's target market and reinforces their position in the organization and the industry.

Advertising and underwriting is also a way for members to show their support for the organization, just because they feel it is the right thing to do. If they believe in the Association and its mission they feel the support is justified.

If a member never spends an additional penny to sup-

port the organization they are looked upon no differently than our most ardent sponsor.

Association membership offers an exceptional opportunity for individuals and their firms to grow and prosper. It gives them opportunities learn about, participate more fully in and have influence on the environment in which they do business. The way to get the most out of their Association membership is to give and participate. The best members are involved at the organizational level; attend programs,

events and networking functions; and support the organization financially through sponsorship and underwriting opportunities that they feel are important. These individuals and their Member firms will reap many fold, the benefits of their investment.



Thank you,
Bob Gonyeau
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University of Hartford
www.construction.org

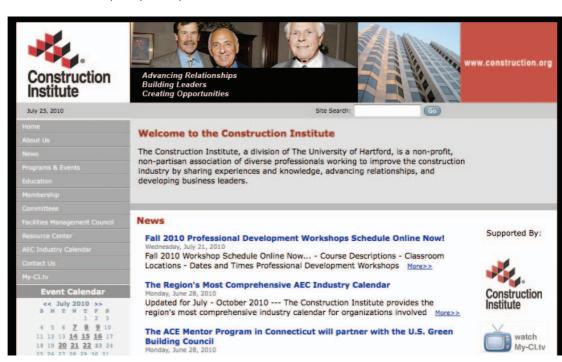


Advancing Relationships Building Opportunities Creating Leaders

P.S. I find it interesting that though you warned you readers to think carefully about sponsorships you had no reservations about directly asking your readers to sponsor:

"Your publicity in The Design and Construction Report can be co-ordinated with sponsorship of live Design and Construction Network events"

"Your investment is reasonable (not more than \$1,500 and most likely much less unless you really want to go allout). In fact, you may not need to spend a cent of your own money if your suppliers would like to advertise in your feature."





Your strengths, passions, and enjoyment

are keys to your marketing success

By Mark Buckshon Publisher, The Design and Construction Report

Imagine, for a moment, the perfect world where you and all of your employees truly enjoy your work. Everyone starts the day with enthusiasm; you are not thinking of the time clock, or bi-weekly bank deposit; you are simply, totally and passionately immersed in your work.

The perfect world – following your strengths

In this world, your clients would be amazed by the skills of your staff, work quality, and capacity. They will want to give you plenty of additional work, or perhaps even join your organization as joint venture partners or employees. You've achieved marketing and business perfection.

This dream-come-true situation occurs more often than you might expect. You may have experienced a similar high in the early stages of your organization, or when you were working on the dream project. It's often apparent in successful, fast-growing businesses like Google, or among teams of craftspeople, who each day celebrate life with their passion and love of their work.

An architectural success story

To illustrate, Diane Valenti, director of marketing and business development at JMWA Architects in Boca Raton, Florida, tells her firm's story. Interviewed for an article in the SMPS Marketer about Public-Private Partnerships (P3), Valenti explained that it wasn't so much her marketing work but her practice's successful business relationships, that led to JMWA's major undertaking — designing five U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) building projects in South Florida under Federal P3 guidelines.

James Williams, JMWA principal and project architect, explained that the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) posted a Solicitation for Offers for the new buildings, with points awarded for price, location of the site, quality of working relationships among the project proponents, and of course the actual building design. He said one of his clients, a local developer, had an unused site in the declining Florida real estate market. A Washington, D.C.-based developer, who knew about the GSA proposal, saw the site and encouraged JMWA's client to submit a proposal.

"We had just two weeks to meet the deadline," he said. "The developer asked if we would prepare our design proposal at cost, which was reasonable to us...we aren't interested in working with people who expect us to do the design work for free in hopes of winning the job but accepted that we wouldn't make a profit on the initial design if it failed to go further."

When CIS officials saw the design, "they loved it" so much that they encouraged the developer to scout out the other sites in South Florida to build similar buildings. As a result, JMWA designed five LEED Silver-certified buildings in less than two years.

In this case, as in most marketing success stories, JMWA won the initial opportunity because the clients trusted the practice. They knew JMWA had delivered in the past, so they were willing to pay a fee even if the project didn't get off the ground.

Passion, teamwork, and meeting the deadline

Imagine the mood in JMWA's offices as designers and support staff worked as a team to meet that very tight project deadline. They knew they would not be able to bill for overtime or extras, but nevertheless gave it their all because there was no doubt in their mind that they could succeed.

When you win the work as they did, you'll have reached that state of business near-perfection: Lots of profitable work, even in a challenging economy, with your success validated by your clients who engage your services again and again.

The other side of the coin

In contrast to the JMWA success story, consider this: You visit a supplier's workplace and experience a very different situation. Discontented people behind the counter barely grant you a smile; they are there because they have to be there. They do their job and get out. Employees are exhorted to try harder, to work more, and to solve the company's problems or they will lose their jobs. Everyone is tense, or lazy, distracted or angry.

Most of us have seen this type of workplace. If we decide to do business with this sort of company, it's because they have a monopoly (or have totally traded off any level of service for extremely low prices), or because our boss insists we work with them. Perhaps we are working with them through habit or because they do business with our own company and we feel obligated to support our clients.

Changing the story

The question is: Can you build passionate joy into your work, and that of your employees? And if you are an employee, can you change your own attitude and help to improve the working environment at your organization?

Yes, absolutely. Marcus Buckingham has written extensively about how to achieve these results. You can find more information at his website, TMBC (www.tmbc.com).

The idea of respecting your strengths provides some important insights into building your marketing success from within yourself and your organization, and is a core concept

of this book. Your "strengths" are the combination of natural talent and passion or interest that propel you to work with intensity and improve consistently so you are a leader in your field.

Everyone has strengths: Can you discover them?

Buckingham advises both employees and managers to structure their jobs and their career paths around their strengths. He also encourages business owners or managers to rethink conventional job descriptions so that everyone in the organization can excel in their particular role in line with the business objectives.

Strengths: Consistency and energy

Buckingham writes that many companies rely on this motto: "Our company's greatest asset is our people!"

It's a nice motto, but it's meaningless without introspection and application. And the truth is, people aren't your greatest asset, unless they're in position to leverage their greatest strengths - those things they do well consistently and energetically.

Years of research prove that individuals and teams playing to their strengths significantly outperform those who don't in almost every business metric. In fact, the single best predictor of a consistently high-performing team is the answer to this question: "At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best everyday?" Teams with individuals who do massively outperform teams with people who don't. They're more profitable, more productive, less likely to quit, less likely to have accidents on the job...the list goes on.

That's compelling, but this is confounding: Our research reveals that only 12 per cent of people in the workplace play to their strengths "most of the time." In general, society is fascinated by weaknesses (most employee reviews bear this out), and we take strengths for granted.

At a time when organizations are trying to do more with fewer people, it's critical to engage each person's strengths, and do it at scale across the organization. The strengths movement isn't about making people happier; it's about making organizations more productive. It's about yield. The best companies are made up of great teams. And those teams have individuals who know their strengths, take them seriously and offer them up to the organization.

From Why Strengths at http://www.marcusbuckingham.com

There is much value in Buckingham's books, including his classic: *The One Thing You Need to Know* (Simon & Schuster, 2005). In it, he offers a road-map for setting your own career on track, and if you are an entrepreneur or business manager, a set of tools to help you reshape the culture and practices of your organization.

Your strengths allow you to overcome your weaknesses, without fighting them

My greatest strengths success story is intensely personal. Through my entire life, from childhood onwards, I have not been gifted with great social or interpersonal relationship skills. Bullies picked on me in grade school, and in high school I belonged to the "out group." How would I ever find my way to live a healthy, balanced life?

I did have a talent for writing and had a fascination with journalism. At university, I joined the student newspaper and began to learn the craft. With limited social skills, I had an uphill battle, but I loved my work, learned how to interview people, and how to compose stories quickly and well. Nevertheless, I still couldn't function effectively in most social environments.

Seeing the world: Seeing myself

One of my strengths and passions has been understanding the confluence of geography and history. After graduating from university, I set out for Africa and eventually, became a sub-editor on a newspaper in Bulawayo, in the year that Rhodesia won its independence and became Zimbabwe, ending a 10-year civil war.

Thus, I had achieved my dream. I had become a foreign correspondent and made journalism my career.

Returning to reality

When I came back to Canada in 1980, I returned to a recession. Several Canadian newspapers had closed and hundreds of experienced journalists lost their jobs. So I supported myself by cleaning the garbage and trays at McDonalds, meanwhile looking for something a little better. At a government employment office, the counsellor wasted no time offering me a job with his own department. Within months, the department transferred me to Ottawa to a then high-paying job as a civil servant, writing news releases and brochures.

While this job paid well and I could do it competently, it certainly didn't relate at all to my strengths, my passions and my true interests.

Connecting the dots: Discovering your real strengths

Eventually, I summoned the courage to quit my well-paid government job and I set out to sell real estate. Friends and family thought I was nuts. Why go from a secure job to a field that seemed totally unsuited for me? But I had a gut feeling that the choice would take me where I needed to go. Within two years I was ready and had enough raw-guts sales experience to go into business for myself.

First, I started a publication for real estate agents, and then, a couple of years later, established a newspaper for local construction contractors. This became the foundation of my publishing business. My company now operates in several cities in both Canada and the U.S., reflecting my lifelong interest in diversity and international travel.

Our strengths are not the same

We all are different – the key to great business (and marketing) success is to respect, recognize, and then capture your own strengths and those of your employees. You may be a much better golfer or hockey player than writer; you may have highly developed social skills and enjoy being with friends. You may be a great cook, or yachter, or engineer. We are all different. Your challenge is to capture your strengths and use these as your driving force in business development and marketing, You will then be able to work around your weaknesses where they might otherwise limit your opportunity for success.

Building on strengths is much better than solving weaknesses

Stories of how heroes overcome weaknesses and achieve success despite the odds make great film or television dramas, but they rarely represent the best way to do things. You might want to be a pro-basketball player, but unless you are tall and have natural athletic ability, you will likely be disappointed. However, if you are a pro-level player, you may need to build your team-support skills to achieve your true talent and potential.

Conversely, you might be really good at doing some things that you hate. Do you really enjoy your current career? Alternatively, you might enjoy a sport or hobby in which you can never expect to be the greatest talent. Certainly you can and should play in house league games for your own enjoyment. You would not want your business and marketing to be focused in either of these directions, however. Instead, in your business and career, you want to capture the right mix of enjoyment and passion. If you aren't good at something, don't enjoy it or lack talent, you will be wise to stop and assess the situation. Determine if you really need to do the things you dislike or if you can find someone with the strengths to take them over.

Your employees' strengths are vital for your marketing success

Once you have ensured you are using your own strengths and passions to succeed, you need to tackle the more difficult challenge of ensuring your entire organization has the same spirit. This of course is not an easy or simple change to make, even if you are the owner and primary decision-maker, and may prove to be an uphill battle if you are a middle-manager or technical or marketing employee.

In truly successful businesses, most employees enjoy their work and are well-placed to communicate their passion and career satisfaction to colleagues and current and potential clients.

However, you cannot force other people to change. Long established traditions and relationships and employees who don't want to change may permeate your organization and make quick improvements virtually impossible.

The recession solution

You probably don't want to have to implement the solution that I discovered. In the middle part of the decade, most of our business's employees were disgruntled, disappointed and didn't really want to work at their jobs. Our sales and business declined precipitously to the point that, to survive, I needed to dismiss virtually everyone. This bad news fortunately gave me the opportunity to get back to my writing and journalism passions and much closer to our clients, and allowed the business to recover. Now, new employees only join our company after a thorough and careful selection process which we work hard to ensure they are truly right for their careers.

In a recession, you may have the perfect opportunity for some house cleaning. You will probably be wise to dismiss employees who are hanging on for the money, rather than their passion and skill. As your organization shrinks, it will also become stronger with people who truly enjoy and care about their work. No one likes throwing employees out of their jobs especially in hard times, but you can create a much healthier business if you streamline your operations for your best and most passionate colleagues.

Leading by example

The other, slower, approach to building a healthy organization is to lead by example. Follow your own strengths and passions and build opportunities wherever you can. As things progress, you may find your colleagues and managers see what is happening, and you can get them to buy into the program. You may also discover it is time to set out on your own or to join another organization more closely aligned to your own values.

You may of course not be able to change everything instantly. You can control some aspects of your working environment. Taking some small steps to reduce irritants and to increase work satisfaction will make time at work much more enjoyable and effective. Your clients will see the change, too.

When you and your employees wake up each morning in a state of mental bliss where you look forward with anticipation to your work, to stretching your abilities, and reaching the highest levels possible of accomplishment in your endeavours, you'll reach the magical point which virtually assures business and marketing success. Your current clients will want to do more business with you and you'll attract the new clients you are seeking. Resources for determining your strengths

Tom Rath's **StrengthsFinder 2.0** (Gallup Press 2007) includes an online test to help you to discover your strengths. Marcus Buckingham has also published several books on this topic. These resources are helpful, but you may already know where your natural strengths lie.

Your childhood interests

Think back to your middle childhood and your memories of what you really enjoyed doing, and did well. Perhaps you enjoyed sports, hanging out with friends, or reading. (I started a neighbourhood newspaper, an early sign that journalism could be my ideal career.)

Blissful moments

Most of us can recall being so absorbed in our work that we don't think of time. We are on a natural high. This is common among tradespeople and professionals who really enjoy their work, people who choose their careers from love rather than money. As a writer, I find I thrive at 5 a.m. at the computer keyboard with a cup of coffee and silence around me. Without much effort, words form into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, and articles turn into the book you are reading now. Capture your bliss and you have likely found your strengths.

Validation from others

When I told my family that I wanted to start a publishing business, I recall my mother saying, without hesitation: "I'll give you some money to get started." You've captured your strengths when you not only enjoy your work, but the people around you also acknowledge that you have found your natural talent and wish to help you along.

Respecting employees' strengths

Many business people spend a great deal of time helping weaker employees overcome their problems, rather than supporting stronger employees to achieve their fullest potential. However, your business will be much healthier if you focus on your stronger employees and help them develop their abilities, rather than worrying about the weaker ones by trying to train them to fit in.

You may find that weaker employees are doing work unsuited to their natural ability and not fully developing their strengths. By encouraging them to redefine their work so that they tap into their natural abilities and passions, they will regain enthusiasm and enjoyment in the tasks at hand. Both your clients and your company's bottom line will benefit

The same remedy applies to high performing employees who may be doing their job well, but don't really enjoy their work. If you can redeploy them so that they are enthusiastic and happy about their work, your business will have much more productivity and energy. You will soon find your marketing is much more successful, as well because cur-

rent and potential clients will find your employee enthusiasm and positive spirit infectious and appealing.

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Mark Buckshon

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Just request ISBN 978-0-9810816-0-1



What happens when you combine the two forces . . . and combine individuals with passion and talent

By Dione Benson Special To The Design and Construction Report images © We Shoot

As I sit here, an old friend comes to mind. A camera repairman in Los Angeles. Whenever I had any trouble with a camera, I'd go to Marvin. He may have been around fixing cameras for Ansel Adams back in the day, as far as I know. He knew everything – and I mean everything – about cameras and their operation. I often think of how great he was at his job in his off-the-beaten-path repair shop, and how so many people weren't aware of his business, and didn't know of his talent.

I knew another talented professional – an auto repairman – who got lost in the shuffle because of his farout location. His customers relied upon him every time they needed a repair. On occasion, they'd mention him to a friend, but in this busy world many of us neglect to talk of such things to others and, like so many professionals, this repairman had days when no business came in, as was the case with my camera repairman.

One day, I got a call from the auto repairman requesting I take a photograph of him to accompany a newspaper ad about his business. I suggested an image of him working over a car engine, and even though many newspaper ads don't work, this one did. People shuffle through their paper and flip through their magazines. They barely take notice of their trade periodicals, oftentimes not even noticing the articles, let alone the ads. Why did this one work? I'd like to think it was because of this picture, and maybe it was. New customers responding to the ad would mention it when they called for an appointment or when they came in to see him. "What a cool picture!" And as they got to know him, they'd say, "watching you work on my car reminds me of that newspaper photograph." Apparently the image seemed to say to them, "I care about what I'm doing. I care about doing a good job."

In the case of this wonderful automotive technician, they were right. This mechanic cared, just like my camera mechanic cared. Did the photo say that to the people who responded to the ad? Apparently so. Looking at it from that viewpoint, it's not necessarily advertising that brings in the work, but the kind of advertising. In this case, advertising with photography. (An interesting anecdote: no customer seemed to recall that the photograph was accompanied by an ad, even though it obviously was since it brought the new customer to his business, but the picture was what stood out.)

What made the image work? Was it the sparkle in his eye – made even more luminous by our professional strobes? Was it the highlight on his wrench – made even more powerful with my assistant's precise positioning of the mechanic's hand? Whatever it was, without the picture, the ad in this case may not have even been noticed.

There are many professionals like these two mechanics. Do you know of some? If so, reach out to them. Tell everyone about them. Hey, even better. Take his or her picture. A good one . . . shot with care. "

Dione Benson at <u>We Shoot (http://www.weshoot.com)</u>, is a Seattle, Washington photographer. This article originally appeared in her company's blog at http://www.weshoot.com/wordpress. Copyrighted photos republished with permission.









Uncle Sam Has It and Is Trying to Spend a Huge Amount on Construction

By Doug Reitmeyer Special to the Design and Construction Report

The construction industry has been hit hard by the economic downturn. Contractors, builders, and their families want something that shows a way out. They need hope and are looking with increasingly anxious eyes to Uncle Sam.

In response, our government has taken steps to revitalize construction, beginning with last year's passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). With \$137 billion of the \$787 billion package allocated for construction, there was an expectation that much of the crisis would be alleviated. Then reality hit; the obvious had been overlooked. Few contractors had the experience and understanding of *how to find, qualify for and bid* on the thousands of ARRA funded opportunities.

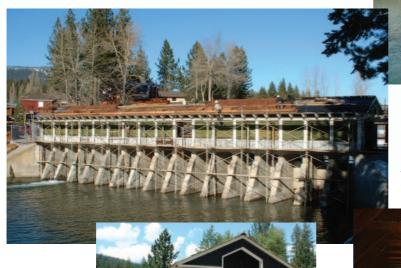
As a result, many of the much needed contract funds never hit the street. And just like the year before, when \$47 billion of government contracts were not awarded be-

cause *no one bid on them*, the lack of instructive information for contractors blunted the effect of the stimulus money.

Construction firms caught in a declining economy, without the know how that would allow them to access government contracts, have been forced to take drastic action including cutting overhead, laying off employees, and reducing profit margins. Private work has become hyper-competitive, with several times more companies than normal bidding on what little work has been allable.

Federal construction contracting, on the other hand, is the only segment of the construction industry that remains well-funded and active. Those contractors that *are* registered and qualified to bid on federal construction projects

MONEY!



These are before and after photos of the Bureau of Land Management funded rehabilitation of the famous National Historic Lake Tahoe Gatehouse that controls the water flow out of Lake Tahoe into the Truckee River. Over 200 Federal Agencies spend billions of construction dollars every year to build and maintain our country.

have been rewarded with an unprecedented level of activity and opportunity.

For example: In September 2009, the last month of the government's fiscal year, there were over 770 federal construction opportunities posted at FedBizOpps; Uncle Sam's public website for all federal purchases over \$25,000. The month before there were 1,050 contracts looking for bidders. With a limited number of qualified bidders, and all sizes and types of projects available, many of the contracts had little or no competition and a lot of them had to be recycled due to a lack of offers.

To put this situation in perspective, consider these numbers:

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that there were approximately 884,300 construction establishments in the United States in 2008.
- In order to do work for the federal government, contractors must be registered in CCR, the Central Contractor Registry. There are only 20,049 construction companies registered in CCR.
- That means that out of 884,300 contracting entities, only 20,049, or about 2.25 per cent, are qualified to bid federal construction contracts. There is essentially 97.75 per cent *less* construction competition bidding on Government contracts.
 Now why is that?

Surveys show that there are three primary reasons. These might be the very concerns that have kept you from pursuing this element of high construction activity:

1. The Red Tape

Admittedly, when doing work for Uncle Sam, there is more regulatory paperwork to deal with. However, with some reading, a little training and knowing where to find the answers to your questions, this problem is easily solved. Like getting a contractor's license, it's really nothing more than following instructions and doing the required tasks.

2. Getting Paid

Old stories of problems getting paid persist like old wives' tales. What many have failed to realize is that years ago our government recognized the problem and fixed it with the passage of the Prompt Payment Act (PPA). Progress payments are made monthly based on a percentage completed and the government is *legally* obligated to pay its bills in a timely manner. What's timely? Under the PPA, any partial billing must be paid in 14 days or less, and final billings are paid in 30 days. With the adoption of the WAWF and other electronic platforms, progress payments are often made within 10 days! And in the few cases where the government *does* take longer than they're allowed, they have to pay interest on the money owed.

3. No Federal Experience

While the government does frequently ask for references and experience on previous federal projects, in most cases, your experience from the private sector is considered equal. Also of note: In 49 of the 50 States, your local business license is accepted for nearly all federal contracts. In the world of economic stimulus funded contracts, the Federal Government's procurement officials really *want* to work with contractors to achieve their goals.

Now let's look at the domestic world of construction funding:

First, the *private* sector

Over the past few years, private and commercial construction spending has consistently declined. From a high in 2006 of over \$912 billion, by 2009, it was about \$620 billion; a drop of about 32% in just three years.

Second, the government sector

Federal spending has been increasing every year for the last 10 years and by almost 15 *BILLION dollars* every year for the past six years. The federal government spent \$317 billion on construction last year and will spend even more this year.

In addition to the ARRA construction funds, the government is spending billions of dollars on BRAC (the Base Realignment and Closure Program), the Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction System and countless other military and civil works construction programs that are being implemented nationally to further stimulate the economy. And now with President Obama's recently announced \$3.8-trillion dollar budget for the next fiscal year, we know that the massive spending on construction will continue.

So let's rehash the numbers: There are over 884,000 contractors going after \$620 billion of private work and only 20,049 of them are able to bid on \$317 villion worth of government work. Do you see the incredible opportunity here?

Realizing that contractors needed a roadmap to follow, I conducted an Internet search to find the information a novice would need to become a federal construction contractor. The majority of searches ended with links to consulting attorneys that had never done a federal contract, retired military and government consultants who promised to assist contractors in exchange for fees and the Small Business Administration (SBA).

An extensive review of the SBA's contractor instructions showed that they were incomplete. They were lacking the necessary information that would help a beginner solve the myriad of problems one is likely to encounter when trying to add Uncle Sam as a construction client.

To address the problem, Reitmeyer & Associates of Austin, Texas took on the task of creating a special website for the construction community, www.GCExperts.com. Here, contractors, subcontractors and builders have free access to video and written training materials with step-by-step instructions of exactly what they need to do to get started. Everything that they need to know to become a federal construction contractor is covered including:

- The best methods of organizing a business structure for maximum protection and financial benefit
- How to get registered and qualified to bid on federal construction contracts.
- Where contractors can find many of the government contract opportunities that are coming out every day.
- And what the steps are to actually complete a typical federal construction contract using two recently completed government projects as examples.

Utilizing the knowledge gained from completing over 1,000 federal construction contracts, an advanced training curriculum was established together with a special membership site where contractors can get access to all the resources necessary to accelerate their business into this underserviced market.

Member resources include proprietary BidTrakker Market Reports (www.BidTrakker.com) that identify and provide near immediate access to the thousands of government construction opportunities over \$25,000 that the United States government funds every year. Using the BidTrakker format, a contractor can identify and track federal construction projects nationwide in less than five minutes a day. This is a huge timesaver for contractors and a must-have tool for the pros.

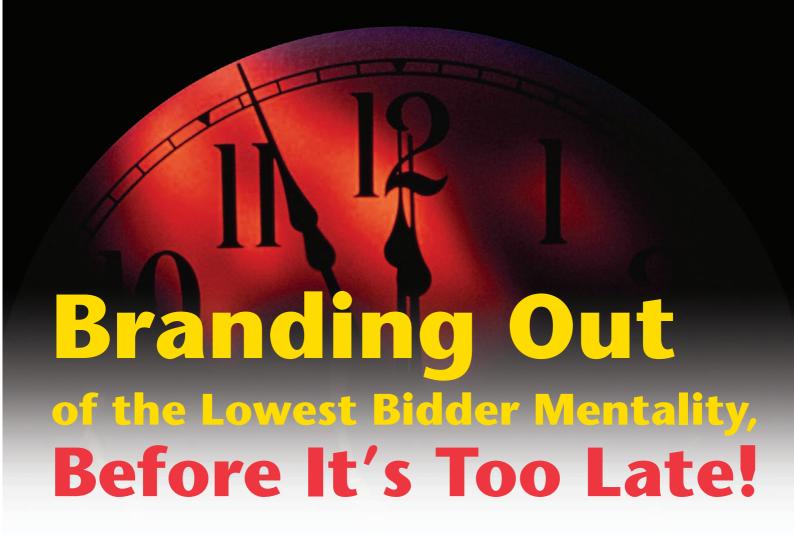
Contractors using BidTrakker, its database of federal procurement officials and the systems developed by Reitmeyer & Associates have already completed more than 280 government construction contracts throughout the country.

With Uncle Sam as a client, and access to the flood of federal construction funds pouring out of Washington, the smartest contractors will do more than simply survive the recession; they are certain to flourish.



Doug Reitmeyer was the Keynote presenter at the Houston and Dallas Construction Expo and he is the author of "How to Be a Federal Construction Contractor". For more information visit www.GCExperts.com.





By Robert J. Folse and Perryn Olson, CPSM Special to The Design and Construction Report

The construction industry is under massive economic and competitive pressure nationwide. For companies to survive and thrive in this environment, they need to set their brands apart from their competitors through strategic positioning, brand differentiation and awareness, and execution of the customer experience. And NO... we're not talking about the Disney construction crew!

Now is the time for companies to get serious about implementing brand building initiatives and techniques to facilitate growth and continued success. Otherwise, they and the industry will succumb to the "lowest bidder mentality," construction quality will continue to decline, and only a few major players with significant economies of scale will thrive. So, what can you do now to fight this trend? We have some thoughts for you, so read on.

Value pricing: What your services, products, and experience are really worth

One of the most challenging branding initiatives for construction companies to complete is the establishing of a "true" value proposition that lays the groundwork for all other branding efforts. Often when asked what really sets them apart from their competitors, the answer is always the same. So, how would you answer? Think hard. What are three unique factors that make you different from the guys across town? What's your answer? Usually we hear: "We're

on time and on budget! We build long-lasting, trusted relationships! We deliver quality work! It's our people!" Sound familiar? Don't feel stressed—these characteristics define many great construction companies and many of them will say these same things when asked the brand differentiation question.

So, how can you formulate and communicate your true brand differentiating characteristics to a prospective customer? You first must establish a Value Proposition for your company. What is a Value Proposition, you ask? Well, a value proposition is "A statement or paradigm of the benefits, costs, and value an organization delivers to customers or others within or outside the organization." Basically, Value = Benefits - Costs.

A company without a clearly established value proposition is a 'commoditized business.'

Commodities cannot charge more for their products or services. Next time you're in the grocery store, stroll down the coffee aisle. You'll see hundreds of product choices, all priced about the same. So, how do they try to differentiate to grab the customer's attention? They use fancy packaging and a lower price. Then, they put their product on sale, thus lowering the price further. Then they run a special and give away some of their product, thus lowering the value further. Do you see the trend? How can anyone survive? Do you think the lowest price is the coffee roaster that packages the best beans, roasts them carefully in small batches, and delivers the product as fresh as possible? Nope...And why

not? Because they are stuck in the lowest bidder mentality and they can not afford to produce a quality product or good brand experience. Now, we may be exaggerating here a little, but we think you can get the gist of what we're saying. You have to KNOW what your true Value Proposition is before you can communicate it to prospective customers!

So, what's the moral of the story? Price your product according to the value you provide. Be the lowest "QUALI-FIED" bidder, not always the lowest bidder. After all, only you know what your product and services are really worth, but you must be able and ready to substantiate your claims. Have examples readily available and collect testimonials from your customers to build your reputation proof file. Reputation matters even more now! If we were a sub-contractor and could guarantee you, the general contractor, less headaches because of our specific experience with the kind of work you're bidding out, the job done right because of past projects, and on-time because we understand the contingencies that may arise, and without work change orders, would you pay us 10 per cent more?...20 per cent more? How much is it worth to you to know that the job won't go over bid because we can guarantee it? How much is it worth to you knowing your client will not call to complain about our performance, or another sub telling you they can't start work because our team is still in their way? There's a thought. Here's another thought for you: Which would you rather have: more money or more clients?

Build and nurture your brand for success

Now that you've taken the time and made the painstaking effort to formulate and cultivate your company's Value Proposition, it's time to build your Brand. Begin inside your organization. You have to get your own house in order, so to speak, before you can walk-the-walk. If you do this the right way, you'll find that you are already walking-the-walk, but you and your staff may not have known how to think about and talk about your brand's unique differentiation and positioning. So put an end to that by establishing brand-delivery expectations internally and training your team on them! What does your company stand for? How do you want to be viewed by your community? Where is the company headed in the future? Answer these questions and form a vision for why your company is relevant.

Define your company culture, and its place in the "grand scheme of things," and provide a vision of the future so they can see the long-term value of a relationship with your company. Then, establish and communicate the repercussions that will occur should the brand experience not be delivered as expected. This is vital! Don't assume your people know or understand your brand! It takes time to develop a brand's awareness and full value, but it only takes one screw-up to ruin the value and reputation.

Carve out a special place in the world for yourself!

Once your vision is set, it's time to think about market position. You must define your strengths and weaknesses (Google: SWOT analysis), so you know what type of business you want to go after, and what type of business you can go after but may struggle to get. This process will form the basis for your "branding" efforts. You may be surprised by the niche markets you have slowly developed over the

years where your competitors can't touch you because of lack of experience. Niche experts can demand higher rates for their expertise and proven record.

Branding efforts include establishing a look-and-feel for your company starting with your logo and stationery package, design and content for your website, newsletters, advertising and communications, and building a functional and viable social media strategy. Your competitive advantage should really stand out through these tools. The tools communicating your differentiation should help with convincing your prospects your company is the best choice. Specialization, capabilities, equipment, expertise, team, past projects, cost-saving techniques/value engineering, etc. should be spotlighted in your brand marketing tools. They should also work cohesively to establish your brand's true market position and value. Your expertise and project history should raise questions about your competitors' experience. Does your RFP simply state your qualifications or does it make you stand out as the best, possibly being the only viable option for the client?

So, where do we go from here?

Branding your construction company or design/build firm is no longer an optional undertaking. Your competitors are doing it, and their efforts may just be the nail in your proverbial coffin. After reading this article, you have the knowledge of where to begin, and if you're still not sure, then ask for help.

Establishing a unique value proposition, defining and communicating your vision for the company's relevance, and building and utilizing a full complement of brand marketing tools to relentlessly promote and nurture your brand will give you a strategic advantage over your competitors. Having the infrastructure ready to apply to website development, advertising creative, internal/external newsletters, RFPs and proposals, award submittals and press coverage can make your branding efforts go smoothly while significantly reducing marketing costs. (Yes, we're saying you're marketing costs could go down while your profits go up.)

Make this current business environment work in your

favor. Build and nurture your brand now, establish your brand dominance and win more of the right kind of projects for your company while increasing your profits!



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By Danna J. Olivo Special to The Design and Construction Report

Today's economic situation is forcing Architectural, Engineering and Construction (AEC) firms to pull out all the strings to create a competitive advantage in their project pursuits. After so many years working in the marketing and business development side of the industry, I am still amazed at the length of time it takes industry decision-makers to realize that just because it has always been done a certain way, does **NOT** mean it is right today. *Times they are a changin'*. It is time to get on the bandwagon, step up to the plate and create an *unfair advantage* over the competition.

In an industry whose primary measurement of a "job well done" is the relationships it develops with the services it provides, positioning for that next job is an on-going process. In a level playing field...it boils down to what you do to win that next project.

"Successful companies do not abandon their marketing strategies in a recession; they adapt them" – John Quelch Two years ago the industry's biggest challenge was finding qualified staff. Today it is trying to maintain the backlog necessary to hold onto the staff that they already have. These hard economic times have taken its toll and left us with depleted marketing resources, and an increasing demand to respond to new business requests.

Over the past 12 months we have seen the average number of proposals submitted on a project jump from 8 to more than 25. The average shortlist has gone from three to four firms to sometimes six to eight and more firms. Owners are looking for that competitive edge. **Do you have it?**

In 2009, as Marketing Director for Turner Construction Company, I put out more than 64 proposals in a 12-month period. That equates to just over one proposal a week. Coupled with the miscellaneous other responsibilities that the Marketing Director of a large International Construction Management firm has, this has all the ear markings of a disaster waiting to happen. Would you not agree? What I am finding since leaving Turner is that this is more the norm than the exception.

This economic situation has not only taken its toll on the number of qualified projects on the market to pursue, it has drained the resources needed to pursue what projects are out there. It is time to think "outside the box". When you find yourself competing against 10 other firms equally matched for one project, what is going to tip the scale in your favor and get you to the shortlist table?

As the economic outlook begins to turn around, now is the time to re-evaluate your benchmarking measurables. Are they truly portraying a competitive advantage...or are they merely competing with every other firm out there on the market?

If you are finding that what was once your competitive advantage within the marketplace is no longer the case...it is time to rethink your marketing strategy. Instead of continuing to chase the same projects that

hundreds of others are chasing...promoting the same benefits...why not take a different approach. Create your own *unfair advantage!*

Creating an **Unfair Advantage** means thinking outside the box and creating opportunities that the competition has not explored. "How do I do that?"...you ask. Rather than approaching the opportunity from the standard "What's in it for me?" or the "Rah-Rah we are the BEST" avenue, put yourself into a position outside the *company* structure and into the *market* environment.

For instance, my firm DAVNA is currently working on a program that was developed to pursue upcoming

AEC opportunities for the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil called "Going for Gold". The programming concept was born out of a conversation over dinner one evening between some colleagues and I talking about the enormous amount of opportunities getting ready to break loose. How could we position DAVNA in the mix?

We decided that rather than reaching out to the normal "Mega" firms that have historically participated in these International environments, we would carve a niche for our-

selves that would *create* a need and opportunity. The original concept grew into a unique partnering program designed to provide new opportunities for U.S. firms who would not normally be able to pursue International markets. By acting as International Business Brokers, we would be able to act as industry specific marketing and business development liaisons for U.S. firms in the pursuit of more than \$1 trillion in renovation and Greenfield projects in South America.



The unique concept involves partnering U.S. firms with similar Brazilian firms in a collaborative arrangement to pursue various opportunities. By working through DAVNA as liaisons, firms are able to share the initial investment costs, thus reducing the costs necessary to break into a new market. Brazilian firms who normally would not be in a position to pursue these opportunities would now

be viable participants through strategic partnering. What we have effectively done is create a position that does not currently exist locally in the states or in Brazil. We have created our own *Unfair Advantage!*

Next time you are knee-deep in proposal efforts for yet another project that you have no competitive advantage on...think about how you can create your own *Unfair Advantage*.



Danna Olivo is President of **DAVNA Enterprises, LLC** a marketing solutions firm dedicated to the Architectural, Engineering and Construction industry to improve the effectiveness of their marketing initiatives and

keeping marketing professionals apprised of new and upcoming marketing tools and resources. www.davna.com.



This posting in Lester's blog (http://www.blog-bizedge.biz/) has attracted much response within the AEC community. You can read his own follow-up on his blog here.

The frenzy over social media has been fascinating. It seems to dominate virtually every conversation about marketing. But is it over hyped?

Clearly it's helped companies expand their marketing bandwidth. But what about bottom-line results? That's the one aspect of social media that doesn't seem to be getting a lot of attention, at least with regards to our profession. I think I know why.

For one thing, most A/E firms have never been inclined to measure marketing results. The reason I hear most often is the difficulty in linking marketing activities with tangible outcomes. No doubt it can be challenging, but low expectations probably come into play. Firms don't expect tangible outcomes from marketing, so why bother trying to measure them?

Most firms do track marketing activity, and social media can amp up the activity meter. That's where I suspect much of the excitement comes from. When you read about the phenomenal growth of sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, it's hard not to get excited about the potential for reaching a lot of people.

And in that sense, I suggest that social media is much like trade shows a decade or two ago. We set up our exhibit booth and waited expectantly as hundreds strolled past. Several, in fact, stopped to talk with us. We left enthused because we had engaged in more conversations with potential clients in two days than two months of sales calls could have produced.

But the shortcomings with trade shows were much the same as they are with social media. You see, most firms failed to do the hard work to turn those conversations into sales. And most firms will fail to do the hard work to make social media actually generate new business. But enthusi-

asm will run high, at least for a while, because of all the connections (the modern substitute for conversations) being made.

Come to think of it, the lack of conversation is one of the primary reservations I have about social media. There are many online forums for posting questions, sharing insights, and meeting new people. But folks in our industry don't appear to be using them much.

Take LinkedIn, for example. There are many groups there related to our business, but little discussion associated with them. Among the several groups I have joined, I would expect members of the Society for Marketing Professional Services group, in particular, to be talking to each other. But there are only 17 discussions currently listed, some posted months ago, and a relatively small number of people who have provided most of the posts and comments. This is a group with 1,893 members.

I checked several A/E firm Facebook pages and found a similar trend. While some have attracted an admirable number of "fans," the back-and-back forth postings generally don't come close to that seen on the average personal profile. Twitter, of course, is not the best site for conversation. It seems largely ignored by A/E firms anyway (although there are many individuals from our industry posting there).

While admittedly only a cursory review, I've seen nothing to make me think that social media will displace face-to-face networking any time soon. Networking involves conversation, not just connecting. But what about social media for supporting other marketing activities? A few key questions come to mind:

- Are clients using social media in significant numbers?
- Where will you get content to support your social media activities?
- Is your firm prepared to make the necessary investment of time?
- What specific objectives do you have in mind?

Let's consider each of those questions:

Are clients—specifically decision makers—using social media?

You can certainly raise your firm's visibility with social media, but are you reaching the right audience? That's the question that has dogged me and I've yet to find the definitive answer. I will say that I've personally found little evidence that executive decision makers are using social media in significant numbers. When I've asked my own clients—typically CEOs and principals—the usual answer I get is, "I don't have time for that."

I've pored over several studies of internet use by B2B buyers, but I've not been able to connect these data to our own business. One trend is clear: The use of social media by B2B marketers has exploded in recent years. One study found that B2B use has actually surpassed that of B2C marketing, although social media is arguably better suited for the latter. I assume that means it's working for B2B enterprises? Again, that angle is less clear.

Another data point you should know: One survey found that 54 per cent of companies prohibit the use of social networking sites *for any purpose* by their employees during work. That number is likely to increase as use of social media while on the job grows (according to another study). So will the exponential growth of B2B marketing through social media continue? Or is there another reality lurking beneath the surface?

Where will you get content to support your social media marketing?

Not long ago, content marketing was the rage among professional service firms. Except in the A/E business, where most firms generate little in the way of articles, white papers, webinars, videos, podcasts, etc. Why did we bypass the last wave—the efficacy of which is better demonstrated in the research—only to jump enthusiastically on this one?

I suspect it's a matter of convenience. It's easier for marketers to create a presence on social networking sites than to try to extract useful content from their technical colleagues. Yet we need to recognize that content marketing hasn't gone away; it has spread to the internet and social media.

A recent study by Business.com looked at business usage of social media and confirmed that content is still king. The most common business uses for social media were: attending webinars, listening to podcasts, reading user ratings and reviews, subscribing to feeds from business information and news sites, reading articles and blog posts, and searching for business information.

With so many firms staking a claim on social networking sites, the question you should ask is: Why should folks pay attention to us? It's obvious that good content is the key. It doesn't necessarily have to be your own (although I strongly recommend creating some of your own content). You can link to others' content if your cupboard is bare. But that still takes time finding it, which leads to the next question.

Are you prepared to commit the necessary time and resources?

A little more marketing is certainly better than a little less. So if you find social media a convenient and efficient way to broaden your marketing efforts a little bit, so be it. But if you want to have some real impact, it's going to require substantial effort. How much is it worth?

I confess to being only a casual user of social media (oops, there goes my credibility). I dabble in LinkedIn and Twitter, and only recently created a Facebook business page. Of course, I blog. I follow what others are doing, leave comments, exchange occasional emails with my peers. As a sole proprietor, I have limited time for marketing. I don't engage social media more because I'm not fully convinced yet that it's worth more of my time. Maybe it's a chickenand-egg sort of thing.

But I'm still much more active online than most of my clients, including some rather large firms with substantial marketing resources. The big difference? I have content and use social media primarily to distribute it. So what's your plan? Dabble or dunk? The important thing is that you align your level of activity with your expectations. Social media hasn't made effective marketing any easier; it still takes a substantial commitment to do it right.

What specific objectives do you have in mind?

Marketing needs to be more than enriching the atmosphere with positive vibes about your firm. It should deliver tangible, measurable results. The truest test that marketing is working is when clients are contacting you in response. So surely you should be tracking who contacts you through your social media marketing efforts. Even better, how many sales does it lead to?

But I'm also an advocate for tracking leading indicators, results that you can reasonably expect will eventually deliver to the bottom line. Some leading metrics to consider:

- Google PageRank
- Traffic (visitors, followers, fans, etc.)
- Interactions (comments, discussions, messages)
- Mentions (use Google Alerts to track when your firm's name is mentioned on the web)

Obviously, your objectives and level of effort go hand in hand. That's why it's important to weigh both together. Many firms have dived into social media without clear objectives in mind. So how then do they measure success?

Regardless of the size of your marketing budget or staff, you have limits just like I do. Ideally, you're allocating those resources to the best possible use, to the best of your ability. Where does social media fit into that equation and how much of your resources does it deserve? That I can't answer. I can only hope to ask the right questions.



Mel Lester is a consultant based in Shawsville, VA. You can Email him at mel@bizedge.biz for monthly tips, advice, and industry trends of interest to A/E firm managers or business developers.



I have seen the reemergence of a refreshing way of doing business that is nothing less than exciting. It is the idea that being simply honest with your clients is no longer enough to separate you in the crowded marketplace. Rather companies are beginning to embrace the idea of 'going the extra mile' for their clients, the concept that I like to refer to as Values Based Business. The exciting thing about a Values Based Business approach is that it generates a marketing mechanism that cannot be stopped. I have seen companies that use a Values Based Business marketing approach enjoy rich profits, extremely loyal clientele, and a satisfaction that only doing a great job can give.

So, what is a Values Based Business **Marketing Approach?**

A Values Based Business marketing approach is running your company not to make money or to grow, but specifically to help other people. It is the idea that, by running your business with integrity and honesty, faithfully serving your customer instead of your wallet or your own interests, you will experience true success. Let me clarify true success here: more profit, less hassle, a peaceful satisfaction every day on your way home from work, and a good night's sleep (this last one is for all the business owners that haven't had a good night of sleep in years).

What it looks like

Values Based Businesses do several things that most profit and growth oriented businesses have a hard time swallowing. Here are just a few examples:

They always do something extra for free: I used to go to an auto shop that would always do something unexpected for me free of charge. They rotated my tires, replaced light bulbs, oiled squeaky doors; the list goes on and take his or her cars there.

They take on pro-bono work: Vales Based Businesses help out non-for-profits, low-income families, and even their everyday clients. They do it because it is right and because they really care. Finally, when they do it, they treat the nonpaying client just as good as the paying client.

They treat every client like a first class client: Taking calls and returning e-mails promptly is just the tip of the iceberg. Values Based Businesses see what their clients need and help them to achieve it, even if it is out of their scope of work.

The Result

By putting others first you are beginning the process of controlling your own destiny. Values Based Businesses leverage their entire business as a marketing tool that uses referrals, recommendations, references, and relationships as their primary marketing vehicle. This allows a company to increase profitability and to grow far beyond that of a typical money and growth focused company.

Firms that practice this philosophy have strong client bonds based on trust and respect. They have a client base that refuses to work with anyone else because it is a known fact that you will always go the extra mile and never compromise the customer relationship. They have employees that are excited about coming to work to do something good. They have managers that choose what work they want to do and who they want to work for. Perhaps developing your company as a Values Based Business, focusing on others first, will allow you to achieve the success you have always hoped for.

Tim Klabunde is the Design and Construction Network's founder. His blog is at http://www.cofebuz.com.

Why Start A DCN Chapter?

Baltimore Co-Founder Shana Opdyke Explains

By Shana Opdyke Special to The Design and Construction Report

Marketing has never been a strong suit of the construction industry. Self-congratulatory ads and lack of defensible differentiation is partly why developers perceive the industry as a commodity where lowest bid reigns. It will take a while, but that may be changing.

The reason is partially due to the latest iteration of Web technology that enables social media, but it also is attributable to a realization brought about by social media: online relationships can't succeed by themselves. They must be a periodic, face-to-face relationship as a foundation. And that is how the Design and Construction Network (DCN) started.

At the first meeting of the Baltimore chapter earlier this year, 125 professionals showed up from the architecture, engineering and construction industries. They came because it presented an opportunity for informal networking where real, mutually beneficial relationships could be established. Sure, the reverse is true and people can first meet online, but no one will be a pen pal forever. In our complex industry with multiple subcontractors and specialists, it takes more than a solid bid package to sell a project. It requires having a relationship so that the bid package gets the proper scrutiny.

"All chapters have the same objective, which is to bridge the gap between online and real relationships," says Tim Kablunde, founder of DCN. "We follow a grass roots model where others with established networks begin their own chapter so that relationships are built and business is created."

Tim started DCN in early 2009 after hosting a networking event in Washington, D.C. where 142 construction professionals came to a venue that could hold half that number. Inquires from other cities led to the establishment of chapters, and the membership has grown to more than 9,000 across the country.

DCN tracks membership through signups on www.mydcn.com, and the site is also where viewers can find links to other DCN locations on the Web. There is a LinkedIn group that hosts online discussions, job postings and other information, a blog for industry commentary, a Twitter group for news (called a Twibe) and the latest issues of *The Design and Construction Report*.

"Members don't want to manage information sources in multiple places any more than necessary, so we use our site as a platform to embrace today's social media, and tomorrow's." adds Tim.

Becoming a member is as simple as going to the site and signing up, while becoming a chapter leader takes a greater but still modest commitment. The Baltimore chapter follows the same model as the others where organizers find a venue and sponsor for the quarterly gatherings. Many restaurants are eager to rope off a section after hearing that you plan on bringing more than 100 people there for a couple of hours. Some food and drink is subsidized by the sponsor, and a few well-crafted emails and a few phone calls help drive attendance. This no-cost approach for members is what keeps DCN growing.

For the time invested in creating and running a chapter, the reward is that you become a hub of information and connections within your area, and there is no geographic limitation to expanding your network. You won't get to know every DCN member you meet online, but they may help answer a question you post in a LinkedIn discussion. Moreover, you have the opportunity connect others and foster relationships that lead to tangible busi-Carmadella (co-founder of the Baltimore ness. Shane chapter) and I recently introduced an entrepreneur with a green retaining wall product to another contractor with a precast concrete business; they are now in discussions about pursuing a project. These stories happen at each event and in between, and they make it worth the effort. Contact DCN founder Tim Kablunde about launching your own chapter.



Shana Opdyke is the Mid-Atlantic Regional Sales Engineer for design-build contractor GeoStructures. She co-founded the Baltimore chapter with Shane Carmadella of Ruppert Landscape.

DCN Networking Events

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