

Helping your people succeed?

Coach your staff on the small things that make all the difference and follow these four tips from Mark Zweig.

You are the trainer and advisor who is looking out for everyone who works for you in an effort to help them avoid mistakes you may have made yourself or have seen others make. That is in all our job descriptions.



Mark Zweig

EDITORIAL

So much of one's success in the architecture, engineering, planning or environmental business has nothing to do with one's technical, design, or computer skills. Don't get me wrong – before you fire off an angry email to me, I'm not saying those things aren't important. They obviously are. That's the business you're in and you better be good at doing it.

What I'm talking about today is the other stuff. The stuff it takes to be a good leader, manager, and seller – or the stuff you don't want to do because it gets in the way of success. None of us has enough of these people (those who know what it takes and do it) in our employ. Here are a few ideas for you:

- 1) Be willing to confront the odd quirks and mannerisms someone may have.** I have seen it all. A principal who snorted like a pig every 30 seconds, a guy who always had both hands in his front pockets, a woman with horrific dandruff, a project manager who wouldn't look at you when he talked, a department head who dressed horribly, and much more. All of these things have to be dealt with because they could be big negatives when it comes to managing clients and people inside and out of the firm.

- 2) Help your people with their writing.** It may be as simple as explaining the

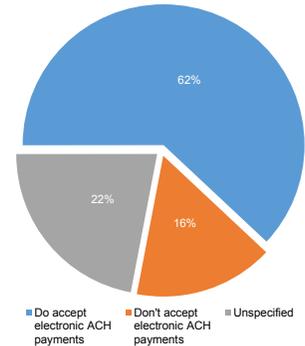
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TRENDLINES

Timely payment



Close to two-thirds of A/E/P and environmental consulting firms say that they accept electronic payment, according to ZweigWhite's 2014 Fee & Billing Survey. The recent study finds that 62 percent of respondents report that they use ACH electronic transfer as a way to facilitate timely payment. – Margot Suydam, Director, Research

2014 INCENTIVE COMPENSATION SURVEY

Participate and save! The deadline is Friday, July 11, 2014. Take the survey at www.zweigwhite.com/survey-participation.php

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WHAT'S WORKING



Stanley Consultants celebrates 100th

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TO OUR READERS In observation of the upcoming holiday, THE ZWEIG LETTER will not be published on July 7. Happy Fourth!

Evaluating service lines

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A/E BUSINESS NEWS

ABI REBOUNDS NICELY On the heels of consecutive months of decreasing demand for design services, the Architecture Billings Index has returned to positive territory. The American Institute of Architects reported the May ABI score was 52.6, up sharply from a mark of 49.6 in April.

This score reflects an increase in design activity (any score above 50 indicates an increase in billings). The new projects inquiry index was 63.2, up from the reading of 59.1 the previous month.

“Volatility continues to be the watchword in the design and construction markets, with firms in some regions of the country, and serving some sectors of the industry, reporting strong growth, while others are indicating continued weakness,” said Kermit Baker, AIA chief economist. “However, overall, it appears that activity has recovered from the winter slump, and design professions should see more positive than negative numbers in the coming months.”

As a leading economic indicator of construction activity, the ABI reflects the approximate nine- to 12-month lead time between architecture billings and construction spending.

The AIA has added a new indicator measuring the trends in new design contracts at architecture firms that can provide a strong signal of the direction of future architecture billings. The score for design contracts in May was 52.5.

Key May ABI highlights:

- Regional averages: South (58.1), Midwest (51.3), Northeast (47.6), West (46.9)
- Sector index breakdown: multifamily residential (58.2), commercial/industrial (53.6), mixed practice (50.4), institutional (47.3)
- Project inquiries index: 63.2
- Design contracts index: 52.5

SOCCER LEED With all eyes on the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil, the U.S. Green Building Council announced that six World Cup stadiums have achieved LEED certification, including South America’s largest stadium, Maracanã in Rio de Janeiro.

Originally built and used for the 1950 FIFA World Cup, the LEED Silver Maracanã stadium is once again reprising its role by playing host for the final game of the 2014 World Cup. Maracanã will also serve as a major sporting venue for the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, hosting both the opening and closing ceremonies as well as major sporting events.

The other LEED-certified stadiums for the 2014 FIFA World Cup include Castelão Arena in Fortaleza (LEED Certified), Arena Fonte Nova in Salvador (LEED Silver), Mineirão in Belo Horizonte (LEED Silver), Arena da Amazônia in Manaus (LEED Silver) and Arena Multiuso in Salvador (LEED Silver).

Felipe Faria, managing director of Green Building Council Brasil, noted that the Brazilian construction firm responsible for the certification of Maracanã, Odebrecht, pushed the boundaries of sustainable innovation, including features such as photovoltaic panels on the roof, rainwater reservoirs and selective collection for waste.

Each stadium incorporated multiple sustainable features that contributed to its LEED certification. For example, Castelão Arena features a 67.6 percent reduction in drinkable water consumption and a 12.7 percent reduction in annual energy consumption, while 97 percent of the project waste was diverted from the landfill.

Arena Fonte Nova, meanwhile, used 20 percent of its building materials made from recycled content, diverted 75 percent of the project’s construction waste from the landfill and purchased 35 percent of its power from renewable sources like solar and wind.

Brazil is among the top five countries worldwide with LEED-certified projects, encompassing nearly 3 million gross square meters of LEED-certified space.

MARK ZWEIG, from page 1

difference between “your” and “you’re” (I see “your” misused constantly these days!) or “to” and “too” (another pet peeve). Misuse of the language makes you look bad inside and out of the firm. Other common writing problems are those who insist on using “olde” English and start out every letter with “as per your request” and “enclosed herewith.” This stilted style was not good 30 years ago and it’s really not good today. But then there are major problems, such as the person simply cannot communicate their thoughts in writing. Classes may be needed to bolster their skills here.

3) Help your people with their manners. I was taught by my parents to sit up straight and hold my fork properly, to keep my napkin on my lap, to not talk with my mouth full, and to take some butter off the plate and put it on my plate before using it on my bread. I also learned early on to see if my guest was drinking an

alcoholic beverage before ordering one for myself. But not everyone had these lessons. Some people really need to be told this stuff – by you – or they will never learn.

4) Coach your people and help them with other things. Whether it’s buying them a car wash for their car that is well beyond filthy, coaching them on being at work at a regular time because it looks bad to the troops if they aren’t, or telling them how to pack proper clothing for a business trip, you need to be the coach. You are the trainer and advisor who is looking out for everyone who works for you in an effort to help them avoid mistakes you may have made yourself or have seen others make. That is in all our job descriptions. As the principals, managers, and in some cases owners of the enterprises we work in, it’s our responsibility to help all of our people succeed. ▀▀

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OFFERINGS

Evaluating service lines

Firms are constantly measuring new service lines against their core services, often choosing to tread lightly.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

HC Structural Engineering, Inc. (Daly City, CA), an 8-person firm, is constantly evaluating service lines, mainly for staff demands and to determine if a particular service is limited to only certain projects.

“We look at the service in both a monetary and difficulty sense,” says Humza Chowdhry, principal. “One of our services, building design, is constantly evaluated with the question, ‘Is it worth it?’”

It appears HC is not alone in evaluating its offerings.

LOW COST, LOW RISK, LOW DISTRACTION. Over the past 10 years, **Dudek** (Encinitas, CA), a 300-person environmental consulting firm, has maintained a fairly constant portfolio of services for environmental planning and permitting, natural resources management, and infrastructure development. And while California’s size and diversity means geography defines a number of distinct, yet sizable markets within the state, Dudek finds that focusing on constant service lines allows it to develop deep expertise and reputation to build a strong presence in the state’s various markets.

Mark Forster, Dudek’s marketing director, says that while the service lines have been constant, they are fairly broad and diversified across several private sectors and municipal and state public sectors.

“The diversity has helped us to achieve steady growth and profitability each year for our 33 years, even during downturns in the general economy,” he says.

Within the last few years, Dudek has added cultural resources as a new service through a key hire. This complemented existing capabilities and fits well with the firm’s strategic focus. For many years, Dudek teamed with cultural resource firms so it had a good understanding of its clients’ needs and pondered how it could profitably offer this service in-house.

“We also significantly expanded our existing environmental construction compliance monitoring service by reaching a new client-base of renewable energy firms building utility-scale projects,” Forster says.



Humza Chowdhry,
Principal,
HC Structural
Engineering, Inc.

Dudek constantly evaluates its service lines on profitability, growth potential, and strategic objectives, as well as the dynamics of California’s environmental market.

Before 2005, the company attempted land development engineering and surveying on several different occasions.

“We failed each time with the wrong personnel and the coup-de-grace of a cyclic recession,” Forster says. “Each time all staff was cut or transferred, and contracts finished and not renewed. We also attempted materials testing many years ago and failed. The losses were mitigated by profits from our long-term successful service lines.”

Forster says that those lessons have stayed with them.

“We keep an opportunistic outlook and are entrepreneurial about new services within our strategic focus,” he says. “When considering something new, we like author Jim Collins’ concept of low-cost, low-risk, and low-distraction tests rather than immediately jumping in full tilt.”

“When considering something new, we like author Jim Collins’ concept of low-cost, low-risk, and low-distraction tests rather than immediately jumping in full tilt.”



Mark Forster,
Marketing
Director, Dudek.

WHAT’S IN A NAME? At HC Structural Engineering, Inc. design services are more of an add-on to its namesake core offering.

“This is a service I included as a foundation for the company because of my strong design background,” Chowdhry says. “However, the company’s name and focus is structural engineering and design is subject to opinion, changes and decision making. And, unless it’s written into the contract, design may easily exceed budget due to these variables.”

Chowdhry says that structural engineering is more of a fixed type of service where only the contractor understands what is being proposed and most likely is too technical for the client to comprehend. This leads to fewer over-budget projects and more control over the design.

Some of HC’s projects, however, are profitable in de-

See SERVICE LINES, page 4

RESOURCES

PROJECT MANAGEMENT STUDY Firms in our industry are always trying to figure out how to improve their project management techniques and procedures. This is not surprising. Effective project management and project managers can mean the difference between making and losing money, pleasing and losing clients, maintaining a good firm image and getting a bad rep, and reducing liability and getting caught up in expensive litigation.

While books abound on how to manage projects with everything from scheduling systems to project management forms, the 2014 Project Management Study of Architecture, Engineering, Planning & Environmental Consulting Firms is the only source of hard data available on how project management really works in the architecture, engineering, planning, and environmental consulting industry.

With this comprehensive study on project management, you'll find out how your competition handles project management issues and what you can do to make sure your firm does it better. Get an inside, in-depth look at your peers' project management practices and gain valuable insight from project managers in firms just like yours.

Data are broken out by firm type, staff size, region of the firm's headquarters, firm growth rate, and firm client base so you can make specific comparisons. Updated for 2014 with all the latest available statistics on project management and project managers, this book has the answers you need to improve your firm's project management.

Topics covered in this survey include:

■ **Organization.** Do the majority of firms in our industry organize

themselves by a matrix, standing team/studio, or hybrid structure? What do other firms of the same type, size, and region as yours do? Organization structure serves an important role in A/E/P and environmental firms, as it dictates how project teams are decided and consequently, may affect the project itself.

■ **Project administration.** Do firms budget for project management? If so, what percentage of the total project budget is typically allocated for project management? Many design professionals may believe that an activity is not billable unless it specifically involves design. But firms that don't budget for project management at all, or do inaccurately, may be selling themselves short.

■ **Project websites.** Has your firm jumped on the project website bandwagon yet? Many of our survey respondents have! Find out what they have to say about who's responsible for setting up project websites, who can usually access the sites, and whether they think these sites are truly an effective project management tool.

■ **Project managers.** Several chapters on project managers themselves cover everything from their age, gender, and education, to their time management and responsibilities, to how much they earn. Whether you're a firm leader looking to find out what you should expect from your project managers, or you're a project manager looking to compare your salary or other aspects of your job to your peers, you don't want to miss these statistics.

For more information or to buy a copy, call 800-466-6275 or log on to www.zweigwhite.com/p-2199-project-management-survey-2014.

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sign when the client knows what they are looking for and is involved from the start with their vision.

"The majority of clients have an idea of what they are looking for, and depending on their communication with us, we may be able to help them visualize their design," Chowdhry says. "One design which we tried, but realized was far stretched, was a recent restaurant design. We went in with the impression that there would be strong collaboration between the client and contractor, which did not end up happening."

So, with a lack of experience in a certain field and not having important parties involved, HC ran into some difficulty – to the extent where it most likely will not offer restaurant design services in the future. The time, unknowns, and lack of direction were all factors in that decision.

To date, Chowdhry says that HC has not actually cut a service line. With mainly three lines (design, structural engineering, and BIM consulting), this would be difficult.

However, let's say HC eventually did decide to cut a service. What would it do?

"We would clear it up within our organization and promotions, and offer clients alternative firms, which may be a better fit for their project," Chowdhry says.

Adding services is also in the cards.

"We just added teaching structural engineering classes for the national structural engineering exam and saw an immediate benefit in doing so," Chowdhry says. "By creating an army of students and a national presence, we see a niche market that we can control. The key is not to go into multiple directions, but to stay focused on a few, clear-written goals that will not distract your staff into spinning their wheels."

TAKING A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH. Jack Raudenbush, vice president, **Raudenbush Engineering, Inc.** (Middletown, PA), a 41-person full-service engineering firm, says that, at minimum, it evaluates services lines on an annual basis. It's part of their strategic plan update and they are open to potentially expanding service offerings as specific opportunities for growth are identified.

"We continually track the success of our disciplines through the analysis of monthly profit and loss statements; this gives us a clear picture of each group's performance," Raudenbush says.

When Raudenbush decides to add a new service, the next steps are to develop a marketing plan and action items for the new offering; and to recruit personnel with the right mix of capabilities and experience to meet initial goals. And, when cutting a service line, Raudenbush looks to reallocate resources as necessary, such as transitioning staff to other departments, or shifting work to other offices. ▀▀

SURVEY

Technology trends dissected

Design firms have moved way beyond the typewriter, but they are not cutting-edge in general.

By CHRISTINA ZWEIG
Contributing editor

Just a few years ago this writer received a beautifully written letter from one of ZweigWhite's clients – drafted on a typewriter. So unusual a letter it was passed among colleagues. Just 10 years ago this would have been much less of an anomaly, and 10 years before that, we wouldn't even think it would be something worth mentioning!

A/E/P and environmental firms like to focus on their work and aren't historically front-runners when it comes to new technology; ZweigWhite's recently released 2014 Information Technology Survey found that nearly one-third of all firms (30 percent) say they have underinvested in technology over the past three years. Buyer's remorse is not common, and just three percent of firms feel they have "overinvested" in technology.

"A/E firms tend to be conservative with their IT adoption policies – most important to them is a stable work environment that promotes staff productivity with a minimum of disruptions and learning curves. To that end, they usually will only upgrade when there is a reason," says Richard DesLonde, CEO, DesLonde Software Development, a company in Walnut Creek, Calif. that offers a wide range of technology services, from software development to Internet marketing platform integration.

The Information Technology Survey showed a big reduction in the use of Microsoft Windows XP operating systems over the past year (from 30 percent 11 percent). The number of firms using Microsoft Windows 7 has increased from 63 percent in 2013 to 80 percent in 2014.

"XP is no longer supported by Microsoft, so the conservative and uncriticizable thing to do is upgrade to the most stable version of Windows, which at this point is Windows 7," DesLonde says.

Windows 8 doesn't appear to be popular yet with the A/E/P and environmental community – only three percent of respondents to the survey said they used a system that wasn't Windows 7 (80 percent) XP (11 percent), Apple Mac OS (4 percent), Windows 2000 (1 percent), or Windows Vista (1 percent).

"I expect to see most A/E firms skip Windows 8 en-

PREFERRED OPERATING SYSTEM

MS Win 7

80%

MS Win XP

11%

Apple Mac OS

4%

MS Win 2000

1%

MS Win Vista

1%

Other

3%

Source: 2014 Information Technology Survey, ZweigWhite: www.zweigwhite.com/p-2197-information-technology-survey-2014

tirely or wait until there are minor versions that make the experience more like traditional Windows – but definitely they will be with Windows 7 for a long time to come... I really feel Microsoft made a huge error with Windows 8."

It's geared toward media consumption, social networking, and the tablet experience, which completely misses the mark when it comes to productivity and the type of work A/E staff do on their workstations," DesLonde says.

A recent article on The Next Web (www.thenextweb.com) reported that Microsoft's latest operating system version, Windows 8.1, continues to grow while Windows 8 remains flat.

Still, these two systems have only accrued a 12 percent market share since Windows 8's release over six months ago. According to The Next Web, Windows 7 has nearly 50 percent market share, XP has a 26.3 percent share, and Vista a measly 2.89 percent.

WHAT ARE A/E FIRMS CONCERNED ABOUT?

Data storage or organization was listed as the top IT priority for 2014 and firms are definitely increasing their amount of hard drive storage. In 2013, a median of 300 gigabytes of HD storage was listed as a specification for purchasing a new PC, but this number increased to a median of 500 GB in 2014. Storage in other areas, such as shared, online servers ranges from 2,100 to 40,000 GB and a median of 10,000 GB, the survey found, and most firms aren't using much online storage on the cloud (median amount is 0).

DesLonde is not surprised about the increase in HD storage increase, but thinks the numbers may be simply reflective of the advance in technology and drop in price.

"Last year a 300 GB hard drive was \$100, this year the \$500 hard drive is \$100, so it's not necessarily a correlation with the need for more storage," DesLonde says. He added that a large increase might be indicative of software requirements and have a correlation with the increased adoption of BIM tools.

BIM is becoming a requirement for many projects, and ZweigWhite's survey found that a quarter of firms are using BIM in at least 65 percent of their work. The top quarter of firms report that at least 42 percent of their staff are currently using BIM, and more than half of firms (58 percent) plan to increase their use of BIM in 2014. ▀▀

Outsourcing marketing

When staffs are short or times are busy beyond capacity, outside help may be the solution.

The economy is getting stronger, and RFQs/RFPs are coming at you from all directions – short on time and long on requirements. However, if you’re lacking marketing staff, you might want to fill that position quickly.

So you post internal notices (maybe a current employee wants to join the marketing group), place ads with local and national sources, and let your network know that you have a position to fill.

You probably have two lists in mind: the attributes a successful candidate *must have* and the additional attributes you’d *like* them to have. You look for these attributes in the reams of emails, cover letters and résumés you receive. If you’re lucky, you find a likely candidate or two and invite them to interview.

No candidate has all the “must have” attributes, but time is short, so you hire the one with the most attributes and hope “for the best.” Unfortunately, as many learned the hard way, *hope is not a strategy!*

If “the best” doesn’t happen, if you don’t stumble across an experienced team player with strong writing skills and a long-term commitment, you may find yourself undertaking another search in a few months.

Ouch! That’s many hours that could have been spent more productively had there been less pressure to hire immediately. Now you will have to spend the hours (and the cost of those hours) again.

In addition, the new hire (the one you would have bypassed had there just been more time) can cause serious damage to your marketing/BD team and the firm’s perception of the marketing function. You don’t believe me? Consider the factors that might come with a bad hire:

- Lower productivity by other marketing staff.
- Lost time conducting a new search and interviews.
- Cost of additional search and training the second new hire.
- Possibility of lower morale in marketing and other groups.
- Potential negative impacts on clients.
- Here is an alternative strategy that *can* work for you!

Independent A/E marketing professionals are everywhere; you’ll find us on LinkedIn and in the Society for Marketing Professional Services (or SMPS). We live to help you



Bernie Siben

THE FAST LANE

respond to the RFQs/RFPs that threaten to bury you and your current marketers.

Identify and interview a few independent professionals. They don’t need to be local, since you have a phone, fax capability, email and Adobe Reader, and might also have access to SharePoint, Dropbox and other platforms for information sharing. The point is to *get your firm the best help it can afford*, local or remote.

Once you find an independent marketer you’re comfortable with, outsource a proposal to them.

See what it’s like to work with them:

- How do they interact with your internal staff?
- How do their processes mesh with your internal processes?
- How do they deal with deadlines?
- How much supervision do they need?

See BERNIE SIBEN, page 8

With the extra time an outsource marketer provides, you can be certain you’re making the right hire, that you won’t have to search and interview again in a few months. Remember: a bad hire can be expensive!

The common isolation of marketing

Make your company stronger by involving marketing folks in the sales process.

I recently attended a SMPS “Spring Training” one day seminar in Oklahoma. The first speaker, Carolyn Ferguson, asked several probing questions about developing interviews. She asked how many of the attendees had ever been to an interview. Affirmative answers were absurdly low, especially considering that most attendees had job duties that included assembling presentations for client interviews.

Although I was not surprised, this exercise exposed a big problem in many A/E firms. The people responsible for developing our sales documents are completely isolated from a big part of the process. An example: We have marketing staff developing interviews who have never been to an interview and do not understand what really goes on behind those doors.

Why does our industry view marketing as a separate function from the rest of the firm? Can you imagine if General Motors never allowed their marketing people to see the production floor, visit a dealership, or participate in any of the vehicle development decisions? Marketing is often at the heart of every business, yet the professional services industry seems to be an exception. Some of the great and somewhat untapped resources in our firms are marketing people. They are wired differently than the typical design and technical professional. That perspective can be beneficial, especially when you are reaching out to a diverse audience. Many of the selection processes and committees include a diverse range of people that respond differently to documents or presentations. A more focused and deeper integration of marketing people with the design and production staff produces a more comprehensive and wider reaching message. Instead of sharing this view, A/E firms often view marketing as an overhead function and isolate them in the organization chart – off to the side. It is that visual that captures what we think about marketing. Deep down in the subconscious of many leaders is the tendency to view marketing as an overhead expense that must be minimized. We keep the marketing people in a nicely defined box where they don't get in the way of the design and production teams, viewed as the “heart” of the company. Instead of fully leveraging our internal marketing resources, we tend to only trust them with a very limited scope of services. There is great opportunity to get more out of the valuable marketing talent that already exists in many of your firms.

At ZweigWhite, we have plenty of data that shows that marketing investments produce some of the greatest



Chad
Clinehens

BRAND BUILDING

return. Our high growth firms survey consistently shows that rapidly growing firms do so by investing more in marketing than their average performing peers.

Here are some simple and easy things you can do to invest more in marketing and better integrate your marketing people into the sales process:

1) Include marketing people in meetings.

This is especially true for meetings that discuss clients and upcoming projects. It is important to give marketing people a complete perspective of what the firm does on a daily basis and how the project teams interact with clients. I am not suggesting that all marketing staff attend every project meeting. Rather, I am suggesting that you designate a marketing person to have some ownership over an area of the business and look for opportunities to include that person in meetings or communications that discuss clients and future projects. This is opposed to just bringing them in to just assemble a document or presentation.

See CHAD CLINEHENS, page 8

Instead of fully leveraging our internal marketing resources, we tend to only trust them with a very limited scope of services. There is great opportunity to get more out of the valuable marketing talent that already exists in many of your firms.

IN BRIEF

HOME LEED The U.S. Green Building Council now estimates that there are as many as 150,000 LEED-certified green housing units worldwide, a number that more than doubled between 2011 and 2012 and continues to grow steadily, according to the organization's LEED in Motion: Residential report.

The report is the latest in USGBC's popular LEED in Motion series designed to equip readers with the insight and knowledge to understand LEED, the world's most widely used and recognized green building rating system, and to make the case for sustainable building practices worldwide. The report also details the U.S. states with the most LEED-certified homes, with California in the No. 1 spot followed by New York and Texas.

With the official start of summer just days away and Americans bracing for higher energy bills, the benefits of LEED-certified houses

are even more pronounced. LEED-certified homes provide 20 to 30 percent savings in energy and water use compared to code-built homes, and they maximize fresh air indoors while minimizing exposure to airborne toxins and pollutants.

"Our homes are more than just spaces that provide shelter," said Rick Fedrizzi, president, CEO and founding chair, USGBC. "Homes touch practically every aspect of our lives and are a critical element of our overall sense of safety, identity and community."

Enhancing our homes' efficiency and resilience offers an extraordinary opportunity to further the revolution in sustainable building and living practices so that it ripples outward to our communities. As demonstrated in LEED in Motion: Residential, this movement is already well under way."

BERNIE SIBEN, from page 6

You want a consultant who can not only write a proposal, but who can also manage a proposal team – including your own staff and subconsultant firms. If they can also manage the development of the short-list presentation, so much the better.

Equally important, while this marketing professional is developing your proposal, they are also giving you *the luxury of time* to search at a less hurried pace and make a better hiring decision.

Here's how it might work:

- If you didn't find a good candidate at first, advertise again. If necessary, edit the announcement to attract the résumés you want to see, and to help eliminate the ones you don't need to see.
- If you think you have already found the right person, call him/her back for a second interview. Let him/her meet more of your staff, and see if they truly fit into the social dynamic of the firm, the marketing group, and the office where they will work.

With the extra time an outsource marketer provides, you can be certain you're making the right hire, that you won't have to search and interview again in a few months.

CHAD CLINEHENS, from page 7

2) Invite marketing people to interviews when possible.

At a minimum, each person that is involved in developing interview presentations should be invited to at least one interview per year. This is should be very easy. At any interview where you need some set-up and break-down help, invite a marketing staffer to do this job. This allows the interview team to maximize their interaction and influence over the interview selection committee. During the interview, have the marketing staffer watch the presentation closely and the reaction of the committee to slides, statements, and answers to questions. That experience can provide invaluable input for that person to take back to the office. All of these benefits are a bonus to the career fulfillment and sense of inclusion the employee will feel.

3) Involve marketing staff in more events. Conferences, ground breakings, ribbon cuttings, and career fairs are all examples of events where a marketing staffer can aid in making

Remember: a bad hire can be expensive!

Finally, outsourcing is also a great answer when your marketing staff is "over-committed." Most A/E firms have more people with the authority to say "yes" to a perceived opportunity than people with the ability to write proposals. So, when all your marketing folks have all their time committed and a new RFP comes in that seems to "have your name written all over it," you might end up in a situation where the choices are:

- Cancel a proposal already in progress, to which your folks have billed hours.
- Cut corners on submittals in progress to create time for the new one – ensuring that potential winners become losers, *because quality takes time.*
- Bypass this RFP even if it is in your "sweet spot" because you don't have anyone available to manage or write the proposal.
- Outsource to an independent marketing professional.

Outsourcing marketing should be the obvious answer! ▀▲

BERNIE SIBEN, CPSM, is owner/principal consultant of The Siben Consult, LLC, in Austin, Texas, providing strategic and marketing services to AEC and environmental firms nationwide. Contact him at 559-901-9596 or bernie@sibenconsult.com

the event more productive for your design and technical representatives. Plus, they provide opportunities for the marketing person to observe brochures, giveaways, and what the competition is doing. Again, involving marketing folks in events provides them greater job satisfaction and valuable on-the-job training.

You can see the theme here. It is all about engaging your marketing staff in more areas of the firm. Allow them to contribute in a bigger way while providing them a sense of empowerment and greater job satisfaction. As design and technical firms, it is time we make marketing a larger part of our businesses. Marketing is one of the three areas of investment that we believe will have the biggest impact on making firms bigger, better and stronger. ▀▲

CHAD CLINEHENS is ZweigWhite's executive vice president. Contact him at cclinehens@zweigwhite.com.

RIGHT NOW

Understanding the role of the CRM

They are a means to an end, not the end itself, although some professionals seem to become CRM-dependent.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

Client relationship management systems certainly offer ample functionality. This technology enables companies to manage current and future clients. It organizes, automates and synchronizes sales, marketing, customer service and even technical support. That's a lot to get excited about. But what happens to client nurturing? Does it go out the window? Do marketers get a little too complacent? The key seems to be a delicate balance of both.

COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER. Amanda Wheeler, business development and marketing director, **JQ** (Dallas, TX), a multidisciplinary engineering firm, says that she does not believe CRM systems make marketers complacent. Instead, she believes that they help to keep them organized and on their game.

"A CRM can even provide the ability to have information readily available to use in face-to-face meetings," she says. "These days, CRM systems all have mobile sites and apps that make them even easier to say, 'Let me look that up for you,' and are also able to provide real-time information in meetings. With the competitive nature in our current marketplace, most marketers understand the value of face time. That can never be replaced by a database system."

DON'T RELY ON JUST ONE. **KJWW Engineering Consultants** (Rock Island, IL), a 473-person global engineering design consulting firm, is currently evaluating CRM products, says Molly Foley, marketing manager.

"The use of technology can be an excellent tool in managing client relationships, from CRM systems to email to social media," she says.

And, in a business environment where marketers are asked to juggle more clients and territory, while still keeping overhead low, technology certainly has its place.

"With limited time and the need to connect with prospects and clients quickly and often, the use of technology has become the 'go to' communication vehicle," Foley says. "Has it cut back on face-to-face

meetings? Perhaps, but I don't feel it's replaced the need or made marketers lazy – it has simply shifted expectations."

All these tools can play an important role in client development, however the key is in understanding that strong client relationships require a balance between different outreach tools. It's essential that business developers and marketers don't rely on just one form of communication.

"With the competitive nature in our current marketplace, most marketers understand the value of face time. That can never be replaced by a database system."

MANAGE, NOT SUPPLEMENT. Brent Collins, marketing manager, **Luckett & Farley** (Louisville, KY), a 76-person multidisciplinary architectural, engineering, and interior design firm, says that a common debate in their office relates to technology: lazy or efficient?

"While you can do more with technology, the quality of the information often suffers," he says. Garbage in/garbage out. Technology compromises what it means to build relationships, but it's great for creating awareness and interactions."

PEOPLE FIRST. **Advantage Engineers, Inc.** (Columbia, MD), a 150-person engineering consulting firm, builds relationships first; deliverables come next.

Matt Eveland, director of business development, says that during the sales process, the number one goal is to secure a face-to-face meeting with the proper decision makers.

"Technology assists while opening new doors and presenting our story, but it never performs the work for us," he says. "We instill a 'customer service first' corporate mantra. Service that starts with relationships and face-to-face meetings builds the best relationships."

Advantage Engineers uses technology to enhance efficiency in many aspects of its sales and operations. Technology permits remote collaboration and secures customer data and speeds deliverables and

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Amanda Wheeler, BD and Marketing Director, JQ.



Molly Foley, Marketing Manager, KJWW Engineering Consultants.



Brent Collins, Marketing Manager, Luckett & Farley.

A look at SEO basics

What is Search Engine Optimization and what does it have to do with your firm?

If a potential client is searching for your firm's services on the Internet, will they make it to your website with a simple Google search? Chances are that if you are not actively practicing Search Engine Optimization (or SEO) techniques, they will not. What comes out of a web search isn't something that is left up to Internet fates; it's in the hands of your website designer and every person, every day, who puts content relating to your firm on the web.

TO UNDERSTAND SEO ONE FIRST NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND SEARCH ENGINES. A search engine is far more than the text box interface you use to look up name of the actor who played "Ducky" in *Pretty in Pink*. Search engines are the backbone and ringleader of the Internet.

Search engines do four things:

- 1) "Crawl" all of the Internet's websites searching for content.
- 2) Store/index that content into files that are easily retrieved.
- 3) Rank the content based on popularity and relevancy.
- 4) Display results of a search in the form of web pages, photos, or videos.

For any business, being listed near the top on a list of search results is imperative for obvious reasons: users will be much more likely to click on your firm's name.

HOW CAN YOU MAKE YOUR FIRM'S WEBSITE MORE SEARCHABLE? Quality and relevant content are at the heart of good SEO. In order to rank this content better, especially if your firm is industry, market-sector, or geographically specific, be sure to use important "keywords." Keywords are words that you want clients and potential clients to know about you, and that clients and potential clients are likely to use when searching for your firm or the services of a firm that does what you do. For example, if you're a design-build firm in North Carolina, be sure to describe your current work using the words "design-build firm in North Carolina."

It's also important to analyze the technical "back-end" of your site to make sure search engines can easily read the content that you're producing – with this you will most likely need to partner with your webmaster. Search engines can only read HTML. For example, if you upload images of your current project and the description of the project is written on the image, the search engine cannot see it! It's great to have images but a search engine has no idea what it is; instead, upload an image and write the



Christina Zweig

MARKETING MATTERS

content on the website. A quick way to see if your website has this problem is by trying to copy and paste from your site. If you can copy and paste a paragraph, then it's written into the HTML.

Also, search engines can't fill out or read online forms or drop-down menus. For example, if your firm excels in engineering "thin-shelled concrete structures" but this title is hidden under a tab labeled "project types" on your website, you won't be easily picked up when someone is searching for this specific kind of work. Flash, Java applets, audio files, etc. that contain keywords are all invisible to search engines unless they are correctly labeled in regular text.

Search engines also rank based on usability. Other things that can be done to make a website more searchable include content that is organized, and network-style structures with a navigation menu where one page leads to another page and someone can easily get back to the first page.

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WHAT'S WORKING



"100 years is a very significant mark. Few consulting engineering firms have a history as long as ours. More often than not, they fade away or are acquired by other firms."

STANLEY CONSULTANTS CELEBRATES 100TH WITH BOOK Engineering firm **Stanley Consultants** has published a book on company history to celebrate its 100th anniversary, "Engineering a Better World: A Centennial History of Stanley Consultants."

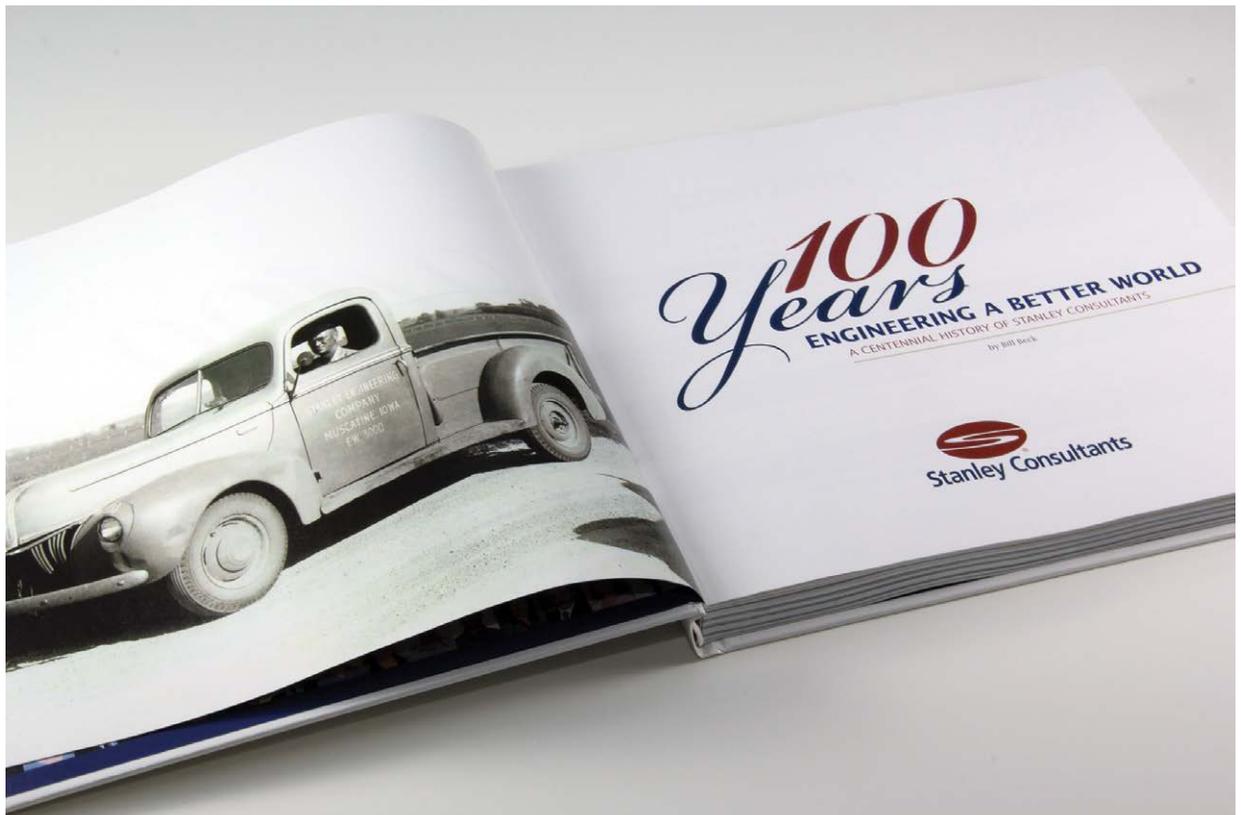
In honor of its 100th anniversary, the global consulting engineering firm commissioned the book with historian Bill Beck. The book chronicles the firm's modest start in 1913 as a one-man storefront in Muscatine, Iowa and its transformation into a 1,000-person global provider of engineering, environmental, and construction services. The firm has "members" instead of employees. A 1968 memo cited in the book explains how Stanley Consultants "encourages a climate of freedom that allows members to have an outward focus that goes beyond the single-minded goal of just making money."

Today Stanley Consultants is the largest engineering firm in Iowa, with four offices in the state. The firm also has 14 other offices in the U.S. and International offices in Guam, India, Jamaica, Kuwait, Liberia, Puerto Rico, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam. The firm has successfully completed more than 25,000 engagements in all 50 states and over 100 other countries.

"100 years is a very significant mark. Few consulting engineering firms have a history as long as ours. More often than not, they fade away or are acquired by other firms," said Richard Stanley, chair emeritus of Stanley Consultants.

The book intersperses historic photos, documents, and events with sidebars of "Member Memories." As much more than a simple timeline, chapters in the book are devoted to the firm's roots, purpose and values, members, resilience spirit, and flexibility, excellence in client service, global reach, community, and managing for the long term.

"Our continuity demonstrates that we have been able to manage leadership and ownership transitions while holding firm to fundamental values of excellence in client service and recognition that our people are our most important asset," Stanley said.



AWARD WINNERS

MPA RECOGNIZED Margulies Perruzzi Architects (Boston, MA), an architectural and interior design firm, announced that the firm's high performance workspace designs for Iron Mountain and Zipcar recently received a multitude of awards from Boston's professional organizations, including CoreNet Global New England, International Facility Management Association of Boston, International Interior Design Association of New England, and New England Women in Real Estate.

"We believe a successful design is one that not only satisfies a company's space needs, but also creates transformative experiences that change the way work is done," said Janet Morra, principal at MPA. "MPA focuses on understanding the unique needs of every client, and then works through a collaborative process to express the client's corporate goals, culture, and brand in an innovative workplace design. MPA is honored to receive these awards because they validate the influence of design in creating the workplace of the future."

MPA's design awards point to a broader trend in corporate interior architecture as area companies streamline their real estate needs, incorporate branding to excite the workplace, and promote collaborative and innovative work through the use of technology integration and efficient use of space. MPA's award-winning high performance workplace projects illustrate facility flexibility, sustainability, and amenities that provide companies with workplace innovation.

OVS RECEIVES ASLA AWARD Oehme, van Sweden (Washington, D.C.), a landscape architecture firm, has won The American Society of Landscape Architects' Landscape Architecture Firm Award, its highest honor.

The award recognizes landscape architecture firms that produce bodies of distinguished work influencing the professional practice of landscape architecture. OvS receives the award in November at the National ASLA 2014 Annual Meeting in Denver.

OvS helps fulfill the vision of multiple national botanic gardens and arboreta such as Chicago Botanic Garden, the National Arboretum and the New York Botanical Garden. The firm's passion for plants and deep horticultural legacy underpin its long-time relationships with botanic gardens and arboreta.

"OvS produces designs that contribute to the site's ecological systems," said Sheila Brady, principal. "It's about distilling the Institutions' objectives into an aesthetic composition."

PARSONS RECOGNIZED Parsons (Pasadena, CA), a 11,500-person engineering, construction, technical, and professional services firm, announced that the California Transportation Foundation selected the San Diego Integrated Corridor Management System as Operational Efficiency Program of the Year in the 25th Annual CTF Transportation Awards. The awards recognize excellence in transportation – all modes, representing both the public and private sectors, from all California regions.

As the program's systems integrator, Parsons installed its Intelligent NETworks product to help manage all facilities and modes along a 22-mile section of I-15 that serves as the primary artery for California's San Diego County. At the core of this system is an advanced decision support system that recommends and activates response plans for different types of scheduled and unscheduled events that may occur along the freeway, managed lanes, or parallel arterials.

"We're excited that our Intelligent NETworks product will help improve safety and travel reliability throughout the corridor," said Todd Wager, Parsons Group president. "This is the first decision support system to integrate network traffic prediction and online micro simulation into a single advanced transportation management system."

Led by the San Diego Association of Governments, the system allows individual transportation systems to be operated and managed as a unified network. The system began operating in early 2013 and will operate through the spring of 2015.

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Lastly, like the cool kids in high-school, websites that have lots of "friends," i.e. have many other sites communicating with them, are seen as more "popular" and are therefore likely to climb the search rankings. One easy way to increase your website popularity is to get linked to by other pages or websites (like those of your current clients). Furnishing clients with a clickable linked logo is an easy way to do this. Going full-circle, quality, relevant content inspires sharing! This can be anything from awesome project photos, to informative blog posts, or news about your market sector. Making sure this good stuff is easy to share is the last piece of the equation. Social media buttons and clearly formatted text is a good way to do this.

Again, this is a basic introduction into the world of SEO. If your firm is not actively practicing it, it's time to start! Stay tuned to The Zweig Letter to read more about good practices for active SEO techniques. ▽▲

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allows them to track their progress. However, technology does not create the personal credibility achieved via true customer face time.

"By meeting in a customer's office, we gain a better understanding and usually discover new truths," Eveland says. "That said, technology doesn't make anyone complacent. If anything, it removes the excuse to be so."

The bottom line is that you simply can't automate everything in this industry. The purpose of a high functionality CRM is to create high functioning business development professionals, but if they're relying on the tool more than their talent, they're missing out on what really matters in this increasingly commoditized marketplace.

"Personal relationships will always rule the day when all things are equal among competing firms," Collins says. "CRMs should simply allow a business development professional to successfully manage more relationships effectively, not supplement the role of business development." ▽▲