

Know your margins

Which units are performing and which are not?
Do a little research; allocate your investment appropriately.

Many companies don't ever do a margin analysis between offices, divisions, market sector groups, clients, or studios and teams. This is critical information and it should potentially affect virtually every decision made by management.



Mark Zweig

EDITORIAL

I'm all for holistic thinking – always have been. I've seen a lot of silly (make that stupid) stuff done in AEC firms when they run offices or departments as profit centers. One group is hiring while another is firing, cross-selling isn't happening, and managers are fighting with each other in senseless turf wars.

That said, sometimes you HAVE to look at how units are performing profit-wise compared to one another. If you don't, you don't know where you should be investing and where you should be cutting. Resources are limited. Management time, money, marketing dollars, training dollars, technology dollars – these things must be deployed where best used.

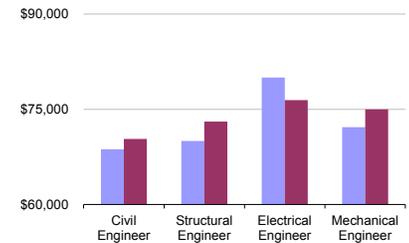
Many companies don't ever do a margin analysis between offices, divisions, market sector groups, clients, or studios and teams. This is critical information and it should potentially affect virtually every decision made by management.

For example, one time I was asked to do a marketing plan for a client who had multiple separate and distinct market sector groups they were organized around. I had their CFO do a complete analysis of each unit – something they had never done before. When the results came in we saw that they were

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TRENDLINES

Good discipline



Zweig Group's 2015 Salary Survey of Central Engineering Firms finds that at leading engineering firms salaries for project engineers in a variety of disciplines have risen again this year.

The median base salary for civil engineers increased from \$68,701 last year to \$70,325 this year; for structural engineers, from \$70,000 to \$73,063; and for mechanical engineers, from \$72,181 to \$75,000.

However, the median base salary for electrical engineers dropped to \$76,400 this year, from \$80,000 last year.

– Margot Suydam, Director, Research

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A/E BUSINESS NEWS

CONSTRUCTION SPENDING ON THE MOVE Construction spending increased in October amid growing public-sector demand for construction and continued modest growth in residential, according to an analysis by the Associated General Contractors of America. Association officials said the new spending figures underscore the need for measures to increase the supply of qualified construction workers as firms worry about growing labor shortages.

"Construction growth remains volatile," said Ken Simonson, the association's chief economist. "While overall construction spending jumped by more than one percent in October, the gain followed two months of stagnation. Public construction was the fastest-growing segment for the month but the slowest-growing over the past year and for the first 10 months of 2014 combined. Conversely, private nonresidential construction inched down from September to October but has risen at double-digit rates – 1 percent – for the combined January through October period. And private residential construction continues to grow very modestly, with multifamily construction taking the lead on an annual basis."

Construction spending in October totaled \$971 billion at a seasonally adjusted annual rate, up 1.1 percent from the September total and 3.3 percent higher than in October 2013, Simonson said. Private residential spending edged up 1.3 percent from September and 1.9 percent from a year earlier, while private nonresidential spending dropped 1 percent for the month but rose 6.4 percent year-over-year. The third component of the total-public construction spending increased 1.5 percent from September and 2.3 percent from a year ago.

Single-family home construction gained 1.8 percent for the month and 13.2 percent over 12 months, and multifamily increased 1 percent from the September level and jumped 27.2 percent from a year earlier. The largest private nonresidential type, power construction – which includes oil and gas fields and pipelines as well as electric power – slumped 1.9 percent in October but rose 0.3 percent from the prior year.

Commercial construction – comprising retail, warehouse and farm projects – decreased 2.6 percent for the month but increased 9.3 percent for the year. Manufacturing construction increased 3.4 percent for the month and 23 percent year-over-year. Among the largest public segments, highway and street construction inched up 1.1 percent for the month and declined 0.1 percent from October 2013. Public education construction inched up 2.2 percent and 6.1 percent, respectively.

"For 2014 as a whole and 2015, private nonresidential spending and multifamily spending should be the strongest segments, followed by single-family construction, with very limited

prospects for public construction."

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF SMPS The Society for Marketing Professional Services announced the release of its 2013–2014 Year in Review Infographic. The infographic, available for download on SMPS's website, features important facts and figures covering marketing and business development professionals in the AEC community.

The Year in Review provides SMPS members, board of directors, and the AEC industry a breakdown of SMPS's growth and achievements, as well as programs initiated within the 2013–2014 fiscal year. During this period, SMPS achieved an 84 percent average retention rate among membership and 18 chapters realized more than 16 percent growth. It also includes 26,447 people attending education and networking programs held by SMPS chapters.

The 2013–2014 Year in Review includes a membership summary broken down by firm size, gender, job function, and firm discipline. In addition, it incorporates statistics on professional development offered, connections made through social media, and recognition given through SMPS's awards program. SMPS has initiated several new programs, including Lunchtime Learning Labs.

The infographic can be found at http://www.smeps.org/uploadedFiles/SMPS/Site_Framework/Home_Page/SMPS_13_14_2.pdf.

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spending more money on the worst performing units and less money on the best performing units. It was the exact opposite of what a logical and dispassionate management team should do. Yet this is a typical scenario.

The reason this happens is that we tend to focus on our problems. They command our attention and resources. Instead of investing in what works, we do the opposite. We ignore the good and devote our energies to the bad. And that then results in throwing good money after bad and wasting months or years. Then we wonder why our businesses aren't profitable or growing. This phenomenon is certainly one reason why...

Of course, you have to be smart about your analysis and look at longer-term performance versus just shorter-term. We do have different units and

areas of business for good reasons. Sometimes they are countercyclical. That's ok. But be sure when the cycle is right their contributions exceed their costs when the cycle is off. Some things never make money. Several times, I worked for companies in this business where we studied project performance over a 15- to 20-year period. In one case, we discovered that all of our higher education projects over the life of the company, when totaled, lost money. This certainly was good information to have, influencing our marketing efforts going forward. Another company I worked for discovered that claims paid ate all profits in one project category they worked in over a 20-year period. That told us to get out of that market.

I always say: before business planning is a good time for a little research. Have you done your homework? ▀

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THE ZWEIG LETTER

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INITIATIVE

Salvaging debilitated relationships

When something goes wrong on a project or when dealing with a difficult client, the best course of action is to do what it takes to make it right.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent



Rick Koehler,
Chief Strategic
Officer, Architects
Plus.

Trust to an organization is what oil is to a car engine. It keeps the moving parts from seizing and stopping forward motion. But trust is not something you should take for granted. It takes months – sometimes years – to build, and you can lose it overnight.

Mark Zweig points out that relationships are critical to overcome pricing issues or service/quality problems in his recent editorial, titled “Relationships: Key to Success” (**THE ZWEIG LETTER**, Nov. 3, 2014, #1078). That’s true. But what if that relationship you thought was rock-solid is tested by an unexpected problem with a project, for example. How can you build trust back up again without having to drop the ball, look for a new client and restart from ground zero?



Mark
Lauriello,
President,
RETTEW.

“We do whatever it takes to ‘bank’ emotional trust so that in the event something goes south on a project, we have the ability to dip into that ‘bank account’ and make a withdrawal.”

TRIED AND TESTED. Rick Koehler, chief strategic officer, **Architects Plus** (Cincinnati, OH), a 15-person firm, says that when something goes wrong on a project, the client’s trust level with you drops immediately. However, if you are quick to respond and do it without any question about “what’s in it for me?” (i.e., an extra services agreement), his theory is that your stock price soars and you end up in a place that may actually have a higher trust level than if everything had gone smoothly.

“Think about the Tylenol incident 25-plus years ago,” Koehler says. “Someone opened one or two bottles in a store and added a toxic substance, which was later ingested by one or two individuals. Tylenol immediately pulled all of their products until they figured out what happened. This discovery process led to the sealed tops under the caps. And when Tylenol returned on the scene, customer loyalty had improved because they knew it was once again safe to purchase their brand.”

The same can be said for selling architectural or engineering services. Architects Plus believes that building the highest possible trust level with clients is one of the most important things the firm can do.

“Rather than trying to figure out who’s at fault, focus on analyzing the problem and developing the best solution options for the client/owner.”

“We do whatever it takes to ‘bank’ emotional trust so that in the event something goes south on a project, we have the ability to dip into that ‘bank account’ and make a withdrawal,” Koehler says.

Koehler illustrates with a real-life scenario.

“Five years ago we landed the largest project our firm had ever won: a \$24,000,000 senior living facility. The one anomaly about this project was that their building committee was made up of one person: the CEO. This was a little strange, but we accepted it because he was also accompanied by an owner’s representative who we would all know and recognize,” he says.

Architects Plus worked for months on the project and had meetings along the way with just the owner’s representative and CEO. The CEO even signed off on the drawings at the various stages of the project as it proceeded.

“We were on time and on budget and within sight of the finish line just weeks before completion, when the CEO called one day to inform us that he had just now taken the time to ‘really delve into the drawings’. He said that we had not listened to him and that we needed to make major changes to the design concept. We were floored by this news,” Koehler admits.

So, what did Architects Plus do? They bit their tongues and agreed to make the changes. They doubled the workforce to get the project completed as close to the original schedule as possible. While they were making the requested changes, they had a conversation with the CEO and the representative to discuss fees.

See RELATIONSHIPS, page 4

TALK TO US

Do you have an interesting story to tell? Is your company doing things differently and getting results? Let us know. We’d love to contact you and feature you in an upcoming case study. If interested, please email LSullivan@zweigwhite.com.



RESOURCES

ENGINEERING FIRM SALARY SURVEYS The 2015 Engineering Firm Salary Surveys are the most up-to-date and comprehensive compensation survey reports for engineering firms operating in each region of the U.S. Based on data from a broad sampling of engineering firms in the region reporting salaries for all positions, these reports are the new standard for firm leaders and human resources directors looking to benchmark their staff's compensation against their peers.

The 2015 Engineering Firm Salary Surveys will help you:

- Compare your staff's salaries to those in firms just like your own
- Find out what the normal salary range is for every type and level of position in engineering firms
- See how salaries change as firms grow in size and help you prepare for your own firm's future
- Evaluate salaries on a state-by-state and regional basis
- If you have offices in more than one state, see where employees are earning the most – and the least
- See how salaries have changed over the years with trend data

Choose from these regional editions:

- Northeast & South Atlantic edition
- Central (north & south) edition
- Mountain & Pacific edition

Each regional survey includes data for a wide range of technical staff – from civil, structural, electrical, mechanical, geotechnical, environmental, and traffic/transportation engineers, to architects, landscape architects, planners, construction managers, and land surveyors. Technical staff data are broken into five levels – entry-level, project

engineer, project manager, department head, and principal. The report also shows salaries for management positions – such as presidents, CEOs, CFOs, branch managers, and others – as well as IT, marketing, and administrative staff. Trend data is included so you can see how salaries for every type of position has changed over the years.

For more information or to buy a copy, call 800-466-6275 or log on to <https://zweiggroup.com/p-2213-salary-surveys-of-engineering-firms-2015>.

OPERATING EXPENSES SURVEY Are you overlooking obvious ways to be more profitable? It's always important for firm leaders and financial managers to keep overhead costs in check, and every design and environmental firm has costs that can be cut in one area or another.

Where does the fat reside in your firm? Where can you minimize spending to maximize profits? Get the answers to these questions and many more with Zweig Group's 2014-2015 Operating Expenses Survey of Architecture, Engineering, Planning & Environmental Consulting Firms.

Newly updated for 2015, this survey has the latest, most detailed statistics available on operating expenses for firms just like yours. Get data on everything from how much the average firm spends on professional liability insurance to how much it spends on hardware and software.

We packed this report with tables, and broke the data out by firm type, region of headquarters, staff size, growth rate, and client base so you can make apples-to-apples comparisons between the survey statistics and your own firm. We also included trend data so you can compare your firm's spending history to the industry norm.

For more information or to buy a copy, call 800-466-6275 or log on to <https://zweiggroup.com/p-2217-operating-expenses-survey-2014-2015>.

RELATIONSHIPS, from page 3

“We offered to split the cost of the rework on the drawing package,” Koehler says. “From an accounting standpoint, we barely broke even on the project, but from an opportunity cost we made the right call. Our actions spoke louder than words and we have been awarded five projects with this same client since this initial debacle. The trust level is higher than if the first project had been completed without a hitch and we believe that we have this client's work for the foreseeable future.”

DON'T PLAY THE BLAME GAME. Mark Lauriello, president, **RETTEW** (Lancaster, PA), a 375-person engineering consulting firm, says that if a problem occurs, they don't point fingers.

“Rather than trying to figure out who's at fault, focus on analyzing the problem and developing the best solution options for the client/owner,” he says. “Once a solution is agreed upon and the project is back on track, then areas of

responsibility can be sorted out. If the initial focus is on assigning blame, tension rises and the problem becomes worse. Always do the right thing, be honest in every way, and accept all appropriate responsibility. But don't accept responsibility until all facts are gathered and analyzed.”

FIX WITH FOUR. Mark Hyatt, a business consultant and author, advises:

- 1) Keep your word
- 2) Tell the truth
- 3) Be transparent
- 4) Give without any strings attached

“Trust can often be rebuilt. Granted, in some situations, it can take years. It takes doing the right things over a long period of time. But in most cases, it won't take that long. Relationships can be turned around quickly if you own the problem,” he says. ▀

BEST FIRM

Choice One sets the bar high

Award-winning firm involves everyone in decisions and pushes them to fulfill their potential.



The team at
2014 Best Firm
To Work For
Choice One
Engineering.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

Providing a fulfilling life for a lifetime (by making lives better with an enjoyable experience) is the mission of **Choice One Engineering Corporation** (Sidney, OH), a 31-person civil engineering firm that made no. 3 on Zweig Group's 2014 Best Firms To Work For ranking. Sounds pretty sweet, and employees think it does too.

Tony Schroeder, Tom Coverstone, Jeff Puthoff, Sharon Maurice, and Brian Barhorst founded Choice One in 1994 for three reasons: 1) provide a stable place to work; 2) enjoy work; and 3) provide responsibility and opportunity to employees.

EVERYONE HAS A VOICE. Choice One works hard to ensure that everyone feels that their input, opinions, and needs are taken seriously, because they are. So, whether they are deciding between pizza or wings for lunch or working on the company's three-year strategic plan, everyone is expected to participate.

This person-centric approach is taken one step farther when Choice One asks employees, from one month of service to 20 years of service, to produce meaningful work, find a sense of accomplishment, and know that they make an enormous impact on the company and in the communities it serves. For example, the firm entrusts young engineers, just a few years out of college, with project manager roles because it provides experience, gives them a chance to learn, and gives them a clear impact on the company.

Additionally, much of Choice One's business is de-

veloped with public/municipal clients. While the firm has many fantastic clients, it wants to provide opportunity and success, when possible, to current and future Choice One-ians too. To do this, Choice One sends its young engineers, fresh out of college, to council meetings of potential and current clients. They feel this demonstrates to public jurisdictions their interest and passion for providing good service to as many communities as possible. It also empowers these young engineers to take responsibility in business development efforts.

As Choice One has grown, it has shifted more and more internal "running the business" responsibility, away from just a handful of leaders to every person in the company. This makes employees accountable, decisions can be made faster, and every person makes an impact on the company's success. Because of this approach, they now have numerous "superintendents" of important Choice One programs, such as The COLA (Choice One Learning Academy) and PIMP (Plan Improvement Process). These programs, and others, are headed by an employee who is passionate about these topics, which ignites ownership of the program.

"They simply let me do my job. They believe in empowering us to take ownership of our projects and let us manage the project and deal with the client as needed to get the design done. This has allowed me to grow and develop as an engineer and as a person."

SILENT RECRUITING. Mitch Thobe, a transportation engineer, has been with the company for four years. For the past two years, he has been tasked with recruiting college co-ops as well as helping leadership to recruit, interview, and hire new employees.

"As a result of the improving economy, the ability for a company to attract 'A' players is becoming progressively more challenging due to the ever-growing competition of more and more companies looking to hire interns and full-time staff. When a job

See CHOICE ONE, page 12

TALK TO US

Do you have an interesting story to tell? Is your company doing things differently and getting results? Let us know. We'd love to contact you and feature you in an upcoming case study. If interested, please email LSullivan@zweigwhite.com.



Leaders and succession

A new generation is taking the reins. Learn how to identify, nurture and place them atop the food chain.



Gerry Salontai

GUEST SPEAKER

Now that things are generally on the upswing in our industry, we have another generation ready to move on – those who patiently stayed on only because of the economic challenges of a few years ago. This delay in previously planned “retirement” is most often linked to the desire to get ones’ equity out at a price that’s more acceptable to the retiree. While timing is important for leaders to ensure there is enough investment equity (they will liquidate from the company to retire comfortably), successful organizations make leadership transition a continuous, orderly process that extends deep into an organization’s ranks.

Whether companies managed well or struggled through the recession, many don’t place a high enough emphasis on this leadership topic. For example, a recent study suggests that the lack of CEO candidates is one of the very top concerns in the boardroom of companies across all industries over the next five years. Creating a leadership succession plan that finds, develops and keeps leaders for the time when they are needed to assume more responsible roles within at least the top three or 4 levels (the CEO position and positions two to 3 levels below) of the company is the goal. This is much easier said than done and the devil is in the details. The key to success is the investment of time, effort, and constant vigilance.

The plan’s framework doesn’t have to be a complicated to be successful or be so rigidly formal it can’t be done in even very small companies. Leadership development can be scaled for the size of a company – accomplished through simple programs and activities. Leaders are best developed by simply participating in the learning and sharing experience of your business. Informal mentoring, coaching, special company projects/ assignments, providing promotional opportunities and formal education all provide an opportunity to develop leaders.

An important first step that is often overlooked is the assessment of the leadership style within your company. Leadership studies argue that the best type of leadership is determined by situational variables in an organization – which can vary between types of businesses, companies in the same business and within your own company over time. Identifying the leadership style that best fits a company includes the assessment of the type and complexity of your business and the broad

Finding leaders who can assume top positions in a company seems to sometimes be an elusive, yet important next step. One must always be on the ‘prowl’ for potential leaders that work for you now and those you could attract to your company and add strength to the ‘bench.’

culture there. The assessment of the best style(s) that fit your company increases the chance you will find and develop the best candidates to lead.

Finding leaders who can assume top positions in a company seems to sometimes be an elusive, yet important next step. One must always be on the “prowl” for potential leaders that work for you now and those you could attract to your company and add strength to the “bench.” The ability to influence others, communicate well, deliver results, have a positive attitude and resilience, vision, integrity and a team player are just some of the traits to look for. You can usually spot them in action during everyday activities. They tend to be good with clients, their peers and subordinates. Leaders participate well, ask good questions and strive to make constructive contributions during the conduct of meetings. And leaders almost

See GERRY SALONTAI, page 12

RIGHT NOW

A season for giving thanks

While the holidays are still considered the best time to be appreciative, firms are finding creative ways for expressing gratitude year-round.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent



Mark Forster,
Marketing
Director, Dudek.

Traditionally, the holidays are a time for giving and expressing thanks. But, has the whole thing become too cliché? We asked a few firms to talk about how and when they prefer to thank their clients and it seems that while the holidays still rank high, there are other opportunities to thank clients too.

LEAVING IT THE PMS. Mark Forster, marketing director, **Dudek** (Encinitas, CA), a 300-person environmental consulting firm, says that the company works to express appreciation regularly to clients who select Dudek to work with them. The holiday season is a natural time to reflect on the year and to let clients know how important they are.



Adria Larson,
HR Generalist,
Nova Consulting
Group, Inc.

“Clients who like boxes of chocolates still get those, but we’ve also had project managers get creative. For example, our urban forestry practice leader gave out high-quality wood-carved pens to his clients.”

“Six years ago, we dropped having the marketing department order a standard, firm-wide gift in favor of letting project managers determine the best way to express their appreciation to clients,” Forster says. “Clients who like boxes of chocolates still get those, but we’ve also had project managers get creative. For example, our urban forestry practice leader gave out high-quality wood-carved pens to his clients.”

More and more project managers are also sending out e-greeting cards rather than a printed holiday card.

“With the e-card, it seems that more people tend to add a personal message, rather than simply signing their name on a printed card,” he says.

STICKING WITH THE CLASSICS. **EMCS, Inc.** (Milwaukee, WI), a 50-person, multidiscipline, civil engineering firm, sends out candy-filled tins along with a holiday card, says Corinne Evans, business manager.

Adria Larson, HR generalist, **Nova Consulting Group, Inc.** (Minneapolis, MN), a 110-person environmental and engineering services firm, says that the company also likes to give clients something during the holiday season.

See GIVING THANKS, page 10

6 TIPS FOR SAYING THANKS

If you’re looking for a few more ways to thank your clients year-round, try implementing some of these ideas. The cost is minimal, but the return is likely much greater.

- 1. Social media shout outs.** Did a client recently complete a new building? Did they get an industry award? Share the news on your social media sites and encourage clients to do the same. Sharing is caring.
- 2. Designate a day.** Consider hosting a client appreciation day. If you have a physical location, you could host a lunch or you could send out a little swag or gift card for no reason at all.
- 3. Acknowledge life events.** If you know that a client is getting married or having a baby, send an acknowledgement – even if it is a simple card. Your gesture will not be forgotten.
- 4. Share information.** E-books, reports, workbooks, videos and other types of information products can make great gifts. For example, compile a list of useful tips that your clients will appreciate and either deliver it via email in a PDF document or publish it in booklet format to mail or hand out.
- 5. Referral rewards.** The highest compliment you can receive is a referral to your business. This gesture deserves recognition in the form of a thank you note, or small gift card. Always acknowledge when a client sends business your way.
- 6. Pick up the phone.** A good old-fashioned phone call is still well received. Something as simple as calling a client after a project is completed to say thank you can go a long way.



WHAT'S WORKING

The holidays are a great time for fun and creative marketing pieces. Taking home second place in Zweig Group's 2014 Marketing Excellence Awards in the Online Marketing Category, **Clark Patterson Lee** (Rochester, NY), a 220-person multidisciplinary firm, combined the traditions of making gingerbread houses and sending holiday cards into a sweet marketing piece that spread holiday cheer inside and outside the company.

A GINGERBREAD VIDEO PROJECT



The process of creating the card and gingerbread structure remained collaborative: the e-card was created and executed entirely by internal staff, who expressed pride and joy in the project. Architects, engineers, and interior designers used their talents to design, plan and execute the structure constructed solely from edible food materials.

The firm began the process with a brainstorming session three months before the targeted send date of an e-card on Dec. 20. The firm decided to make a video of the process of creating a gingerbread structure, and to make things even more A/E industry-themed, the process of creating the ginger structure was made to mirror the steps taken in responding to a request for proposals. The video emphasized the creative process, which captured all the steps from receiving RFP through completion and ribbon-cutting.

Project teams and individuals were encouraged to submit a proposal. A committee selected the winning design, choosing to incorporate elements from all submittals.

The team selected a digital platform to distribute the video e-card due to cost and flexibility. The recording captured the design process in real-life, resulting in a time-lapse video set to music, resulting in a fascinating and engaging visual.

The process of creating the card and gingerbread structure remained collaborative: the e-card was created and executed entirely by internal staff, who expressed pride and joy in the project. Architects, engineers, and interior designers used their talents to design, plan and execute the structure constructed solely from edible food materials. The firm produced an outtakes video from the bloopers as a bonus feature to encourage further engagement.

The e-card was posted on YouTube, shared on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, and linked back to the firm's website as a part of an inbound marketing campaign.

Clark Patterson Lee set a few simple goals for the marketing piece: showcase their creativity to clients and friends in a way that evokes the holiday spirit, promote firm culture by working collaboratively on a project that generates firm-wide excitement, and increase traffic to the website and increase name and brand awareness among a broader audience.

The target audience was broad and included over 1,800 friends, colleagues and clients along the eastern seaboard. The video was also embedded on the firm's website, with a link emailed to contacts. Traffic was driven to the website to increase SEO.

Results

The firm set a modest budget of \$1,500, though the actual cost ended up being even less in accountable hours of time from marketing staff and cost of food supplies. Non-marketing staff volunteered time to build the ginger structure. The firm used camera, equipment and computer programs they already owned.

The 1,800-contact send-list generated 4,168 page views, 1,725 unique views, and had only a 0.6 percent bounce rate. The video garnered 1,508 views on YouTube and was shared by many recipients, with countless positive comments: "An extended member of the CPL family, in southern N.H. loved this! The ribbon cutting and the gingerbread man upside down in the 'pond' were innovative touches" – Lyndy Burnham. "The BEST holiday card of the year!" – Timothy J. DeBuse, national corrections market leader, HEERY DESIGN.

The marketing piece also won the Smartegies A/E/C Full-Service Marketing Agency Holiday Card Contest in Atlanta and placed in the SMPS 2014 Marketing Communication Awards.

WHAT'S WORKING

OPEN THE DOORS!



WHAT'S WORKING FOR YOU?

Want to show off your outstanding marketing campaign? Contact Christina Zweig, contributing editor, at christinaz@zweiggroup.com and we will consider featuring you in this space.

SmithGroup JJR won third place in the Special Event Marketing category of the 2014 Marketing Excellence Awards with their client open house titled "A View Worth Celebrating."

The 800-person integrated architecture/engineering firm recently relocated to a brand new office in Washington, D.C. The firm wanted to welcome clients, industry partners and peers to celebrate the new space, which had incredible views of the National Mall and monuments.

The initial brainstorming session for the event included the marketing manager, office director, workplace studio leader and lead designer.

They wanted to have an event that would draw in the industry and stand apart from others, and also wanted to make sure that the timing was such that this event could turn into an annual gathering. An evening networking event seemed most appropriate, so the firm decided on an open house from 5 to 8 p.m. An additional draw to the event was the serendipitous co-timing with the annual Washington, D.C. cherry blossom festival. SmithGroupJJR also decided to make a donation in each attendee's name to an interior design scholarship at the neighboring Corcoran college of Art + Design.

The initial guest list included more than 1,500 clients, consultants, competitors, and representatives from local industry organizations. In addition to e-invites, the marketing manager extended personal invitations to local media contacts, and the company's staff followed up with clients via personal emails or phone calls.

The "A View Worth Celebrating" event aimed to encourage networking and relationship-building while showcasing the new office environment. SmithGroupJJR welcomed clients and industry partners into the new space to solidify existing relationships as well as form new ones.

Although the office includes the firm's six market sectors, the event aimed to bridge gaps between attendees and to be a fun, industry event – void of any 'hard' marketing or business development tactics. There was no formal presentation or speeches prepared for the evening. Guests were encouraged to mingle as they enjoyed cocktails and

The 'A View Worth Celebrating' event aimed to encourage networking and relationship-building while showcasing the new office environment. SmithGroupJJR welcomed clients and industry partners into the new space to solidify existing relationships as well as form new ones.

light fare.

After having the opportunity to tour the main office spaces, guests were encouraged to make their way to the rooftop terrace – where they could network and take in breathtaking views of the skyline. Guests networked for hours enjoying signature cocktails, delicious Asian-fusion food, and each guest received a copy of the firm's new monograph, entitled "Inspiring Places," as a thank you for attending. The cloth-bound hardcover books were configured into an artful arrangement flanked by custom signage near the exit.

Results

The initial attendee goal was 200, but over 300 people showed up. The firm donated \$16 per attendee to the interior design scholarship. Media coverage for the event paid off with a feature in *Bisnow*, a prominent D.C. real-estate e-publication with more than 500,000 subscribers.

The 800-person integrated architecture/engineering firm recently relocated to a brand new office in Washington, D.C. The firm wanted to welcome clients, industry partners and peers to celebrate the new space, which had incredible views of the National Mall and monuments.



AWARD WINNERS

TPD RANKED AS BEST PLACE TO WORK The Best Companies Group's annual "Best Places To Work in PA" competition has ranked **Traffic Planning and Design, Inc.** (Pottstown, PA) as the #29 Best Place to Work in PA (small/medium employers group). This the six-employee transportation design firm's 9th year on the list.

Through a combination of an employer and employee survey, workplaces are assessed to determine strengths and opportunities. TPD was ranked among 100 total employers providing services across the board including pharmaceutical, accounting, marketing consulting, financial services and much more. TPD was one of only three firms providing civil engineering services related to transportation infrastructure.

ON THE MOVE

TLC NAMES NEW CEO **TLC Engineering for Architecture Inc.**'s board of directors announced that **Michael Sheerin** has been named to succeed **Debra Lupton** as CEO of the firm. Sheerin, currently serving as director of Healthcare Engineering, was selected by the board following an extensive search of internal and external candidates. Sheerin will assume the role early this New Year with an orderly transition until Lupton's retirement on May 1.

TLC is an Orlando, Fla.-based engineering and energy services firm with offices throughout the South.

"While healthcare has been TLC's biggest single market, we have a diverse range of projects in education, offices, transportation, sports, hospitality, technology consulting, energy services and wonderful clients that trust and seek our expertise. And with almost 300 LEED-certified projects, our leadership in sustainable design is unsurpassed. Our engineers do amazing, high profile work throughout the country and beyond, but our greatest successes are the relationships we build," Sheerin said. "We are a great firm and I am excited to help guide us into our 60th year... and many more." Sheerin graduated from The City College of New York with a Bachelor of Engineering in Mechanical Engineering and had design and contracting experience in New York City and Washington D.C. before joining TLC in 1995.

"Michael brings 20 years of tenure and significant leadership

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"Usually it's a small and useful tangible item with our logo or a treat to share with the office," she says. "We have also sent out e-cards and made donations to charities on our client's behalf. It's a nice way to remind our clients that we care and want to share our good fortune."

YEAR-ROUND THANKS. At **Cannon Moss Brygger Architects** (Sioux City, IA), a 45-person firm, Kristi Ploen, marketing director, says that while a few key/current clients receive a gift basket around the holidays that typically showcases products or goodies from a local company, they do most of their thanking throughout the year.

"It's important to stay in the minds of clients year-round and we make sure that they know how much we appreciate them year-round by sending out personal and handwritten notes," she says.

GeoConcepts Engineering, Inc. (Ashburn, VA), a 63-per-

DOUBLE AWARD FOX Architects, LLC (Washington, DC), a architecture, interior design, and graphic design firm, won two awards Nov. 19 at the NAIOP Northern Virginia's Chapter's 2014 "Focus on Excellence" Awards. FOX Architects was recognized for their Transaction Network Services and Global Impact projects. These two awards wrap up a highly successful awards season for FOX that includes five NAIOP MD/DC awards in October, and the IIDA MAC Pinnacle Award in April.

"We are delighted with the outcome of this year's NAIOP Northern Virginia Awards," said Jim Allegro, partner. "Our firm is honored see our clients' projects recognized by our industry peers. We thank our extended team members for their contribution and we look forward to designing more great projects with our clients in the years ahead."

experience with TLC. He has been intimately involved in the evolution of the firm and contributing to robust growth and profitability. He is a strategic thinker and relationship builder focused on executing our vision to be creators of high performance buildings as trusted engineering advisors," Lupton said. "I'm delighted that he's accepted the challenge and will enjoy working with him to transition the CEO role and plan TLC's future."

In addition to overseeing TLC's healthcare practice firm-wide and his involvement on national healthcare standards such as ASHRAE Standard 170 Healthcare Ventilation, Sheerin has held key roles in the design of many award-winning projects, including the Ft. Benning Martin Army Community Hospital, Nemours Children's Hospital in Lake Nona, numerous Florida Hospital projects and more. He chairs the ASHRAE SPC 189.3P Design, Construction & Operations of Sustainable, High Performance Healthcare Facilities, is vice-chair of ASHRAE 170 Ventilation of Health Care Facilities and chairs the NFPA 99 Revision Committee, Mechanical Sub-Committee, and is a member of USGBC and the Florida Healthcare Engineering Association.

Robert Danner, with more than 30 years of experience at TLC designing and managing healthcare projects, will assume management of TLC's Healthcare Operations Group as Sheerin transitions into the CEO role.

"It's important to stay in the minds of clients year-round and we make sure that they know how much we appreciate them year-round by sending out personal and handwritten notes."

son geotechnical firm, also believes in year-round thanks. Amanda Sanderson, director of business development, says that they do their best to thank clients in many ways throughout the year, but they especially focus on showing their appreciation during the holiday season.

"Every year we send out gifts with a personal note and make every effort to hand deliver them if the client is local," she says. "We also send out an email to our clients thanking them for their business and wishing them a happy holiday season. The money we save from what would have been spent on holiday cards is donated to a local charity." ▀

'Tis the season for giving

Marketing is the area of your business intended for giving to others.



Chad Clinehens

BRAND BUILDING

I believe the comment brought up a very good point that we can all learn from – marketing and business development is a business of giving. It requires a great deal of faith that, by giving to others, you will eventually get something in return. There are some things that require a completely different set of rules and measures for accountability. For this firm, adding a planning group would add value to their clients; something to set them apart from their other general engineering competitors in the area. Here are tips for taking a leap of faith in marketing and business development without completely losing control of those precious marketing and BD dollars:

- 1) For new areas of business, whether developing expertise or a new geographic area, set realistic expectations for revenues and costs based on specific information and research you gather.** At the same time, do not buy into commonly circulated myths – i.e. “all new offices take three years to become profitable.” There are many situations when, if executed right, you can become profitable almost right way. There are other situations where it may take five years to become profitable. Keep your expectations (and faith) based on what you know related to the specific investments you are making. Do lots of research!
- 2) Be willing to give a lot to get a little.** This ties in with the season. Marketing and BD is all about offering information and services to current and potential clients in order to earn that very important quality – trust. Anywhere you can offer to help a client upfront before a project opportunity exists is a tremendous way to build trust and loyalty. Offering to help write the RFQ, scope the project and provide cost estimates, provide ideas for saving money or even suggesting alternate projects are just some of the ways you can offer your expertise and advance

I was on-site with a client recently and we were discussing a business development strategy for their new planning group. One of the senior leaders made a key observation that I think is important to share. He said: “We need to make sure we do not apply our traditional utilization targets to this group.” You may not think that comment is profound, but too many firms do try to start a new group to add value for their clients and then do not really give the group the flexibility and resources to adequately succeed. Firms find it difficult to not apply their refined management systems to all groups in order to keep an eye on them.

Any decision of giving or investment should be guided by a strong business plan. As we close out an outstanding year of recovery for our industry, every firm should be taking a hard look at its strategic plans. Much has changed and lots of opportunity exists at this time.

your chances of becoming a preferred provider in the future. Give to others!

3) Be ROI minded. Return on investment is, at the end of the day, what marketing and BD is all about. This concept is applicable even in this season of giving. We give to others in order to provide them with a benefit now or in the future. And giving to others always comes back to the giver in a positive way. A/E firms certainly must manage utilization carefully and not invest wildly in marketing and BD without any accountability or strategy. However, firms must also realize that new ventures need different rules and mechanisms for accountability. Investing in something where returns may not be realized for years down the road can be hard for our utilization-obsessed industry to embrace. Consider all of your marketing expenditures and where to best spend those dollars and realize that giving something of real value to clients, like your time, is at the top of the effective list. Many firms waste tens of thousand of dollars on worthless marketing giveaways like pens, koozies and other junk that does not make near the impact that

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CHOICE ONE, from page 5

seeker sees Choice One Engineering as being one of the top three Civil Engineering firms to work for in the nation, it instantly catches their interest without us even needing to say a word to them.”

EMPOWERMENT GOES A LONG WAY. Nick Sanders, a site design engineer, has been with Choice One for almost 10 years. He loves that everyone is able to have fun and joke around, while still maintaining a professional and efficient workplace. He also appreciates that the company truly supports a family-work lifestyle balance.

“While we all know that getting projects designed on time is important, Choice One gives me the flexibility to attend to family matters as needed and maintain a reasonable work week in terms of hours worked,” Sanders says. “They simply let me do my job. They believe in empowering us to take ownership of our projects and let us manage the project and deal with the client as needed to get the design done. This has allowed me to grow and develop as an engineer and as a person.”

YOUNG WOMAN’S JOURNEY EXPLAINS IT ALL. The commitment of Choice One’s employees and senior level management’s drive to create their culture can be told through one young woman’s journey.

When Choice One was founded, current client relations/funding specialist Kaye Borchers, was in junior high. As a 12-year-old kid, Kaye didn’t understand strategic plans,

GERRY SALONTAI, from page 6

always accomplish the goals or tasks you give them and have a voracious appetite to take on more.

Once you identify those who have top leadership potential, their readiness and, more importantly, the learning “gaps” that need to be filled need to be measured. Essentially, what qualities, experience, skills will they need to be successful? The best approach is to look at each candidate in a of the future context – using the “what got you here may not get you there” philosophy. A development program that can be administered very simply through the annual goal setting and review process should be constructed at the highest level of the company to monitor and track progress of all candidates in the company.

Many make it part of the annual business planning process. No matter the approach, the key is to have “candid” dialogue of not only dreams and aspirations but also those areas of improvement needed in the candidate’s leadership journey. And above all, and after all efforts are made for development, if there are serious flaws that will not allow a candidate to be successful, they should be told as much.

Keeping those with leadership potential, given the investment the company has made, is a high priority. A company needs to create an environment for leaders to continue to grow and prosper; continually challenge them with new and varied assignments while making sure there is reward system in place to recognize their value. It’s also important to bring them along in selected decision-making

business development, or overhead percentage, but she knew several people who worked at Choice One and was interested in the company. What she saw was exciting and mystifying, and maybe a little bit magical. Based on television shows she had seen, Choice One Engineering was a place that challenged her 12-year-old perception of a workplace, as these were employees who didn’t hate their jobs. Instead, these people worked hard for and loved the company with all their hearts.

As the years went by, through her personal relationships with employees, Kaye observed the growth of the company, both in size and in notable reputation. While in high school and college, several of Kaye’s classmates ended up working at Choice One. They talked of their workplace satisfaction.

While Kaye had no desire to become an engineer or surveyor, she knew where she wanted to go with her life. She wanted to become a Choice One employee. Kaye shamelessly pestered her contacts at Choice One for years, asking when she could start working there, and they teased her back telling her, “As soon as you get your engineering degree.” However, in 2005, when an administrative assistant position opened up, Kaye joined the team. The rest, as they say, is history. According to Kaye, working for Choice One has exceeded every expectation beyond the “magic” she saw as a kid.

The moral of the story is that Choice One can only hope that if people like Kaye (specifically because she’s not an engineer) seek out and petition to work for Choice One, then maybe they are doing something right. ▀

forums you may have in the company. Simply put, engaging candidates constantly in the business while rewarding them for their accomplishments will keep them loyal and tied to the company. ▀

This article is an update on at topic dissected by the author a year-and-a-half ago. It is not meant to be a comprehensive outline of a program for finding, developing and keeping leaders. Rather it’s written to inspire those reading this to get their programs back on track or focus current efforts with greater intensity.

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an hour of your time does. Focus on activities and investments where you have the greatest chance of return. Be ROI minded!

Any decision of giving or investment should be guided by a strong business plan. As we close out an outstanding year of recovery for our industry, every firm should be taking a hard look at its strategic plans. Much has changed and lots of opportunity exists at this time. The firm that spends time developing a thoughtful plan for the future will be the one that outperforms its peers. Decide what you want to be and who you want to be with you and start giving to them in a smart and deliberate way. ▀

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