

## Branding a design firm

Mark Zweig explains the benefits of establishing your brand and how to get there.

You cannot change the thinking of the whole world. But you can influence a smaller group of people and get them to understand that you understand clients like them.



Mark Zweig

EDITORIAL

**B**randing. When you hear the term, most people think of Procter and Gamble or Coca-Cola. Sure, there are many examples of brands in consumer products. We all know these brands. They are among the top sellers in their respective product categories. Many are also higher-priced relative to their peers. Unfortunately, many A/E/P firm principals don't realize that they, too, can be brands, just like consumer products can be.

If you establish yourself as a top brand in any market you serve, you will find:

- 1) Selling is easier.** Clients come to you versus you chasing them. This, of course, makes everything better/easier for you.
- 2) Profits are higher.** You are being hired not just for what you do but instead for who you are. You will get better fees.
- 3) You will weather the downturns better.** Other firms may fall out during market contractions but those most connected to the sector will get whatever work is there.

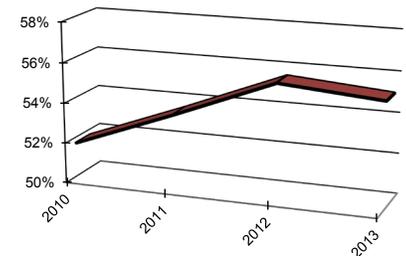
How can you become a brand? It won't happen from wishful thinking – that's for sure! Here are some thoughts:

- 4) Know who you are trying to sell to.** You cannot change the thinking of the

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## TRENDLINES

### Low charge



Chargeability – which indicates the percentage of total labor costs that are chargeable against billable projects – decreased slightly this year to 55.2 percent from 55.6 percent last year, according to ZweigWhite's 2013 Financial Performance Survey of Environmental Consulting Firms. Chargeability had seen a steady incline in previous years: The median chargeability rate increased from 51.7 percent in 2010 to 53.6 percent in 2011, and then to 55.6 percent in 2012.

– Margot Suydam, Survey Manager

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## A/E BUSINESS NEWS

**ABI CONTINUES TO GROW:** The Architecture Billings Index showed more acceleration in the growth of design activity nationally in August.

The American Institute of Architects reported the August ABI score was 53.8, up from a mark of 52.7 in July.

This score reflects an increase in demand for design services (any score above 50 indicates an increase in billings).

The new projects inquiry index was 63, down from the reading of 66.4 the previous month.

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.

"As business conditions at architecture firms have improved eleven out of the past 12 months, it is fair to say that the design professions are in a recovery mode," said Kermit Baker, AIA chief economist. "This upturn signals an impending turnaround in nonresidential construction activity, but a key component to maintaining this momentum is the ability of businesses to obtain financing for real estate projects, and for a resolution to the federal government budget and debt ceiling impasse."

Key August ABI highlights:

- Regional averages: West (54.8), Northeast (54.4), Midwest (52.8), South (51.9)
- Sector index breakdown: mixed practice (60.1), commercial/industrial (54.8), multi-family residential (52.1), institutional (50.8)
- Project inquiries index: 63

**2014 INDUSTRY FORECAST:** McGraw Hill Construction will present its annual forum for construction and economic leaders,

the Outlook Executive Conference.

The event features the release of 2014's Dodge Outlook Report, a mainstay in construction industry forecasting and business planning.

Scheduled speakers include Beth Ann Bovino, chief U.S. economist, Standard & Poor's, presenting a global economic outlook; Harvey Bernstein, vice president, Industry Insights & Alliances, McGraw Hill Construction, discussing construction industry trends and presenting the results of Engineering News-Record's Q3 Construction Industry Confidence Index survey; Scott Kolbrenner, managing director, Head of Engineering & Construction, Houlihan Lokey, moderating a panel on Real Estate Investment for Construction with James Dinegar, president and CEO, Greater Washington Board of Trade; Daniel McQuade, chief executive, Tishman Construction, an AECOM Company, and Dorothy Robyn, commissioner, Public Buildings Service, U.S. general Services Administration; Roger Flanagan, professor/chairman, Steering Committee for International Affairs, School of Construction Management & Engineering, University of Reading, presenting the luncheon keynote address; Robert Murray, vice president, Economic Affairs, McGraw Hill Construction, unveiling the 2014 Dodge Construction Outlook report.

The conference is Oct. 24 and 25 in Washington, D.C. More information at <http://Outlook2014DC.com>.

**ACEC ELECTS PRESIDENT:** American Society of Civil Engineers members have elected Robert Stevens as the society's new president-elect.

The first ASCE technical region director to be elected to this position, Stevens joined ASCE in 1961 as a member of the student chapter

at the University of Akron.

Throughout his distinguished career, he has served on 38 ASCE and Transportation and Development Institute committees.

Stevens is also a member of the governing boards of Engineers Without Borders-USA, and the American Road and Transportation Builders Association.

He is retired but still works part-time as an executive vice president with ARCADIS-US in Fort Worth, Texas.

"I am thrilled to have this opportunity to be the president-elect of ASCE," Stevens said upon being elected. "As we look ahead, one of the really important things is to help our members become more aware of the things ASCE has available to them and the ways that they can participate in the society to help advance the profession and themselves.

"The profession has changed so much from when I first began. While computers are now doing a lot of the calculations and analysis in our profession, we still need innovation and more emphasis on education and technology in engineering. This will help us provide a higher quality of life for people all around the world," Stevens said.

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whole world. But you can influence a smaller group of people and get them to understand that you understand clients like them.

**5) Pick a simple and clear logo and colors that are appropriate for your market sector.** Use them everywhere on every single thing – with no exceptions.

**6) What are the values, virtues and attributes of your brand?** Everything about the client experience has to be consistent with that. Your website and all graphics need to be done in such a way that it reflects your branding. Ditto for company cars, job site signage,

your website, etc. Even your people need to reflect the image of your brand.

Of course, there are already some great brands in our business. **T.Y. Lin** and **HNTB** for big bridges, **CH2M-Hill** for treatment plants, **HOK** for corporate offices, **Gensler** for retail, and **WATG** for resort hotels, among others. These companies enjoy a steady stream of project leads for good projects and continue to grow. Who do you want to be like? Are you doing all you should be doing to build and sustain the kind of brand you want? You should be! 

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## THE ZWEIG LETTER

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## STRATEGY

# Can you protect from market oscillations?

Anticipation of market and economic trends, as well as diversification, are part of the answer.

By LIISA SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

Is it possible to build a firm that is impervious to market oscillations? Ultimately, the answer is no. But, a little foresight and planning can go a long way.

*“A/E firms that neglect planning and implementing growth strategies will, at best, merely survive.”*

David Ross, senior vice president, **SCS Engineers** (Reston, VA), a 670-person environmental engineering consulting and contracting firm, says that strictly speaking, no business can expect to be “impervious to market oscillations” in today’s complex economy.

The performance of each business venture is subject to a range of largely unpredictable and interdependent influences, such as the successes and failures of others businesses, government policies and regulations, consumer attitudes, investor decisions, technology evolution and natural disasters.

“A/E firms most likely will thrive if their leaders are savvy (and/or lucky) enough to accurately forecast market trends, build capacity to meet expected client demands, and establish a reputation for reliability and service,” Ross says. “A/E firms that neglect planning and implementing growth strategies will, at best, merely survive.”

**AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.** Virtually all types of projects supported by A/E firms are necessary to maintain



David Ross,  
Senior VP,  
SCS Engineers.

and improve key elements of our society.

For instance, it’s impossible to imagine life in the U.S. without adequate, if not superior, housing, schools, hospitals, harbors, airports, energy plants and supporting infrastructure (e.g., roads, railroads, water supply, wastewater treatment and solid waste management systems).

“That said, some of us are experiencing the ill-effects of long-overdue infrastructure

maintenance and/or over-capacity facilities, contributing to a pent-up demand for improvements, probably in the not-too-distant future,” Ross says. “Over the long run, I doubt that any one of these market areas is more secure than another. But demand (and associated funding) for A/E services ebbs and flows in the shorter term, depending on societal priorities as typically expressed through political channels.”

Ross explains that in the 1950s and ’60s, substantial government investment spawned a focus on wastewater treatment; solid and hazardous waste management systems were substantially improved in the 1970s and ’80s due to efforts by the government and private sectors; and more recently, government and private industry has spawned a growth spurt in renewable power facilities.

“A/E firms that forecasted these trends, and prepared to deliver the services demanded, did well,” Ross says. So, in retrospect, they were at least temporarily in ‘safer’ markets, he says.

**‘EARTH DAY’ PLANNING SET THE STAGE.** In the late 1960s, SCS Engineers’ founding principals read the engineering market tea leaves and concluded that conditions that spawned planning for the first Earth Day would translate into an increased and sustained demand for environmental engineering services throughout the country. This thinking led to the opening of SCS on April 1, 1970, to focus on wastewater and solid waste science and engineering – nine months before establishment of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

“Many of SCS’s assignments during the firm’s first decade were conducted for the EPA and agencies of the Department of Defense,” Ross says. “The larger EPA assignments typically supported the development of solid waste and industrial wastewater regulations, which were later adopted and implemented by the states, precipitating the closure of many dumps, the emergence of secure sanitary landfills, and substantial improvement in the quality of ground and surface waters.”

During the 1970s, the original Solid Waste Disposal Act of 1965 was expanded to cover hazardous waste management, and SCS also helped develop the technical foundation for corresponding storage, treatment, and disposal regulations.

Today, about 65 percent of SCS’s business is in the solid waste arena, including sustainable materials management, and 35 percent is in environmental services (i.e., site investigations and projects to remove or control the release of industrial chemicals from soil and water, to enable development of brown-field sites).

“The majority of our clients now are in the private sector, motivated to retain

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## GOOD TO KNOW

Over the past three years, net service revenue has grown a median of 8.4 percent. However, profitability on net service revenue has declined by a median of 7.6 percent over the same period.

**Source:** 2013 Financial Performance Survey, ZweigWhite: [www.zweigwhite.com/p-2155-financial-performance-survey-2013](http://www.zweigwhite.com/p-2155-financial-performance-survey-2013).

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us to support their efforts to conform to environmental regulations, reduce waste flows to landfills, expand waste management capacity, recover energy from landfill gas and/or waste itself and to efficiently and safely redevelop industrial properties,” Ross says.

Over the years SCS’s environmental compliance practice has been more stable than other facets of its business, but even that is not recession proof.

“Since 2008, our business in support of Brownfield developers has fluctuated significantly, tracking the more volatile real estate market through the ‘Great Recession,’” Ross says.

Ross says a quote from Thomas Jefferson’s comes to mind when addressing recession proof markets – “The harder I work, the luckier I get.”

**MARKET DIVERSIFICATION.** Trish Downing, vice president, specialty architecture at **FRCH Design Worldwide** (Cincinnati, OH), a firm of 185 employees, agrees that there are no markets that are truly safer than others.

“The key to staying busy during market oscillations is diversification,” she says. “One of the things we learned early in our experience in rolling out prototypes was that each industry hit its own peaks and valleys and that these individual peaks and valleys were rarely aligned with others. For example, when retail is down or on the downside of their typical cycle (during the holiday shopping season) other markets like restaurant and consumer services are usually still pretty robust. This past downturn notwithstanding, we’ve often experienced that when one of our key markets is down, the others are busy.”

Downing says that one market in particular proved to be a bit safer than others in this most recent downturn – financial services.

“While banks weren’t building hundreds of new branches, we found that they were buying out failing/ailing competitors, which led to new business for us in converting existing branches to new banners and consolidating branches due to overlap in specific regions. Another market that picked up the slack in the downturn was the in-



Trish Downing,  
VP, Specialty  
Architecture,  
FRCH Design  
Worldwide.

stitutional/higher education market. While this was not a core market for FRCH, it was one that we quickly tried to enter, leveraging our staff’s experience and networks of contacts,” she says.

Downing says that FRCH has found retail to be the least safe.

“This past downturn notwithstanding, we’ve often experienced that when one of our key markets is down, the others are busy.”

“Retail is always an indicator when the economy is headed toward a recession. On the flip side, retail sales usually increase when we’re heading out of a recession as well. Again, in this most recent recession, all previous trends/typical behaviors went out the window. I think in this case consumers were hit so hard that they were more hesitant to spend and retailers were way more cautious in diverting their funds back to building,” Downing says.

While diversification did not make FRCH impervious, it certainly kept them active in the industry while their competitors were floundering.

**ANTICIPATE NEED.** Downing also advises that being nimble enough to quickly respond to industry needs was key to FRCH’s success through the recession.

“When clients and prospects stopped building new facilities, we stayed in front of them by offering support in refresh programs and opportunities assessments,” she says. “It was all about anticipating their needs and making sure they knew we could support them, regardless of their budgets.

So, while there is no way to truly combat economic challenges, having a wide range of experience and service offerings can certainly help you to stay active – or at least visible – in the marketplace. ▀▲

## CALENDAR

**2013 HOT FIRM CONFERENCE: THE ZWEIG LETTER** Hot Firm Conference is THE most exciting annual event for A/E firms because it’s all about how to achieve success in this industry.

This year’s event will be Oct. 24 and 25 at the Eden Roc Hotel in Miami Beach, Fla.

CEOs, owners, presidents, principals and other leaders from the top design and environmental firms, along with entrepreneurs, authors, and business experts come to this conference every year to share industry news, compare strategies for success, learn from their peers, and leave with renewed inspiration for another successful year.

**THE ZWEIG LETTER** Hot Firm Conference features:

- Keynote presentations by CEOs of the most successful A/E/P and environmental consulting firms today
- Breakout discussion groups where firm leaders share strategies to common challenges
- Welcome cocktail reception on the first night of the conference
- Black tie awards reception and dinner with live music and dancing
- Beautiful locations where attendees can network and recharge and their spouses and families can relax

For more information visit [www.zweigwhite.com/conference/hotfirm](http://www.zweigwhite.com/conference/hotfirm).

To register call 800-466-6275 or log on to [www.zweigwhite.com/conference/hotfirm/registration.php](http://www.zweigwhite.com/conference/hotfirm/registration.php).

**PRINCIPALS ACADEMY:** Don’t miss the last 2013 edition of The Principals Academy, a crash course in all aspects of managing a professional services firm, Nov. 14 and 15 in San Francisco.

The program is presented by a team of speakers – including ZweigWhite founder and CEO Mark Zweig – with extensive experience working with and for A/E firms.

The two-day agenda covers six critical areas of business management from the unique perspectives of architecture, engineering and environmental consulting firms, and is presented in tutorial and case study workshop sessions.

The Principals Academy program also includes a case study workshop session that will provide an opportunity to practice implementing these management strategies in a supervised test-case scenario.

For more information or to register, call 800-466-6275 or log on to [www.zweigwhite.com/seminars/tpa](http://www.zweigwhite.com/seminars/tpa).

## AWARDS

# Hot Firm status validates strategy

Award winners are a diverse group, but they distinguish themselves by unparalleled focus and drive.

By LIISA SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

Editor's note: This is the second of a multi-part series.

They are employee-owned and sometimes even virtual. But a common thread unites them, a spot on **THE ZWEIG LETTER** 2013 Hot Firm List. This week winning firms continue to react to their newly found status.



Lonnie Laffen,  
President/CEO,  
JLG Architects.

**CREDIBILITY CONFIRMATION.** Lonnie Laffen, president/CEO, **JLG Architects** (Grand Forks, ND), a firm that employs 85 professionals, says his first reaction to placing on this list was one of surprise. The firm came in at No. 22 on the list.

“It’s always a surprise that our company could achieve a listing like this – even though we have been on the list before.”

“It’s always a surprise that our company could achieve a listing like this – even though we have been on the list before,” he says. “There is always a sense of accomplishment when you make a list that compares such a large number of firms.”

Laffen adds that opportunities for comparison or feedback like this aren’t plentiful and recognition from outside of your won organization is the best kind of marketing.

“It is confirmation that many years of effort from a lot of people is working and gives us energy to keep at it,” he says.

Laffen believes that JLG received this honor because it puts itself in its clients’ shoes and understands the value of money.

“Would we spend our own money in the same fashion we are asking of our clients?” he says. “If not, then we need to rethink what we are doing. We stay on budget, work hard and bring common-sense value to the building process. The opportunity to build is generally a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and we want to make the most of it.”



Jon Carlson, CEO,  
Braun Intertec.

**MARKETING LEVERAGE.** At **Braun Intertec** (Minneapolis, MN), a 600-plus professional multidisciplinary engineering firm, Jon Carlson, CEO, says that he was thrilled to be recognized as the No. 13 fastest-growing firm in the U.S. and Canada.

Braun Intertec continuously strives to attract and retain top talent in the industry. As a 100 percent employee-owned company, this recognition is very meaningful to the employee owners and is an asset in their recruiting efforts.

“This accomplishment reflects the dedication of our employees and their commitment to meeting the needs of our clients,” Carlson says. “We believe in the power of relationship excellence with our clients, and we are grateful to have achieved this growth, which allows us to better serve them.”

Despite market uncertainty and the temptation to “hunker down” into “survival-only mode” during the recession, Braun Intertec continued to make bold, smart maneuvers for continued growth. The company is flattered to join the list of firms that pursued similar strategies to outperform the economy and their competition.

Braun Intertec makes practical use of

the award as well. It markets the award internally and externally. Internally, the award is communicated during an all-employee meeting and on the firm’s Intranet site. Externally, the award is promoted on the Braun Intertec website, distributed to the media via a press release, and social media distribution including the Braun Intertec YouTube channel, LinkedIn and Twitter. The Hot Firm logo is also proudly displayed as part of email signatures.



Jorge Garduno,  
Engineering  
Manager, GATE,  
Inc.

Jorge Garduno, engineering manager at **GATE, Inc.** (Houston, TX), an 86-person systems engineering firm, No. 19 on the Hot Firm List, says that it too leverages the award in its marketing campaigns.

“We believe that our unique GATE culture, coupled with a management team that is focused on delivering quality products and internal professional development to all seasoned and young staff members, most definitely makes us a Hot Firm to work for and we want to share that news,” he says.

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Executive team group EHS Support (left to right): Nigel Goulding, William Egan, Andy Patz, Joe Biss, Kenny Ogilvie, Bethany Evans.

# Have we forgotten how to network?

On becoming a market information expert.

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According to research conducted by the SMPS Foundation, which was recently published in “A/E/C Business Development – The Decade Ahead,” maintaining and developing relationships with current or potential clients and contacts is one of the keys to the success of any firm. While I agree with this finding, I find it a bit shocking that we would have to be reminded that the absence of solid relationships can cause a failure in obtaining or producing our work.

Ask any successful professional to name the keys to their success and they will include the value of their relationships with clients and the value of their network. It can take years to develop your network and much effort to maintain it.

But do we all utilize our network properly and get the most benefit from those efforts to create and maintain it? I have utilized the following guidelines in making my network as robust and beneficial as possible.

**DON'T BE A TAKER.** Nothing will destroy your network faster than not providing a two-way flow of information. You cannot call a client continually asking for work and never provide some benefit in return. Do you want to be compared to the in-law who always shows up for holiday dinners but never brings a gift?

Sometimes you just need to provide information even if there is no direct benefit to you. If you are seen as looking out for the best interest of your client or even peer firms when there is no direct benefit for you, you have proven your worth to their network, and they will reciprocate. But I suggest you don't keep a score sheet, based on who returns the favor, because you never know when the shoe may be on the other foot.

**CAST A WIDE NET.** Diversity is good in most things and your network is no exception. Your network should include any person who can provide valuable input to you, including clients, peers, consultants and suppliers.

The more broadly you develop your network, the more broadly you can obtain information about services, markets and geographic regions. I have often been made aware of opportunities in markets or with clients that we had not envisioned as possible users of our services. All were developed by the diversity of our connections.

**KEEP IN TOUCH.** Just because someone knows you does



STEPHEN LUCY

## BEST PRACTICES

not mean that they are part of your network. Adding someone to your network and, more importantly, keeping someone in your network requires continual work. Make a phone call, set up a lunch and pass along leads.

At our office I have established the Rule of 46. Simply stated, this means that after deducting for time off and holidays, our project managers and above are in the office about 46 weeks a year. If they just plan one meeting a week with an existing or potential client with whom they are not currently interfacing with on a project that is 46 face-to-face contacts a year or 46 opportunities to succeed.

**KNOW YOUR NETWORK.** Nothing turns away someone more than having to provide information about themselves over and over again. It sends the message that you really don't care and are not paying attention. You want to know some personal information, but, more importantly, you want to know what makes them tick professionally.

What is their market focus, geographic regions of responsibility and their goals? You cannot provide concise, accurate information or present applicable opportunities to them without this basic information.

See STEPHEN LUCY, page 8

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Nothing will destroy your network faster than not providing a two-way flow of information. You cannot call a client continually asking for work and never provide some benefit in return.

# Internal barriers

What's standing in the way of doing the best job with each other?

Employee surveys are a mainstay in the work with do with our clients. They always produce some interesting, useful, and eye-opening responses from within the organization. The recommendations are surprisingly practical and the criticisms brutally honest.

We design questions that cover all aspects of the firm – and of course there are several regarding project management. Asking, “*What’s standing in the way of doing the best job with each other?*” highlights the internal areas that project managers and technical and design teams struggle with. Each survey unfailingly produces the same themes or challenges – so even though every firm believes they are unique or different, they really do wrestle with the same issues.

Here are a few strong comments extracted from those surveys. If you asked around, you might find several people agreeing that this is the case at your company too.

■ **Resource planning.** “*The only barrier is when we get to a critical deadline, due to many projects going out at the same time, does not allow for us to assist other team members in meeting their deadlines and vice versa. This is something that project managers could help us out by better scheduling.*” There will always be critical deadlines, interim deadlines, and final deadlines; but will there be balance in trying to meet these in a way that produces a product we’ve got confidence in without burning ourselves out? Is it time to hire? Is there any mechanism to decide how to get the work done, or are we just winging it? This employee is asking for the PM to step in and help, but this belongs to the principals to sort out.

■ **Project roles and client service.** “*There is no clear understanding of roles on our projects, or a clear understanding of how the firm works together to support the customer.*” This particular firm had several office locations working with clients with project sites nationwide. On a project level, the internal team was not sure who was doing what – so things always fell through the cracks. That’s just poor management. On an organizational level, project managers and principals in various offices hoarded their relationships and didn’t share lessons learned with their colleagues – ultimately NOT supporting the customer, as this employee clearly points out. Together, it’s a recipe for frustration and disaster.

■ **Communication.** “*Everyone works differently, and because of this, communication is often an issue with projects. Many will assume that everyone has the latest updates or the information changes, causing confusion and contradiction.*” This employee is right to acknowledge that everyone works according to their preferences. However, communication is not a style.



Christine Brack

PM  
PERSPECTIVES

It’s a requirement. Without it, the team becomes confused, makes mistakes, the client is disappointed, and the firm looks bad. Who has the information? Either the principal or the PM has it and if it’s not getting to employees (like the one who wrote this comment), the person in charge is not doing his job!

■ **Collaboration and effort.** “*Some people go the distance, others are minimalists and it shows.*” I have written about this subject before because it’s hugely demoralizing and worth the attention. Even in large firms, employees know who the slackers are because they are sitting right next to them or have to work with them in some close capacity. Because of all the projects and deadlines (as mentioned above), management allows this to continue – burning out the teams that are continuously reliable and hard working.

You want to do the best job for your clients. Ask your teams what’s standing in the way of making that possible. Then, start fixing it.



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You want to do the best job for your clients. Ask your teams what’s standing in the way of making that possible. Then, start fixing it.

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**MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY.** Much of the information you obtain from your network is available from other sources, but on occasion you will be given confidential information. Failure to safeguard that information will destroy the trust that your contact has placed in you. In addition, knowledge of that violation can rapidly spread and destroy your entire network.

If you have any questions regarding the confidentiality of the information, you need to ask if the information can be shared. You cannot “put the genie back in the bottle” once you have passed the information along.

**CONNECTING THE DOTS.** The true value of your network is being able to take the disparate pieces of information you obtain and understand how that data can be meshed together to create a complete picture. The bigger the network, the more pieces of the puzzle you can obtain. And the more of the puzzle that you assemble, the more powerful your network.

If you know your network, you can connect the dots quicker

as you can be focused in your pursuit of information. This assembly process shows the full value of your network and will allow you to differentiate yourself from your peers. Just like being identified as a technical expert, you can be seen as a market information expert.

**SHARE YOUR CONTACTS.** At some point you have to make the decision to share your network with others. Internally, this allows for the transfer of knowledge to other firm leaders. Externally, this allows you to further expand your reach by expanding your network.

However, you should not share those contacts without some heads-up to the contact being shared. The right introduction can result in multiple returns on your time investment.

**IT TAKES WORK.** Your network takes work to create and maintain, but the rewards for that effort will be realized with increased firm visibility, expanded market share and increased personal value to your clients. Start now, stay focused and reap your rewards. ▽▲

STEPHEN LUCY is managing principal at **JQ** in Dallas, TX. Contact him at slucy@jqeng.com.

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“Our dream was to create a company that not only provides exceptional service to our clients, but also is a place where employees are happy to come to work and are proud to be part of the organization. We are realizing this dream, and this award is testimony to that.”

**VIRTUAL SUCCESS.** At **EHS Support** (Pittsburgh, PA), a 56-person environmental, health, and safety solutions specialist, it is the culture that drives success. Eight years ago, the No. 23 Hot Firm adopted a business model that no other company in the industry has – it is 100 percent virtual (as in: everybody works remotely).

“This model allows our employees the flexibility to focus on family when they need them most and our core values guide them to provide outstanding service that our clients have come to respect and rely on,” Kenny Ogilvie, chairman and CEO says. “We are blessed.”

Ogilvie says that EHS has the most talented and enthusiastic employees in the industry.

“Our dream was to create a company that not only provides exceptional service to our clients, but also is a place where employees are happy to come to work and are proud to be part of the organization. We are realizing this dream, and this award is testimony to that,” he says.

Ogilvie says that, for 2013, EHS has been very fortunate to receive a number of awards, both regionally and nationally.

“These are great marketing tools for us,” he says. “By making the lists and reaching the positions we have on them, it shows that our company is growing tremendously, which means we’re doing things right. We have already started using it in our communications and collateral pieces.”

**PEER RECOGNITION.** Pam Gower, director of **HR, Pond & Company** (Norcross, GA), a 237-person architecture, engineering and planning firm, No. 14 on the Hot Firm List, says that receiving this type of national, peer-based recognition means a great deal.



Pam Gower,  
Director of HR,  
Pond & Company.

“First, it represents the commitment to our employees,” she says. “As a consulting architecture and engineering firm, it’s our people who set us apart from the competition. We seek new employees who will contribute to the growth while exhibiting the same excellent character our customers and co-workers have grown to rely upon. In return, collaboratively, we provide services, tools and solutions for our employees that will not only help them excel as individuals, but that will help them provide for their personal objectives outside their profession. Additionally, the feedback we get in summary is used to identify areas of concentration to continue to do what we do even better.”

Heather Collins, marketing and communications manager at Pond & Company, says that they also use this recognition in their marketing.

“It is a great validation to a culture we work tirelessly to foster,” she says. “We feel that our customers would be proud to know this of their service provider and we also feel that other like-minded professionals might find it of value in seeking opportunities where they can excel in their careers.” ▽▲

## RECRUITING

# Who are the candidates seeking you?

The résumés are pouring in and they come from all quadrants, including recent graduates and well-seasoned professionals.

By LIISA SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

**A**re you stockpiling résumés? Do you have a database of go-to people should a hiring need arise? If so, where are these people coming from? Are they recent college grads? Career changers? Recently laid off and seeking work?

Sue Slade, HR manager, **Spicer Group, Inc.** (Saginaw, MI), a 133-person professional engineering, land surveying, community planning and architecture services firm, says that she gets résumés from all of the above... and then some.

**A MIXED BAG.** Résumés that find their way to Spicer Group include:

- College grads – some with bachelor’s; others with advanced degrees.
- People who’ve been laid off (lots of these). Many people are still looking for jobs after a firm downsized.
- People looking to change companies (not as many of these). “I think people are staying put unless the job offer is too good to pass up,” Slade says.
- Experienced people who are closer to retirement age and are looking to stay in the workforce longer. Many have been put on reduced hours or downsized by their companies in some way.
- People who are looking to come back to the area.
- Local people who are just looking to get

a foot in the door; many of these applicants are not qualified for the positions posted; they just want to work.

“Some of our summer co-op positions are filled with college grads who cannot find full-time work, so they work for a summer to gain experience,” Slade says. “I’ve had grads offer to work as a job shadow for free just to gain this experience (we don’t do this; we always pay them an hourly wage).”

**LAI D OFF AND LOOKING.** Michelle Gramelspacher, assistant controller, **Butler, Fairman & Seufert, Inc.** (Indianapolis, IN), a 135-person civil engineering firm, says that she is noticing a trend of people being laid off in the A/E industry.

“Most of the résumés/applications that are coming our way are from people who were laid off from local Indiana firms due to a shortage of work in the state. Ten percent of the résumés that come through are either college students looking for internships or people who just graduated and are looking for a full-time position. Since our field is specialized, we do not receive applicants who are looking to change careers,” she says.

**POSITION DICTATES.** Matt Hoying, VP, project manager, **Choice One Engineering** (Sidney, OH), a 27-person civil engineering and surveying firm, explains that job description generally dictates where résumés come from.

“For our engineering positions, we typically see people who are just out of school,” Hoying says. He adds that they do target this group more often and only advertise for positions through the regional colleges.



Matt Hoying, VP,  
Project Manager,  
Choice One  
Engineering.

“For our non-engineering positions (administrative, surveying, etc.), we get more interest from career changers, typically under the age of 40,” Hoying says. “In the last year, we have advertised for an administrative assistant, an engineer, and a field survey technician.

For the administrative assistant, we had more than 150 applications. For the engineering position, we had 20; and for the survey technician, we had 25.”

“It’s been a ‘buyers’ market’ with very qualified candidates. We have been very fortunate to have great talent available to us and we tend to not pass up those opportunities.”

In 2013, Choice One hired two, full-time employees – an engineer who graduated from the University of Dayton this past spring; and survey technician who is also a recent college grad.

“The survey technician was working while going to school, so this position was also a career change for him that better aligns his career with his education,” Hoying says.

**IT’S A ‘BUYERS’ MARKET’.** Karen Moorefield, associate director of corporate development at **HuntonBrady**

See CANDIDATES, page 10

### ●●●● GOOD TO KNOW

Firms report their top reason for difficulties with hiring is a lack of qualified candidates (50 percent).

**Source:** 2013 Policies, Procedures & Benefits Survey, ZweigWhite:  
[www.zweigwhite.com/p-2150-policies-procedures-benefits-survey-2013](http://www.zweigwhite.com/p-2150-policies-procedures-benefits-survey-2013).

## ON THE MOVE

**LEA HIRES: Littlejohn Engineering Associates** (Nashville, TN), a 117-person surveying, site development engineering, municipal engineering, transportation, landscape architecture, urban planning, environmental engineering, industrial engineering and industrial hygiene and health and safety services firm, announced the key addition of **Charles Higgins**, senior environmental consultant in the Nashville office.

Higgins is a highly accomplished environmental engineer with over 40 years of experience in the environmental consulting and engineering industry. He is a trusted advisor to many attorneys, industries and real estate ownership groups who work throughout the country. Throughout his career, Higgins has provided environmental management services throughout the U.S. on a broad range of areas including environmental compliance, remedial investigations and site remediation, hazardous waste, water pollution control, surface mining, land development, landfill design, and solid waste management. Higgins has cultivated long-standing relationships with a variety of local, state, federal and private sector clients that he will continue to serve in his new position with LEA.

“We are enthused to have Chuck join our growing environmental engineering practice. It has been rewarding to our firm and to our clients to have him join us with his enviable technical expertise and environmental engineering experience. He complements and adds significant bench strength to our team,” said Jim Littlejohn, the firm’s president.

**MKA EVOLVES LEADERSHIP:** Seattle-based **Magnusson Klemencic Associates** has announced title changes at the top level as part of the firm’s leadership evolution. **Ron Klemencic** has transitioned from president to chairman and CEO – positions previously held by **Jon Magnusson** – and **Derek Beaman** has become president. Magnusson remains actively involved in MKA’s project execution and is a member of the firm’s executive committee, along with Klemencic, Beaman, COO **Andy Fry** and senior principal **Don Davies**.

Klemencic joined MKA in 1992 and became president in 1998. Over the last 25 years, he has helped evolve the award-winning firm to

a staff of 190, with four offices across the globe and projects in 47 states and 51 countries. As chairman and CEO, Klemencic remains active in both projects and day-to-day firm leadership.

Beaman joined MKA in 1999 and became a principal in 2006. He leads the firm’s Convention Center Specialist Group, with a portfolio of 33 convention center projects in five countries.

Fry became COO in June 2012, following a 15-year career of project management at MKA. Davies joined the firm in 1990 and became a principal in 2000.

MKA provides structural and civil engineering services out of its Seattle headquarters, with branch offices in Chicago, Shanghai, and Riyadh.

**HCEA HIRES: Hillis-Carnes Engineering Associates, Inc.** (Annapolis Junction, MD) has hired **Mark Clippinger**, who has joined the Chantilly, Va. office as a senior geotechnical engineer.

Clippinger has over 18 years of experience within the geotechnical engineering and construction inspection and testing disciplines. HCEA is looking to continue expanding its technical expertise in the Virginia and Metropolitan Washington, D.C. markets to continue providing highly reputable and innovative services.

HCEA is a Mid-Atlantic based multi-disciplined engineering firm specializing in geotechnical, environmental, structural/forensic, construction materials testing and inspections, field exploration, and specialty geotechnical construction services for owners, general contractors, construction managers, commercial real estate developers, educational institutions, energy providers, sports authorities, municipalities and government agencies for over 20 years.

HCEA services clients from offices located in Annapolis Junction (serving Baltimore and Washington, D.C.), Frederick, Hagerstown, Salisbury, and Waldorf, M.D.; Williamsport, Harrisburg, State College, and Philadelphia, Pa.; Chantilly, Va.; and Dover, Del.

## CANDIDATES, from page 9

**Architects** (Orlando, FL), a 70-person design-oriented architecture firm, says that the past 12 months have been very interesting to observe and experience.

“Last year, we interviewed more than 30 applicants (architecture, interiors, administrative and technical support),” she says. “It’s been a ‘buyers’ market’ with very qualified candidates. We have been very fortunate to have great talent available to us and we tend to not pass up those opportunities. We hired seven new staff members last year.”

Recently, due to the market shift, HuntonBrady has been receiving résumés from those seeking to change current employers. Those candidates are looking for multiple things: stability, security, design opportunities and, yes, more money and benefits.

“Many firms are still rebounding from the economic downturn and had to reduce staff, salaries and benefits,” Moorefield says. “That trifecta hit hurts everyone involved, from the employer to the employee. We have also received inquiries and have interviewed people who have been laid off or know they are about to be laid off. These are tough since our architectural community is pretty close here in Central Florida. We hate to see any firm lay off staff even if it could be

beneficial to us.”

Typically each year, HuntonBrady sees recent college graduates looking for a job (both architectural and interior design). This is seasonal.

“We continue to look for talented graduates and do interview even when we don’t have an open position,” Moorefield says. “We also get college students looking for internship positions, and we try to have at least one or two interns every year in house.”

Due to it being a “buyers market” Moorefield says that, unfortunately, anyone trying to change careers right now is competing with many experienced and qualified candidates.

“From an employer’s perspective we are looking at certain levels of architectural and design industry experience,” she says. “These are the candidates we will consider first.”

Moorefield says that she receives an average of 10- to 15 unsolicited résumés per week. They come from everywhere – including international candidates seeking employment in the U.S.

“This is a cyclical type of business that responds to the economy,” Moorefield says. “We’ve seen this before and I’m sure we’ll see it again.” ▽▲

## FUNCTIONS

# Do you need a CFO or a controller?

The question is whether your firm needs mainly a numbers cruncher or a finance strategist.

By LIISA SULLIVAN  
Correspondent

Some firms have them both, others don't. What dictates whether a firm has a controller or a CFO? There appears to be a clear differentiation between roles and there are options to consider if your firm is bursting at the seams.

**DEFINING THE ROLES.** Robert Brewer, partner and architecture/engineering practice leader at Grassi & Co., an accounting and consulting firm, says that controllers are typically in charge of the day-to-day financial happenings (e.g., bookkeeping and records, general ledger, payroll, etc.).

"The CFO has to be able see the bigger picture," Brewer says. "If the owners of a company want more than someone to manage the internal numbers, it needs to bring in a CFO. CFOs are focused more on strategy, budgets, developing bank relations, taxes, insurance and benchmarking."

**OUTSOURCING OPTION.** Brewer says that hiring a CFO is costly; a firm that is considering making a move in this direction often considers outsourcing the role, for at least a little while.

Many firms will bring in an outside CFO once or twice a month to provide them with more strategy and planning – things a controller would not do. Having this type of arrangement is cost-effective and gives the firm insight it would not have with only a controller.

Outsourced CFOs are typically retired CFOs seeking to keep their hand in the business, but not a full-time basis.

"Outsourcing is also effective for a firm that is in transition – moving from one



Robert Brewer,  
Partner and  
Architecture/  
Engineering  
Practice Leader,  
Grassi & Co.

CFO to another," Brewer says. "Many outsourced CFOs can now access a firm's financial data on a cloud and this is a good way to make a transition to ensure that no data is lost or miscommunicated."

Brewer explains that in many firms there is typically a partner/owner who is the "numbers guy."

Quite often this numbers guy needs to focus more on selling and company growth. He/she cannot afford to be bogged down with numbers (this is another good reason to think about hiring a temporary or outsourced CFO). The CFO has to be able to make recommendations and look to the future. They have to "tell the story" and be able to provide a financial summary. Controllers typically do not function in this role.

**HIRE FROM WITHIN.** Some firms may also consider promoting the current controller to CFO.

"This may take some additional education and training and even hiring of more accounts payable/receivable people to handle the day-to-day numbers, but hiring someone who already knows the ins and outs of the books is also a good option," Brewer says.

Brewer also says that since hiring a CFO is costly, he finds that firms in the revenue range of about 15- to 20 million per year are ready to make a move to hiring a CFO.

**EXAMINE THE NOW AND HOW.** Jacqueline Weir, director of the architects and engineers services group at Feeley and Driscoll, P.C. in Boston, says that the complexity of a firm's business, how it runs its business and its strategic vision (where it is going in the future) dictates whether a CFO or con-

### DID YOU KNOW?

"People often confuse the terms controller and comptroller," Brewer says. "However, there is actually a difference. It's correct to use the term comptroller for a government accounting officer. The term controller is correct to describe accounting officers in private business."



Jacqueline Weir, Director of the Architects and Engineers Services Group, Feeley and Driscoll, P.C.

troller is right for the job.

"For example, if your firm is looking for someone to help run its business and drive initiative, than a CFO is right for you," she says.

"However, if you are looking for someone to report on the historical performance and to close the books, than a controller might be

a better fit. The size of your firm also plays a role in your decision. In smaller firms, the controller typically handles the accounting, office and IT needs of the firm. They handle many functions outside of just the numbers. As your firm grows, you may look to acquire firms, enter new markets and change policy. This is the time when we see companies looking to hire a CFO."

Weir agrees with Brewer when he says that a CFO is definitely a better choice when it comes to providing a financial arm for strategy.

She also agrees that financial procedures are left more to the role of a controller or accounting manager.

"Either position should be viewed as a resource, not a cost center of your firm," Weir says. "Both positions can be pushed to help you hold individuals accountable by tracking and reporting on the proper metric." ▀▀

## TRANSACTIONS

**APEX ACQUIRES: Apex Companies, LLC** (Rockville, MD), a 500-person national energy, water resources and environmental consulting and engineering firm, announced the acquisition of **Management and Technical Resources, Inc.** (Pittsburgh, PA), which as of Sep. 14, 2013 began operating as a subsidiary of Apex.

MTR is a privately held environmental consulting company specializing in management of environmental projects for industrial and commercial clients. Apex is a portfolio company of Tailwind Capital, a private equity firm focused on investing in growth-oriented middle market companies. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

“Due to the high-level talent on MTR’s staff and the company’s strong clientele, it was clear that a business relationship will be mutually beneficial,” said Peter Ceribelli, CEO of Apex. “MTR will provide strategic geographic expansion into the important Western Pennsylvania markets, as well as strengthen client relationships in the East.”

“With our experience serving energy clients, we were very closely aligned with Apex’s leading strategic growth sectors,” said Andrew Contrael, Principal of MTR. “We’re confident that this new partnership will bring about great opportunities for everyone.”

Focused on minimizing environmental liabilities and hurdles to maximize client business opportunities, Apex’s has also recently acquired **TITAN Engineering, Inc.** (Dallas, TX), **Ash Creek Associates, Inc.** (Portland, OR) and **A2L Technologies** (Tampa, FL), privately held environmental and engineering services firms.

Based on its three-year growth rate in gross revenue, Apex was recognized by THE ZWEIG LETTER as one of the 100 fastest-growing architecture, engineering, planning, and environmental consulting firms in the U.S. and Canada, ranking 21st on the 2013 Hot Firm List.

**WRS ACQUIRES: WRS Environmental Services** (Yaphank, NY), a provider of environmental, energy and industrial services as well as hazardous waste management services throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast, announced the completion its acquisition of **Active Water Jet, Inc.** (Cranford, NJ), a high pressure water blasting and industrial power vacuuming firm.

“The acquisition of Active Water Jet aligns perfectly with our strategy of expanding our Environmental Services business in the Mid-Atlantic Northeast,” said Michael Rodgers, CEO. “Active Water Jet brings well-established leadership positions in several important markets,

including industrial water blasting and industrial power vacuuming, providing us a stronger foothold in this industry that allows us to respond more quickly to our clients’ needs. We welcome Active Water Jet’s employees to the WRS team and look forward to advancing our combined organization.”

AWJ offers a full line of Woma high-pressure pumps, blasters up to 40,000 psi, Guzzler vac trucks 6000CFM. In addition, WRS will be able to enhance its own highly skilled, safety conscious workforce with additional OSHA trained staff that have experience in dealing with hazardous waste. WRS has been given top rating by not only its customers, but by ISNetworld where they have earned an A rating.

Rodgers said with the acquisition and growth of WRS, the company has expanded its existing facility in Edison, N.J. and more than doubled the space. That facility will house a full line of equipment and employees to support all environmental services.

**JACOBS BUYS: Jacobs Engineering Group Inc** (Pasadena, CA), one of the world’s largest construction consulting firms, is acquiring Australian employee-owned consultancy **Sinclair Knight Merz** for approximately A\$1.3 billion (\$1.2 billion) in cash.

Jacobs has been looking for new projects in the oil and gas and chemicals sectors and has historically turned to acquisitions to expand its market presence. It has bought six other companies in the last three years.

Jacobs, with a market value of about \$7.6 billion, said in a statement that the acquisition of SKM was expected to be accretive to its earnings once it is completed by the end of the first quarter of its fiscal 2014 year.

“Our capabilities and geographies have little overlap, enabling the combined companies to continue to expand client relationships and provide significant opportunities for employees,” Jacobs Chief Executive Craig Martin said in the statement.

SKM, which has operations in Australia, Asia, South America and Britain, and serves clients in sectors ranging from mining to power plant construction, had \$1.2 billion in revenue in 2012, Jacobs said.

In July, Jacobs reported net earnings for the nine months ending June 28 of \$312.3 million, up from \$271.5 million over the same period a year earlier.

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