
Small Project Forum Atlanta Activities

Recognizing that we will periodically have an opportunity to participate in professional conferences, like the AIA convention and the upcoming Nashville Conference in September, and that only a small fraction of our members can be expected to join us at these events, we will periodically issues special reports such as this one to apprise you of the proceedings and inform you as to how you may explore further the various discussions and presentations.

In addition we are working to make tapes and handout materials available to Small Project Forum Local Advisors for informal sharing and distribution locally. Refer to our regular newsletter if you need information on the local advisor program.

New Name

We have requested that our name, Small Projects PIA, be changed to The Small Project Forum. We are awaiting official approval.

Small Computers + Small Projects = Big Profits

This was our first collaborative convention seminar. Jerry Laiserin AIA, vice chair of the Computer Aided Practice PIA, led a discussion of computer use trends among small project practitioners and how the 3D capabilities have become commonplace. An underlying structure for the program arose from questionnaire responses by computer-literate Small Project Forum members from various locales around the country.

Here are a few highlights:

- Despite favorable client response, 3D animation is currently too time and hardware intensive for most.
- There is widespread use of the computer, among respondents, to generate 2D perspective views of projects. These are often used as a background for a hand rendered finished product.
- Most noted that they consider computer use an indication of state of the art service and a marketing asset. Noted one, "many of my clients are bringing stuff into my office that they've done on their own computers. I shudder to think of an architect being less technologically sophisticated ...than his or her client!"
- Commercial on-line services such as America Online and CompuServe are reported to be valuable resources for shared (that is free) expertise on computers and software.
- Fax modems, despite occasional software reliability problems, received applause all around. They are prized for giving architects the capability to fax drawings or portions of drawings directly from their computer with clarity superior to hand fed-machines.
- Modems are also commonly being used to transfer files among consultants. One architect noted that it has allowed him to collaborate efficiently with other architects at remote locations.
- Despite a lingering fondness for soft pencils, most reported that the computer was proving to be a valuable tool early in the project design phase. Noted one architect, computerization "has allowed me to look at



more alternatives than I would have by hand." Noted another, "after schematic design, the computer drawings already have exact dimensions, so design development and working drawings take less time. This enables projects to get through the office faster, leaving more time to spend on design, with the clients, and out in the field."

- The ability to automate repetitive tasks, easily change drawing scales, duplicate repetitive drawing elements and copy/modify and reuse existing standard elements and details is widely valued as a time saver.
- Most report they manage more paper than they used to—perhaps because the creation of documents takes so much less time. Some report keeping paper copies of only a portion of their documents.

The program also included a demonstration of one 3D product, an AutoCAD overlay by Ketiv Software. Tapes of the program proceedings are available from ACTS, Inc. in Ballwin, Mo., 800-642-2287.

Marketing Success in Small Project Practices

Our survey of Small Project Forum members in February 1994 revealed that marketing was considered an area of interest by 70 percent, and an area of strength by only 17 percent. We prepared what we hope will be the first in a series of convention programs to address this topic. The program was led by Rosemary McMonigal AIA, 1996 Small Project Forum Chair, and included Gabriel Durand-Hollis AIA, 1995 Small Project Forum Chair, as guest speaker.

The purpose of marketing was defined as "to find, satisfy and retain clients." According to McMonigal, marketing services differs from marketing goods in four key ways.

- Intangibility. Services cannot be held, seen or touched. A major marketing need of service providers is to give their services a memorable character.
- Inconsistency. The human element in providing services tends to cause the quality of service provided to vary noticeably. This gives rise to a business management need of service providers to control service quality. It also gives rise to a marketing need among service providers to give their services a reputation for consistent quality.
- Inventory. Human resources and overhead are the main capital costs of service providers. Marketers of services must create a demand for ability, not packaged goods.
- Inseparability. Goods have an identity of their own. Services are inextricably linked to the provider of the service. If you provide a service, you are perceived as the service.

A difficulty for small project architects is that we are service providers and our market is for the most part a consumer market—a market sensitive to flaws in product-type goods. Our services in some respects, drawings for example, have a similarity with goods, in the mind of the consumer. Consumer education is therefore a necessary part of the marketing of our services and it is made more difficult by the fact that our drawings are, on the surface of things, the most tangible marker of our effort.

Marketing of services is, therefore, not the simple undertaking we might first imagine. Developing a marketing effort is, according to McMonigal, a challenging but manageable undertaking. You begin by giving serious consideration to a few simple questions.

- What are your goals? If your marketing program is successful, how would your life or business be different? Do you want to make a certain amount of money, have a certain volume of work, do a particular kind of work, have a particular reputation, achieve a particular recognition, or work with certain people? The answer should be specific and unique to you.
- What is your image? How would you characterize yourself or your firm? Are you artistic, methodical, attentive, self-effacing, confident, broadly skilled, tightly focused, a specialist in a particular area, reliable, efficient, expensive or client driven? Consider whether there is any difference between how you see yourself or your firm, how others see you or your firm, and how you want to be seen. What do you have/want to sell? Your image is your identity. It must be believable and genuine.
- Who are your clients? Where do they live/work, what do they earn, what are their values, what are their attitudes, and why do they hire you and not someone else? Can you achieve your goals working with the clients you have? How do you meet your clients and gain their confidence? Do they return for your services or make referrals to their friends? Are there client groups or types you want to bring into your client base? Who are they?
- What are your markets? Where do your services fit in? One way of describing your markets would be to list your client types. Another way is to consider what kind of services you provide. Do you offer drafting services, consulting services to other professionals, counseling to owner builders, full architectural services to homeowners who need to remodel, full services to people who want to build a new home, limited design services to housing developers, pre-design services to public agencies, site adaptation services to franchise owners, tenant improvements for businesses or one stop design-build services? Can you achieve your goals with the markets you have? Would other markets be a better fit or beneficial addition to your mix?
- What is your message? Some say that people buy benefits, not services. What benefits do you offer? In what way will your clients be better off having chosen to employ your services? Can you state it simply, in a way that is believable and inherently interesting?

McMonigal also related lessons learned from her marketing efforts with her 6 person architectural firm in Minneapolis. Here are a few highlights:

- No single advertisement, announcement or notable project brings work all by itself. Successful marketing is a fusion of many efforts--many opportunities to catch the attention of and impress potential clients.

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- Advertising has been an effective tool because the effort has been a consistent one over a period of several years. The size and cost of ads are scaled to allow an ongoing effort that is more effective than a single big splash.
 - Every person in the office has "marketing" explicitly stated in their job description. Marketing happens when anyone visits the office, and when anyone from the office sends something out, or goes out. At least two people attend client interviews. One person always hears something the other doesn't.
 - Residential clients have been better for referrals than repeat business. The firm has responded by seeking out commercial and public clients to broaden the firm's client base, to include those that can be a source of repeat business. Marketing of new clients is vastly more expensive than marketing of repeat clients. All clients making referrals receive a special thank you or gift.
 - Successful marketing requires the discipline to devote, without fail, a given amount of time each day, or each week to marketing. McMonigal makes no exception to the rule, even if the work load requires 70 hour workweeks on top of the marketing effort.
 - Marketing requires a commitment of resources normally in the range of 5-7 percent of gross receipts per year.

The Small Project Forum would like to compile a list of marketing resources. If you have found an especially useful publication or other resource that has assisted you in your marketing efforts, kindly forward the information to Rosemary McMonigal AIA, McMonigal Architects, 125 SE Main St., Suite 345, Minneapolis, MN 55414 or fax, (612) 331-1079. We will list the resources in our regular newsletter.

The Second Annual Small Project Forum Brochure Exchange

Marketing may be a known area of interest for Small Project Forum members, but so is fellowship. For the second year we have combined the two in an informal reception and review of marketing materials. Ellen Flynn-Heapes and Ray Kogan of Flynn Heapes/Kogan, Alexandria, Va. (703) 838-8080, provided the professional marketing expertise, also for the second year running. In addition to the good cheer and libations, several of us also had an opportunity to sit down with a couple of marketing professionals who specialize in marketing of professional services. Here are a few of their comments based on what they saw:

- The most successful promotional materials speak to the clients interests and show an understanding of them. Architects sometimes "speak" to their potential clients as if they were other architects!
- If you are going to use photographs of your work in your marketing materials, bite the bullet and have the work professionally photographed--the difference is that significant. Expect to pay \$700-\$1000/day plus expenses.
- If you have differing client types, tailor the design of your marketing materials to allow you to adjust them for each client type. If your clients want shopping centers, show them retail, not churches. A brochure packet with insertable materials is a good way to do this.

By all accounts this was an enjoyable and informative gathering with guests from California, Texas, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Tennessee and some areas we can't mention. Hope to see you next year in Minneapolis for our third annual event.

**Call for Small Project
Submittals**

Also stopping in for a visit at the Brochure Exchange were *Architectural Record's* Stephen R. Lkiment, FAIA, editor in chief, and Charles K. Hoyt, AIA, senior editor. Hoyt AIA has requested submittals of small projects for publication in *Record*. He is interested in finding and reviewing small projects that you feel have something unique to tell their readers. Please submit a written project description, floor plan and slides to him at the address noted below. Feel free to call him with any questions.

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