The Secret Value-Add to Your Project Team: You!

By Scott D. Butcher, FSMPS, CPSM

The role of professional services marketing continues to evolve, from not even being a “thing” until the 1970s (with marketing being illegal or a violation of professional societies’ codes of ethics) through the present-day integration of traditional and digital marketing with increasing roles in talent recruitment and retention.

Unfortunately, too many A/E/C marketers still hear themselves referred to as “overhead” by their billable coworkers. At the same time, many of these technical professionals complain that they are viewed as a commodity by clients and prospective clients.

What if there was a way to differentiate your firm—and specifically your project teams—while also moving beyond the perception of marketers as being overhead and all A/E/C firms being equal?

There is, and it’s been right under everyone’s noses all along!

A design and construction team is a sophisticated operation with many moving parts. And clients increasingly demand more for less, squeezing profitability and too often basing decisions purely on price.

Many clients, however, have needs that go far beyond traditional design and construction services. This creates an opportunity for marketing professionals to plug into project teams, perhaps gaining billable hours in the process or, at minimum, serving as a value-add for the project team’s offerings.

Mandy Arnold wears many hats. She’s the owner of Gavin™, a digital public relations and marketing agency in York, PA, that works with a variety of clients, including A/E/C. She also serves on the board of directors for the York County Industrial Development Authority (YCIDA), an organization in the midst of a $35 million hotel redevelopment. From this perspective, she sits on the client side, commissioning design and construction services.

Arnold recently shared her insight at an SMPS Central Pennsylvania panel discussion about how A/E/C firms are working with clients to drive project communications via social media. “If you want to stand out at the proposal or presentation stage,” she states, “demonstrate that you can add value by helping the client with project messaging and communications. Even if your client has a large marketing group, most likely a construction project is beyond their scope of understanding. Work with them to provide content and continually drive project communications to the stakeholders and the public.”

The Expanding Role of Marketers

There are many ways that marketing professionals can enhance your project teams. You can:

- Provide content for client social media, eblasts, and newsletters
- Conduct market research for the project
Help the client plan and manage events
Write or ghost write op-eds for the newspaper
Assist the client with media relations
Develop project presentations and videos
Prepare project talking points and value messages
Serve as project photographer/videographer
Manage components of the project that are beyond a typical design and construction project
Develop project graphics and signage
Create a project website to inform stakeholders
Serve as spokesperson for the project
Facilitate stakeholder meetings or community charrettes

There are countless ways that you can plug into projects. This won’t apply to every project, and somewhat depends upon the client’s in-house capabilities. Arnold recommends that A/E/C firms promote these expanded capabilities from the beginning of the conversation, include the marketing value-add during the proposal stage, and reinforce it at the project interview.

“Projects are becoming increasingly challenging, with more and more community and stakeholder interest with the outcomes of a project and the effect on their interests. Whether it’s traffic, use of public funding, historical assets or perception of correct use of an asset, communications strategies have quickly risen to the top in conversations during the bid process. That means a competitive advantage may be offered if marketing and communications is leveraged appropriately,” says Arnold.

She believes that newer marketing and public relations tools have created these opportunities for marketing professionals to increase their value during the project pursuit. “However, I’m always surprised with how few firms view it this way. There’s an enormous market opportunity here, especially when points of differentiation are key for the win.”

The vision of SMPS is “Business transformed through marketing leadership,” and by leveraging your marketing skills as a key member of project teams, you can help transform your business and gain new project commissions.

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