



Architectural Photography in the Marketer's Toolkit

By Michele Spiewak

Photography can be the most compelling part of your marketing and PR campaigns, and often a large part of the marketing budget for architecture firms. How can you best leverage this investment to showcase your firm's work? At a recent SMPS Boston-sponsored session at ArchitectureBoston Expo (ABX), a panel of experts discussed the importance of high-quality photography in architectural marketing and provided tips and tricks for working with a professional architectural photographer.

Robert Benson, an architectural photographer with 20 years of experience, Wendy Benson, studio manager at Robert Benson Photography, and Jennifer D. Wells, vice president of brand strategy at Shepley Bulfinch, participated in the panel moderated by Rhino PR's Susan Shelby, FSMPS, CPSM. Below are some tips and best practices from the session.

The Marketer's Role

Part of a marketer's job is to track completed projects, determine which projects to photograph, and secure photos that support the firm's marketing objectives. Will the photos be used for printed marketing collateral? Will there be digital uses like the website and social media? Will photography be needed for award submissions and public relations? Will it be used in client interviews and meetings? Identifying marketing usage before scheduling a photo shoot goes a long way to capturing the shots you really need.

Professional photographers are busy and often booked months in advance. It's helpful to develop relationships with several photographers, so you have choices when scheduling gets tight. Photographers like to hear about a potential photo shoot ahead of the project's

completion, ideally six to eight weeks, so they can hold time on their calendar.

Before the call is made to the photographer, the marketer should meet with the design team to confirm the project is ready for photography and understand the design story you're telling through the photography. The project team is always eager to get photos, but sometimes their idea of a project being done does not equate to photo-ready. Ask questions and have the design team take photos on their phones so you can get a sense of good shots.

To help the photographer translate the design story into photography, learn about the design concept and programmatic elements of interest. Create a shot list to share with the photographer and determine if props are needed. Contact the client for permission and help with coordination. For clients, there's usually enthusiasm and willingness to work with the architect on a photo shoot. Setting expectations with the client for what's involved will ensure the photo shoot is a success.

If you're working with a new photographer or planning a complex shoot, the marketer should provide sufficient information to ask the photographer for a cost estimate. A photographer's proposal usually consists of fees, expenses, cost sharing, licensing, and copyrights, and it's easier to give an estimate of time and price when specifics for the photo shoot are known. Before you hire a photographer, ask about your options for selecting and editing photos, and confirm that the photographer carries sufficient insurance in case of damage or injury during the photo shoot.

Project team members will often share the cost of photography, an arrangement that requires planning for licensing and usage rights of photos. The value of a body of work is determined by how the images will be used, and most





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licensing agreements are written for design firms. However, licenses can be customized to suit a firm's marketing needs. When soliciting participation by the project team, share the photographer's license and usage rights with all parties before the shoot takes place.

The Photo Shoot and Post-Production

A photo shoot can be intrusive to a client, especially if the space is occupied. If so, bring models to stage in the shots and remove personal belongings within the photo frame. It's helpful if the client can provide a furniture plan, as well as be available to assist with building access and override lighting controls and motorized shades, if necessary.

On location for the shoot, the marketer's role is to facilitate the creative and logistical process for the photographer and minimize inconveniences for the client. Bring cell phone numbers for everyone involved, including the facility manager, and assist with directing shots, moving furniture, and ordering lunch.

Upon arrival, the photographer will ask to walk through the space with

a well-informed marketing person or designer and query them on the project's design story. An experienced photographer will know what to shoot and what not to shoot. Knowing how the client intends to use the images will inform how the shoot is approached.

Like other professional services providers, there is a diversity of workstyles and production practices among photographers, so be sure you're comfortable with the photographer you choose. Understand your photographer's post-production workflow: Can you select the images? Do you have input during the editing process? How many rounds of editing? For example, "visual clutter" like outlets, smoke detectors, and exit signs may be edited out during the post-production process. Panoramic photos and spaces with people can be created using a composite of shots. On average, a photographer can spend three days doing post-production work for each day spent at a photo shoot. There is no industry standard for post-production, so workflow and deliverables vary widely by photographer.

Remember to refer to the photographer's licensing agreement when sending

photos to publications or posting photos to a website or social media. Be sure to always give proper photo credit for all photos. Photographers care about clients getting recognition for their projects, but they also want credit for the photo work they have done.

What's the Value of a Photo Shoot?

Architects and designers may have worked on a project for years, but they often have no idea how to photograph it. Architects are trained to think in 3D, whereas photographers know how to interpret a space or building in 2D. Architectural photographers provide a visual narrative to help architects tell the design story of their projects, and the resulting set of high-quality images can be presented to convey theme, sustainability, materials selection, collaboration, and transparency.

So, what's the value in hiring a professional architectural photographer to shoot your next project? Is it the quality of the images, or maybe number of shots? Beyond thoughtful lighting and composition, a good photo makes a viewer think "I want to be there" or "I can see myself working there." It takes experience and a trained eye to capture that photo. ■