

Social Media in A/E/C

Make a Good First Impression

By Sherilyn Tkacz



In a pre-COVID proposal kickoff meeting, a firm principal said, “Can you all please make sure your LinkedIn profiles are up to date? Clients have been checking these recently.” This was the same principal to whom, six months prior, I was explaining what a podcast was. A year earlier, I had to convince them that writing a blog was worth their time. Why the shift? Not because I’m an extremely persuasive individual, but because I finally had proof that social media works in the A/E/C industries. That proof was in the money.

One of our newer clients told us they had been following our social media (as well as that of our competitors) for several years before deciding to hire us. They were impressed by our content, and it was a contributing factor in their decision. We’d devoted a lot of time building a relationship with this particular client, but I’d never considered they were spending as much time researching and evaluating us. But it makes sense that potential clients judge us based on our social media. A client can call your references, but they know you’re giving references who will give you a positive review. Social media is a virtual manifestation of a firm in 280 characters or fewer. Good social media helps you make a good first impression.

Likewise, recruiting new employees is an often-unseen benefit to good social media. The A/E/C industries still struggle with a limited pool of qualified candidates. Having the right people on your team strengthens your client base and bottom line. Perhaps these new employees will bring their existing clients or specialized experience to help you enter new markets. Either way, potential employees investigate you long before they even apply for a job. Posts

that show a firm working on interesting projects and employees enjoying the company culture are major attention-grabbers for anyone considering a job change.

Social media, whether about your projects or your personnel, is a continuous avenue and a highlight reel with which to impress potential clients and employees. It’s the very definition of pre-positioning—and a much less costly version of traditional business development. In today’s virtual climate, social media becomes more important than ever.

Quality Over Quantity

The general approach to social media is the more likes, the better. If your social media goal is to reach a broad audience, this remains true. However, if you want to reach specific clients (whether existing or potential) or job candidates, a more accurate metric is quality over quantity. Much like tailoring a proposal to meet a specific client’s needs, social media can be tailored to attract new clients, employees, or business. Here are five tips to create social media that’s targeted and intentional.

- 1. Create a living calendar.** Start by identifying target clients and/or projects. Identify potential meetings, speaking engagements, and proposals. Add holidays and special occasions (e.g., Engineers Week, Pi Day, your company’s anniversary). Lay out a plan for the year and keep adding to it as you discover more opportunities to promote. Get input from and keep an open line of communication with your technical staff and business development teams. They’ll be your most valuable resources for developing a calendar that accurately captures goals.
- 2. Select an editor.** You need a gatekeeper, someone to maintain aesthetic and content consistency. This person keeps you on brand—a well-used phrase, but one that’s especially important here. Your social media should have a point of view that’s an extension of your brand’s, which is reflected in larger marketing plans and campaigns. Decide what viewpoint you want to project and task your editor with making sure that image is woven into all content.
- 3. Identify themes.** Look at your calendar and projects to create themes. Is Earth Day coming up? This could be an opportunity to position the company as experts on sustainability. Proposing on a large bridge project? A week of completed bridge project images it is! But you also have to ensure themes don’t



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seem forced. For example, create a larger theme that highlights your departments or practices over a longer stretch of time. Maybe it becomes a month of “Celebrating Us” that frames your firm’s anniversary, with that bridge week just happening to fall at the same time the proposal is due.

4. Focus on people, people, people. We all like to believe that our company is unique, that only we have the solutions. But the truth is, in any good free market there’s a lot of choice. Focus on what makes your company special—your people. Your employees/coworkers are your strongest selling point, so celebrate them. Have them take photos in the field and send them to your editor. Tell the world when they’re speaking or attending events. Highlight personal milestones and causes, with permission, of course. We hear it time and time again: People want to work with people they know and trust. Focusing on your team creates positive familiarity with these faces before a client meeting or interview occurs.

5. Project authenticity. When it comes to winning work and creating client relationships, sometimes what you don’t post is just as important as what you do. When something is artificial or forced, it’s obvious. For example, don’t change your firm’s logo to match a social or political movement if this isn’t something you always support. Basically, don’t jump on a bandwagon just to try to get press. This generally backfires and can be offensive; the internet is littered with commentary about companies that have failed in an effort to appear current. Support and celebrate what aligns with your company and do it throughout the year, not just on one day.



Edith Green-Wendell Wyatt Federal Building, Portland, OR. Reinvention by Cutler Anderson Architects, SERA Architects, and RDH Building Science; Original design by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. @cherylmcintoshphotography | greatthingsaredone.com.

📸 Story Behind the Picture | Before it was a newsworthy location in Portland, OR, the Edith Green-Wendell Wyatt building was considered a landmark, in part due to its sustainable design, slanted roof, and façade of reedlike aluminum screens, which host a wall of crawling ivy.



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Even if you use these tips to create great social media campaigns, showing the correlation between marketing and the bottom line is always challenging. And every marketing professional with whom I’ve ever spoken feels the pressure of time—it’s a constant companion to our jobs. It can be difficult to dedicate time to something that seems extra, so leverage social media wisely.

Think about social media as the driver to engagement with your firm. Be sure your messages contain specific calls to action, whether it’s visiting a specific area of your website, filling out a job application, or participating in other lead-generating activities. That way social media doesn’t feel like an outlier—it becomes a vital part of your overall marketing strategy.

When it comes down to triaging work, logic dictates that the company will absolutely lose a project if it doesn’t get a proposal in on time. But it won’t lose a project if an Instagram Story doesn’t get posted. While this is a valid point, there’s a flaw in this logic. Not winning is, essentially, the same as losing. Look at social media as a way to increase your win rate by proactively trying to reach new clients and markets with targeted and intentional posts. ■