

Cultivating a Marketing Culture

Business Development Best Practices Series

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Within the architecture, engineering and construction industry it is not uncommon for many firms to experience a disconnect when it comes to understanding the value of marketing. It is no surprise since the majority of firms are made up of technical individuals who are doing what they do best – designing and constructing the built world around them, not selling marketing services. In many cases, the firm's leaders are individuals who have risen through the ranks of their trade, but have had little time to invest in learning how to effectively market their firms. As a result, the culture is one that reflects this lack of understanding and marketing can end up being an afterthought or a reactionary response to proposal needs, as opposed to a thoughtful and strategic business tool. This can leave marketing professionals who are passionate about what they do feeling discouraged and powerless to influence their firms for the better.

Before we set out to demystify marketing and transform the culture around us we must have the proper perspective and set realistic expectations. Choose to be in it for the long haul and committed to making things happen. At times, you may feel outnumbered and easily misunderstood, but be willing to press through the noise and naysayers and stand on the value that you know you can bring. It will take a lot of perseverance and patience, but have the mindset of a farmer who works diligently tilling the soil, planting the seeds and then waiting patiently for the harvest. In due time, you will see the success of your labors.

The following is some practical insights on how you can begin to grow and develop a culture where marketing is not only respected but embraced.

Start at the Top – Find Your Marketing Champion

As marketers, we all have great ideas on how we can help take our firms to the next level. But unless the key decision makers are behind it, how are you going to turn those ideas into a reality? If we are not in a management position already how do we influence and have our voices heard? The key is finding your internal marketing champion. Is there someone that believes in what you do and who also has influence? If so, start there - invest in and develop that relationship. Ideally, this person will be the one who is able to go to bat for you, one who can elevate your cause among the leaders and be your voice until you get a seat at the table.

Develop Relationships Internally – Engage Staff

Make it a priority to get to know and engage your technical staff. We tend to be so focused on developing and pursuing external client relationships that we overlook the importance of developing internal relationships first. Sit down over lunch or a cup of coffee, offer to tag along on a project site. Take the initiative to learn about their passions and why they do what they do. This will create an open door for dialogue and discussion. You will not only gain greater understanding of them and their roles, but you will also be able to confront and dislodge their misconceptions about marketing.

Grow Your Network and Surround Yourself with Like-Minded Professionals

We cannot do this alone. It's vitally important that you connect with other like-minded individuals who serve in the same capacity at other firms.

Oftentimes, the marketing department consists of a one person show or at best a very small team. This can limit your resources not to mention result in stagnant professional growth. Iron sharpens iron. Whether it be finding a mentor or getting involved in a professional organization, get out there, get involved and make as many connections as you can. You will not only have access to unlimited resources to help you grow in your profession, but the relationships formed will help to be a support system for you along your journey. You will also learn industry trends, best practices and an invaluable amount of information to take back and invest in your firm.

Educate & Advocate – Position Yourself as an Internal Marketing Thought Leader

Now is the time to use your knowledge and resources to strategically position yourself as an internal marketing thought leader. Take every opportunity to educate and advocate. Explain the benefits of how marketing can help move the company forward. Are there weekly, monthly or yearly company leadership meetings where you might be able to have a few minutes to present? Perhaps you could develop a series of lunch-and-learns around various topics that your staff might find useful or informative. Don't forget to do your research and be able to back up your claims. Technical people like numbers and hard data, so when you can use tangible evidence such as whitepapers, case studies and ROI metrics to support your cause.

Offer Marketing Solutions to Company Challenges

Once you have nurtured the soil and planted the seeds be proactive in looking for company challenges where you might be able to apply marketing solutions. Don't wait for opportunities to come to you, but be attentive to the needs of the organization. If you don't have a budget you may have to get creative and offer solutions that require minimal investment at first. Do you have a poor win/lose ratio when it comes to project opportunities? Develop and suggest an official go/ no-go policy. If you've noticed that sales are lagging with your existing client base offer to give lunchtime business development seminars for project managers. Are your proposals slacking? Suggest hiring a part-time graphic design intern to help streamline and update. The possibilities are endless.

When cultivating a culture of marketing, you will no doubt encounter roadblocks, but don't let that deter you. Over time, you will begin to see areas of success and momentum.

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