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MARKETING FOR

TALENT

THE NEXT FRONTIER

BY MARJANNE PEARSON AND MIKE PLOTNICK

For four decades, A/E/C marketers have led the pursuit for clients and opportunities so our firms can do their best work. We have served as cheerleaders and managers, communicators and practice builders, consultants and owners, collaborators and catalysts. We have embraced the notion that the more effectively we can position our firms, the more successful they will ultimately be.

As strategic leaders, we also recognize the role of talent as a key building block for a successful practice. Beyond securing the right clients, we also need to help our firms attract and retain the professionals who can effectively deliver the expertise that we are selling.

The responsibility for developing and retaining talent within A/E/C firms is typically shared by practice leaders and human resources (HR) management. Practice leaders are tasked with creating knowledge and intellectual capital, as well as staffing and utilization. HR is responsible for the framework of employment—policies, procedures, guidelines, compensation, and benefits—as well as talent development and training. Working together, they collaborate on recruiting, and in most firms, HR leads the recruiting process, and practice leadership oversees qualification and selection.

Today, as marketing responsibilities continue to broaden and become more complex, it's time for A/E/C marketers to take a leadership role in shaping the future of our firms by actively engaging in the pursuit of talent.

Luckily, we've already done much of the heavy lifting. The A/E/C profession has always understood the power of content marketing¹—creating and sharing media and publishing content to reach potential customers. For more than a century, our built work and published projects have drawn potential clients and employees to our firms. Even before most firms had marketing departments, they actively submitted projects for awards, published brochures and monographs, and wrote articles and presented at conferences, thereby positioning themselves as experts.

Within the last 20 years, we began to incorporate new techniques and technology to spread the word. With our help, our firms have developed dynamic web sites and communications programs to promote thought leadership, while people at all levels and disciplines have become more comfortable with networking, connecting, and building relationships with others.

Now is the time for us to raise the bar on marketing for talent.

A/E/C firms are social businesses², not in the traditional sense of being established to address a social problem, but in the newer model—organizations that are deeply integrating social media and social methodologies throughout the company to drive real business impact. As A/E/C marketers, we are naturally focused on connecting with our internal and external audiences. We understand how the various parts of our firm work together to create a more powerful, integrated organization. We know how to collaborate with practice and management leaders to enhance our firm's overall platform of practice. We excel at articulating our firm's distinctive identity. We consistently promote our firm and communicate its culture. We continually develop content and use existing and emerging platforms to reach specific audiences.

And we are increasingly taking advantage of inbound marketing³, a term originally coined by Brian Halligan of HubSpot to describe efforts that ultimately serve to bring customers closer to the brand. These activities complement—and, in some cases, outperform—the traditional outbound marketing activities of generating leads through cold calling, trade shows, or advertising.

How can we leverage our skills, expertise, and potential to attract and nurture the best people to work in and lead our firms?

Attract, Engage, Connect

What drives our clients? It's not always better—faster—cheaper. We understand that we are able to craft value propositions to resonate with clients in specific markets and locations. In the talent business, it's important to understand the components of our value propositions as well.

Traditionally, the key motivation factors that drive people (especially knowledge workers) are:

- Interest in the work itself
- Opportunity for growth
- Sense of accomplishment
- Earned recognition

In *Drive*, Daniel H. Pink further explains that most of us are energized by three fundamental things: autonomy (the freedom to direct our lives), mastery (our craving to excel), and purpose (the yearning for our work to serve something larger than ourselves).

Motivation is personal. In addition to motivation, there's another element—generational influences. Which generations⁴ are you targeting with your marketing and communications programs? For years, our clients have been primarily Baby Boomers and Gen X. As the new technology businesses emerged, we started working with Gen Y (Millennials) clients. Today, Baby Boomers are retiring, and Gen X is less than 20 percent of the total adult population. The tech-savvy Millennials are not only our newest employees, but they are actively moving into leadership positions in our firms and in client firms.

PEOPLE ARE THE NEW BLACK

Until recently, visitors to most A/E/C firm web sites might come to the conclusion that the stunning buildings they viewed had designed and built themselves. That's because the static, sterile project images that populated most home pages served as artistic objects to admire rather than as inhabitable spaces created by people and for people.

Deliberately missing was any sense of a human presence.

Gradually, this online portfolio approach to positioning a firm has given way to a more people-inclusive attitude. In most cases, the beautiful project images continue to lead the conversation, but they are no longer disconnected from the teams and individuals who bring these environments to life. People are continuing to escape from the back corners of a careers page and take up residence throughout all sections of a site.

"Clients hire people, not firms," says John Gilmore, vice president and senior writer at HOK. "Featuring people is important on a web site, because in the end it's the people, not the firm, that they will be working with."

This enlightened perspective also reflects the recognition that potential employees are increasingly interested in learning about the work environment and culture of a potential employer before they will even consider coming onboard. But convincing a firm's leadership to embrace the idea of showcasing people requires busting the traditional HR concern that doing so would make the firm vulnerable to recruiters and competitors eager to hire them away.

"We have gotten beyond the phobia of featuring our people on our web site," says Ed Dodge, vice president and director of human resources at SmithGroupJJR. "We figure if we take good care of them, pay them fairly, treat them well, and offer flexibility, they'll stay. And our turnover has stayed steady throughout that culture shift."

Implementing a people-rich web strategy may require devoting a larger percentage of the marketing budget to commissioning professional people photos. Having an extensive library of engaging people shots—especially candid pictures of teams interacting and having fun together—is particularly helpful for showcasing a firm's culture and thought leadership within broader online news and social communities.

This approach also acknowledges the reality that potential employees—and clients—have numerous opportunities to learn about a firm outside the confines of its formal web site. That's why the new generation of web platforms supports and enables the many possible ways in which individuals may visit, interact with, and click from a web site to other online communities.

Millennials are mobile. Anything less is out of date and has serious potential to turn them off. A recent survey conducted by Glassdoor.com⁵ found that 89 percent of job seekers say their mobile device is an important tool for their job search. Twenty-five percent would not apply to a job if a company's career site is not mobile-optimized. Ten percent use the mobile device during an interview to show off technical skills and past achievements.

Millennials are not only digital natives, but they are peer-oriented and globally concerned.⁶ They trust the opinions of people they know. They tend to be inclusive and welcome diversity, they have been actively involved in community service and seek others who support social responsibility, and they are green. They are the ones who got the rest of us to be mindful about the environment, cutting up those plastic six-pack holders and reducing waste. They aren't going to expect anything less from their employers or the A/E/C firms with whom they work.

These are themes that we can use to strategic advantage in our efforts to attract, engage, and connect with internal and external audiences in a way that will develop and reinforce the pipeline of relationships that we want to build business and market for talent. **m**



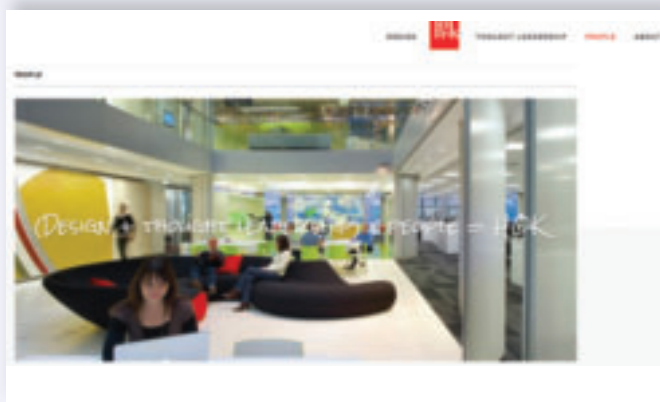
The Perkins+Will home page uses a themed message (social responsibility) tied to an award-winning project, as well as modules highlighting people, connecting, and recognition.

Footnotes:

- 1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Content_marketing
- 2 <http://www.altimetergroup.com/research/reports/evolution-social-business>
- 3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inbound_marketing
- 4 Baby Boomers (50–69), Gen X (39–49), Millennials (22–37)
<http://captico.com/generations-online-in-2010-statistics/2010/12>
- 5 <http://www.globalrecruitingroundtable.com/2013/05/31/mobile-devices-will-be-the-most-common-way-people-search-for-jobs>
- 6 <http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Provost/Advance/Trowerpercent20Generationspercent20andpercent20Mentoring.pdf>

Here are a few examples of A/E/C firms that are demonstrating innovative people-marketing strategies:

Lifting the Cultural Veil: HOK



HOK turned lots of heads in 2008 when it launched Life at HOK, a corporate blog that featured ongoing contributions from the firm's employees around the world. Shunning the conventional practice of only showcasing a firm's senior-most designers publicly, HOK built a publishing platform to provide people at all levels the opportunity to share their perspectives and personality.

Intentionally raw and unvarnished by a singular corporate voice, Life at HOK was created to attract more quality candidates to the firm during a period when mid-level architects were scarce.

Now six years old, the blog influenced the design of HOK's current people-rich web site. "The positive reaction to seeing the people behind the projects did influence our direction in designing a site that connects projects more directly with the people who helped shape them," Gilmore says. "New employees constantly tell us that our blogs, videos, and social media presence were part of their decision to join the firm."

Crossing Continents: T.Y. Lin International

LinkedIn is helping T.Y. Lin International reach outside the walls of its web site to target potential employees in both the U.S. and Asia.

The global engineering firm is running two separate ad campaigns on the social networking platform. In the first five months since launching a "Follow Us" campaign, T.Y. Lin has attracted a 40 percent increase of followers to its branded company page. A separate "Work with Us" display ad, which appears on specific employee profiles, contributed to a 90 percent increase in unique visitors checking out specific job opportunities on the company's career page in the first month.

"We shifted some of our ad impressions to Asia a couple of months ago, and we've noticed a difference in visitors coming from Asia," says Maribel Castillo, associate vice president and director of corporate communications. "It's a good way to further establish a connection between our domestic and international operations."

T.Y. Lin's goal is to post LinkedIn updates at least 20 times a month, including significant content from overseas offices. The firm is also sharing more of its "internal" news externally. "For us, it's a cultural shift," Castillo says. "Our HR department has come a long way in terms of embracing digital and social media."

Taking People to New Places: SmithGroupJJR



Rather than tucking its employees neatly into the "People" section of its new web site, SmithGroupJJR has brought them front and center.

"One of our goals was to showcase the culture and personality of the firm," says Susan Arneson, SmithGroupJJR vice president and corporate marketing director. "We put a lot of effort into creating a site for sharing our culture, not only with clients but also with potential employees."

The site actively highlights the expertise, personalities, and interests of its employees, both within and beyond the workplace. Not only can you search for individuals by role and expertise, but you can also sort for those who identify themselves as a "Bookworm," "Foodie," "Sports Nut," or "World Traveler." When you mouse over a person's professional headshot, it reveals their non-work mode—perhaps kayaking on a lake, shooting hoops, or pushing a child on a swing.

"Marketing the firm to clients is our first priority, but a very, very close second is communicating to prospective staff as well as our current staff," Arneson says.

Leveraging Third-Party Recognition: DPR Construction



Earning a coveted spot on FORTUNE's "Best Companies to Work For" ranking for five consecutive years can hardly be considered a fluke. In fact, it requires several weeks of intensive, coordinated work by DPR Construction's marketing and HR teams each year.

A combination of quantitative data and open-ended questions are part of the extensive application process, which also involves an anonymous employee satisfaction survey and a culture audit.

The firm initially decided to pursue the accolade as a way to showcase its unique culture among its peers. DPR cracked the top 10 for the first time in the 2014 ranking, sharing that exclusive tier with such powerhouse brands as Google, Genentech, and Salesforce.com.

The firm leverages its ranking and culture prominently in marketing and HR materials as well as at job sites. "The third-party validation is both a great marketing tool and a great HR tool," says Yumi Clevenger, of DPR Construction's national marketing team. "Everyone has a role in recruiting."

ADVANCING YOUR TALENT STRATEGY

Here are some ways that Marketing and HR can work together to elevate your firm's inbound recruiting efforts:

- **Create a great tagline.** Google's career web site encourages visitors to "Do cool things that matter." Not surprisingly, it's cool graphically, too.
- **Have fun with video.** The Dallas office of Perkins + Will filmed Fitness Friday 2014. It's posted on YouTube and is also featured on the firm's Ideas+Buildings blog. According to chief talent officer Meg Brown, the video has generated a lot of interest from job applicants. [We love "CBT Delivers" on YouTube, too.]
- **Write great ad copy.** Yes, there are important legal issues to consider in recruiting and hiring, but there's no reason why job postings need to be blah. The MulvannyG2 career site—Want to Work Here?—draws visitors in with, "Imagine the job of a lifetime. Now, open your eyes—it's all right here...."
- **Promote your talent message.** Seek new places to include your talent tagline—the back of business cards, email signature lines, social media accounts, white papers, YouTube, and more.
- **Reinforce motivational themes.** Find opportunities to strengthen the messages that resonate with employees and potential employees—opportunity, accomplishment, recognition, purpose, social responsibility, and sustainable design.
- **Create targeted publications.** Known for excellence in marketing communications, Gensler has done it again with Gensler's Student + Graduate Career Guide—a PDF available for download on the firm's Careers web page.
- **Rethink your web site.** First, have up-to-date information and images. Second, go mobile. Third, make talent a priority. Kudos to Jacobs Engineering Group. Not only do they have "Join Us" as the first tab in the main navigation menu, but "Apply for a job" is in the footer. Throughout the web site, their photos emphasize diversity, including many featuring women professionals.
- **Start a conversation.** It's not enough to collect applications in a database. Just as firms need effective marketers, they need talent spotters who will open the door to building relationships with people who might become your next generation of leaders. **m**

About the Authors



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