

Chapter 1 – Marketing

Lesson 1: Content Marketing

“Sometimes referred to as education-based marketing, inbound marketing, or thought leadership marketing, the idea behind content marketing is to provide interesting, useful information – aka ‘content’ – to your target audience.” (Scott D. Butcher, FSMPS, CPSM, www.aecumen.com)¹

With the advent of the internet, accompanied by the information age, there has come content marketing. Now content marketing is nothing new. Before the information age, presenting at a conference, writing an article or whitepaper, or contributing to a panel discussion were all the same concepts. You share your expertise and knowledge with others to generate interest in hiring you to perform architecture, engineering, or construction services. This is the essence of good content marketing. But now there is a much larger and more consistent platform from which to share your expertise and knowledge.

A brief story will illustrate the power of content marketing. The window regulator broke in my car door causing the window to stay open permanently. I needed to fix it but did not want to pay for expensive body shop labor. I went to YouTube and searched for a ‘how-to’ video to

replace my window regulator. The body shop expert demonstrated step-by-step how to complete this easy repair. In the process, he recommended the best places to buy a quality replacement part online or in a local auto parts store. After reviewing several options, I purchased the part online. I then watched the video as I replaced the regulator, saving myself several hundred dollars.

I made a purchase decision based on the online know-how of a body shop expert who posted a 'how-to' video on YouTube. While engineering services are much more complex and expensive, the same strategy applies. Utilizing social media channels, blogs, infographics, ebooks, and more, engineers can demonstrate their expertise and position themselves as leading experts in their fields.

The primary objection to content or thought leadership marketing is that A/E/C professionals do not like to give away their ideas, tactics, or methods for free. While this is of concern, there is a right way and wrong way to deliver good content.

The wrong way is to share trade secrets or specific processes that differentiate your services from your competitors. This is content I believe should be reserved for paying clients. However, there are many topics on which you can deliver value without compromising your ability to bill for your services. And I promise that for every professional who stands in front of an audience or delivers a quick video online about something that everyone in her profession does, dozens of others will not. This is the secret to successful content marketing. If you are delivering something of value that very few, if any, of your competitors are delivering, you have automatically differentiated yourself as the expert on that topic.

You also need to look at this from the perspective of the

professional who is not utilizing content marketing. If you are one of the dozens of 'other' professionals who are not delivering anything of value to clients and prospects for free, you have successfully identified yourself as 'just another engineer.' You've given no reason for someone to consider your services or trust you with their project. They will likely go to the guy who helped them solve something small from a video they saw on LinkedIn.

Challenge

If you are not utilizing content marketing, start small. Get active on LinkedIn and start posting things you are passionate about in your job. It doesn't have to be original content from your brain. You can deliver good stuff from others (non-competitors), and still be received as someone who can help. Set a goal to propose educational content at a professional association conference next year. Offer to write a piece as a guest to blogs you follow. Do something to get noticed for your expertise by giving little pieces of it away in the right places.

Lesson 2: Marketing 2022 Highlights

A recent survey conducted by the Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) Foundation revealed some interesting trends and forecasts in A/E/C marketing. Marketing 2022² is a survey exploring current and future A/E/C marketing practices. There were 330 responses to the SMPS survey in the first quarter 2019. Of the 330 responses, 29% were from engineering firms, 22% construction, 16% architecture, 18% architecture/engineering, 12% other, and 3% geotechnical or environmental. Here are some of the more interesting results.

- The top five marketing approaches predicted by 2022 are:

- **Client Experience:** Ongoing activities for engaging clients and collecting feedback—then reacting to that feedback as appropriate.
 - **Networking:** Engaging in events, trade shows, and similar business gatherings to build and maintain professional relationships from which to give and receive referrals.
 - **Thought Leadership:** Various methods of providing insight into the talents and knowledge base of your organization (presentations, blogging, publishing, whitepapers, webinars, etc.)
 - **Branding:** The set of experiences, memories, stories, and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to choose one firm over another.
 - **Content Marketing:** Closely aligned with thought leadership, education-based content delivered to increase awareness, consideration, and decision phases of the buying process.
- 70% of respondents stated they believe competition will increase over the next three years. This is a wake-up call that a new norm is in the industries; price pressures will continue.
- 70% of survey participants noted that their firms are currently utilizing **Thought Leadership Marketing**. By 2022, 80% believe their firms will be utilizing this approach.
- Only 18% of firms represented in the survey currently have an in-place **Client Experience Strategy**, and yet, Client Experience was projected to become the top marketing approach by 2022. **Note: Clients are no longer handing work directly to design firms. Instead, they're increasingly requiring three proposals, or even going*

through a drawn-out prequalification process, and then asking the prequalified firms in their database to submit proposals.

- The easiest sale to make is an existing service to an existing client. The most difficult service to sell is a new service to a new client.
- Firms who value their relationships and place a high level of emphasis on enhancing the quality of their client interactions will experience growth and lead the way in **Client Experience Marketing**.
- Roughly 61% of firms who have not refreshed their **Branding** in the past three years, plan to do so over the next three years.
 - Related to the firm's **Branding**, a **Personal Brand** is the perception a person has of an individual within the firm. Much like the mid-20th century architect or engineer-of-record, a professional's **Personal Brand** is becoming more important and effective in winning work.
 - **Personal Brands** are becoming more effective because of the rise in **Social Media Networking** and **Thought Leadership Marketing** delivered by videos, webinars, articles, and the like via social media and websites.

Additional topics addressed in the survey included podcasting, video marketing, corporate culture, account-based marketing, personal selling, proposal automation, lead generating websites, client relationship management (CRM) software, marketing, and business development top skills.

For me, the biggest takeaways from this research were the heavy emphasis on thought leadership/content marketing

and the rise in client experience as a major focus for retaining and growing clients. In both areas, interactions with the client are placed at a high priority. What this tells me is that clients are desiring more interaction and collaboration with architects, engineers, and contractors.

We are not too many decades removed from the time in this industry when A/E/C professionals were hired and then left alone to put their brilliance to work designing and building. Once they completed their tasks, the client was informed, and deliverables were delivered. But today's clients have become much more sophisticated. The abundance of connectivity online and ease of travel give clients the ability to expect more interaction and collaboration. They are no longer satisfied with an end product. They want to see how it's made, learn something, and have some input. Therefore, A/E/C professionals who up their client-relationship game by providing greater thought leadership and taking their clients on an enjoyable and educational journey will be winning most of the work.

Challenge

Considering the top five marketing approaches predicted for 2022, which of these five make the biggest impact on you and why? What are you going to do about it? Your challenge is to take at least one of these top five marketing approaches and implement something new or different in your firm. I chose to introduce a client survey program.

Lesson 3: Taking Marketing Photos

Many of you take construction site photos before, during, and after a project. Most of these photos are for purposes such as gathering site data, inspections, and closeouts. Sometimes, you may take a photo that accidentally is good

for marketing purposes. However, most of the photos have no marketing value. Here are some tips for taking good marketing photos while on a project site.

Quality

The first aspect to consider is the quality of the camera you are using. Most of you likely use your smartphone for project photos. While this is not ideal, it can be a good quality photo if you know how to use your smartphone camera appropriately. A few easy things to remember include;

- Do not use your zoom-in feature, which diminishes quality
- It's best to use the default photo setting
- In some smartphones, you can touch your screen in various sections to change the brightness settings as you see fit.

If you want to increase the quality of your photos, learn how to use a decent digital camera. Take some quick courses online or buy a photography 'how-to' book. However, the best camera is the one you have with you. Learn more about the tools you already have to get the best quality out of them.

Composition

Composing a great marketing photo is not as difficult as you may think. There are a few simple rules to composing a great photo.

- View your photo in thirds. This means looking at the view and adjusting it to capture three significant subjects in equal thirds (i.e., roadway, sky, trees).
- Look for unique and unconventional angles. Try to position yourself and your view at an angle typically not seen from the natural eye.

- Get as close to your subject as possible without losing the context. This takes some practice, but when you get it right you will know by the results.

Like any skill, composing a great photo takes practice. The good news is you have a digital camera on you at all times on your smartphone. You can practice all you want without wasting film.

Volume

Don't be afraid to take too many pictures. Because the photos are digital, you are not wasting film. Sometimes you must take eight or ten shots of the same subject to get one really great photo. That's fine. Whatever you take, be sure to save ALL the photos and share them with your marketing staff.

Depending on the project and its marketing value, your best decision may be to spend a little money and hire a professional photographer. If you do, make sure to hire a photographer who regularly shoots landscapes, buildings, and infrastructure. Be sure to ask to see some of their work. If they will let you, request to go on their shoot with them, and don't be afraid to share your ideas. It is also an opportunity for you to learn how to take better pictures.

Challenge

Take a half-day and go shoot several projects. Practice composing the pictures and taking them at different times of the day and in various weather patterns. Try looking for unique and fun perspectives. Review competitor websites and look for pictures and graphics that grab your attention. Study these and make note of how they are composed, what colors are popping, what is the perspective or angle.