

1 How has the marketing of engineering firms changed in the past decade?

The role of marketing has essentially remained the same—which is heavily focused on brand awareness—but the marketing vehicles are really what have changed. You've got the maturation of social media, and I would say that LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter in particular are the platforms that enable firms to market their services at a very low cost. There are email newsletters and electronic press releases as well, and robust websites with projects, company news, activities, white papers, and blogs that are crucial cogs in the marketing wheel.

Trade shows are still pretty prevalent, but it's no longer just a banner and somebody handing out business cards and stress balls with the company logo. You've got big, beautiful video displays and photos of projects along with brochures. Trade magazines and print materials are still readily available anywhere you go, but they are not as thick as they once were as most companies have taken their marketing digital.

2 What roles do social media play in marketing and branding? What are some of their most effective uses?

The reach of social media outlets is far and wide, and you've got to have the right people in place who understand how to use them. I'm not so sure that social media play an enormous direct role in generating new business for engineering firms, but it's really about overall awareness. Potential clients are able to see what firms are doing, and having them tied into your social media content can certainly keep your firm top of mind when a land developer, public agency, or architect may be in need of your services. Social media can also keep your own employees up to speed on what's going on within the organization and can lead to a higher level of employee engagement. They can also provide prospective employees a sneak peek at a company's clients, projects, and culture.

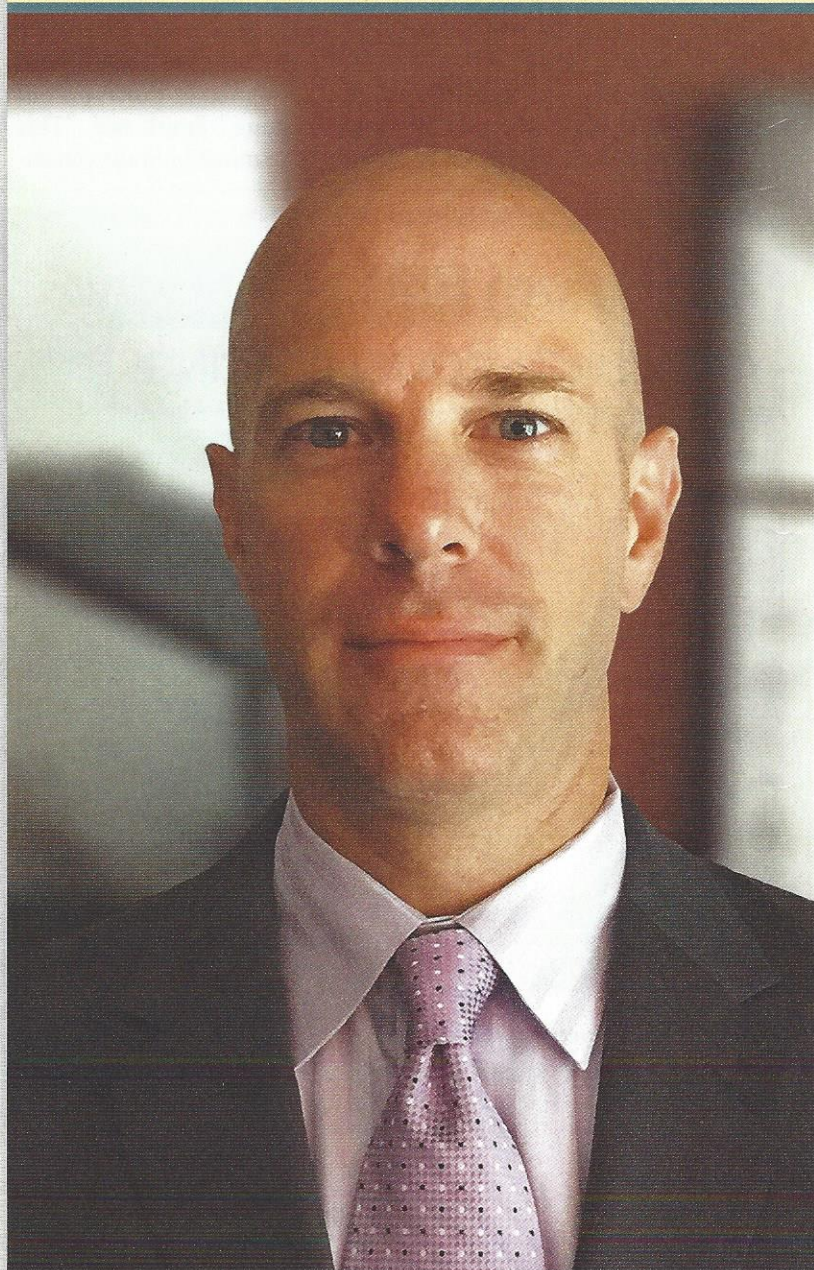
Some of the content that I think is most effective includes short videos highlighting projects, new technologies, or employee experiences. You can also make announcements of key hires and project wins or completions. Blogs that tell a story and establish a member of your organization as a thought leader are important as well.

Questions

WISDOM AND GUIDANCE FOR
SUCCESSFUL CAREER BUILDING

*An interview with Matt Barcus on new
marketing and branding strategies for civil
engineering* • • • • By DAVID HILL

Matt Barcus is the president of the civil engineering recruiting company Precision Executive Search, Inc., of Pottstown, Pennsylvania. He is also a managing partner of A/E/P Central, LLC, which runs the niche job website CivilEngineeringCentral.com.



3 Aside from highlighting its technical competence and performance record, how can a firm differentiate itself through marketing?

You are going to have a step up on the competition if you are able to get your sharpest, most driven, and most engaging employees out in front at different events on a regular basis. If they are not great presenters or communicators, then you want to provide training for them so that they are comfortable and confident in interacting with people. Great marketing in this respect leads to deeper, trusting relationships. More than having a fancy brochure or thousands of followers on Twitter, it's face-to-face marketing that will really lead to new clients and increased sales.

4 Who is responsible for crafting a marketing strategy? Should engineers be involved or should it be left to branding professionals?

My experience has been that most companies with 100 or more employees should have a marketing person or department. The marketing directors should absolutely be consulting with the company principals and leadership on a regular basis to discuss strategy, trends, and what company image they would like to portray. Once the marketing team has gathered that intelligence, it should be left to them to provide the deliverables.

For smaller firms or those working with limited budgets, the marketing and business development are often left to the principals or senior-level leadership. It's important for those key players to get regular face time with clients, and you also want to appeal to folks who might be looking in from the outside. A dedicated social media program and a current website with revolving content can be done pretty effectively on a small budget without spending too much time on them. You just have to be consistent and update on a regular basis, and you can also hire a marketing consultant from time to time to make sure that you are on track.

5 What balance should a company strike between directly marketing to particular clients and advertising to a wider audience?

Direct marketing to specific clients is key; you want to have a regularly updated list of potential clients and networking partners. Many firms report back to me that they are regularly receiving repeat business from at least 80 percent of their clients. You need to show these people that you have the capabilities to solve their problems. Sending a monthly email blast with project successes, showing up at networking events, and inviting people to open houses are all very important. It's about having a good understanding of your customers and what you can offer and not just going out and trying to grab anything that you can.

However, it's a good thing not to put all of your eggs in one basket. Workload can change on a dime, so the ability to market to a wider audience is also important. Even if you're not directly touching potential new clients all the time, the ability to at least be on their radar screen is imperative.

6 How often should a company be reassessing its marketing strategies? What performance indicators should it be reviewing?

Assessing your marketing strategy should be an ongoing task. A professional should be aware of marketing trends and what his or her competition is doing while analyzing which efforts are working best. With today's technology and the Internet, it changes pretty rapidly.

I don't think there's one actual indicator that you can identify as being the key, but there is a pretty comprehensive list of areas that you have to evaluate. You can track the number of followers on social media, track the number of people who sign up for promotional emails, or look at analytics that show how you rank on different search engines. If you have

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a corporate blog, you can look at the number of visits and comments as a way to learn what sticks and what doesn't. It is also important to learn where new hires and clients find out about your company and to elicit direct feedback from employee or client surveys.

7 How might marketing and branding the engineering world change in the coming years?

The ability to make sure that your digital marketing efforts are compatible with mobile technology will be huge. You don't see anybody walking around today without a smartphone or tablet, so you really have to look at how your content effectively translates to mobile screens. Content is king and will continue to be. Amazing, creative, attention-grabbing content that will concisely deliver your message is going to be key. If you have the budget, you could also invest in technology that's going to be more intuitive and understanding of who your audience is as a way to develop more targeted marketing. The best form of marketing will always be quality work that generates regular, repeat business from existing clients, which ultimately leads to referrals to other potential clients. **CE**

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