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THE ZWEIG MARKETING LETTER

Insight and intelligence for architecture, engineering, and environmental consulting firms

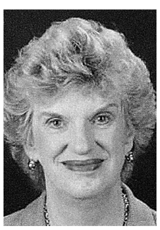
RIGHT | NOW

Interview strategies

Get ready to NOT do the one thing you are best at doing.

By ANDRA MILIACCA
Correspondent

Karen Johnston of the Johnston Training Group in Seattle works with architects, engineers, and contractors during preparations for the shortlist interview. To further her efforts, she evaluated the importance given by interviewers to things like design ability *vs.* people ability, and the influence of visual aids. By asking those questions of key people who make up selection panels for projects, such as universities, Johnston uncovered what firms need to do to win the project.



Karen Johnston, Johnston Training Group.

Many firms will say, "We are the best team for the job." Such assertion is "poor, because it goes back to the judgment of the team. They haven't seen the other firms' interviews."

Missteps made by firms

Johnston has noticed that many firms will say, *"We are the best team for the job."* Such an over-the-top assertion is "poor, because it goes back to the judgment of the team," Johnston says. "They haven't seen the other firms' interviews." Assumptions are made about how this firm will conduct the project because "the interview is a microcosm of the project."

Additionally, the selection panel will want to know that the firm is listening to, and understanding, the unique issues facing their project. Architecture firm **Lee, Burkhart, Liu** (Marina del Rey, CA) has been a client of Johnston's. Jason Haim, a principal with the health care-focused firm, identifies an effective method for connecting on that level, especially when use of visual props is also in the mix. Designers tend to focus their gaze on the illustration at hand. Instead, they need to "speak to one person in the group" Haim says, using what Johnston calls "touching their eyes" to deliver the idea. The aim is to land eye contact for maybe three seconds, avoiding a stare-down, and using "body language and voice inflection to reinforce the delivery."

Another pitfall identified by Johnston is "there is too much from the principal-in-charge and not enough from the project manager and other team members." During team introductions it is simply not enough to say, *"I'm the project architect."* Make it more powerful with descriptions of responsibilities and tasks that will be done, and a personal story related to the project's parameters can be extremely valuable.

In today's economic climate there are more firms out there seeking work, so the shortlists get longer and the allotted interview time gets shorter. LBL's Haim

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EDITORIAL

Tribal culture

It may be among the best things your firm fosters.

Debbie Frederiksen

What do you think of when you hear the word "tribe?" Do you picture Native Americans beating on drums at a powwow or maybe African tribes performing a warrior dance? What I am pretty sure you don't picture is a room full of professionals discussing business issues. At a conference I recently attended this notion of "tribes" was a recurring theme—tribal culture, tribal leaders, and how tribes can change the world.

This wasn't your traditional industry event. KA Connect is only in its second year, but I'm certain it will become a prominent event in the A/E/P and environmental consulting industry. It is hosted by Knowledge Architecture and touted as a "knowledge and information management conference." The agenda highlighted topics such as social media, video

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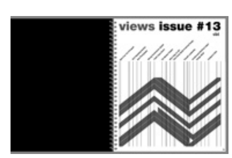
Tribes and their leaders don't follow the rules, don't accept the status quo, and are constantly seeking to move their cause forward. Drums and dancing are optional.

INSIDE

WHAT'S | WORKING

E-mail trivia



Big views

LiMa SOLUTIONS

Road to resolution

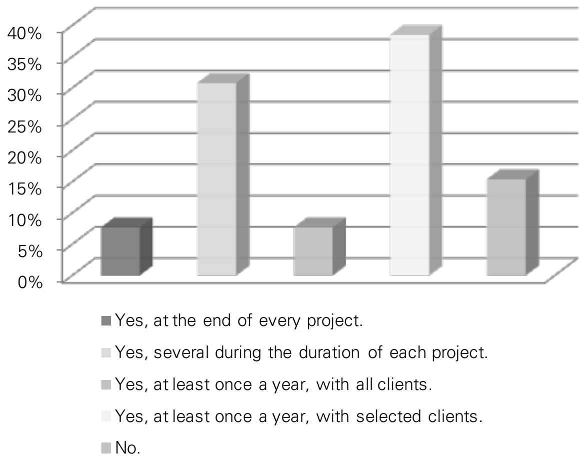
zweigwhite

TREND | LINES

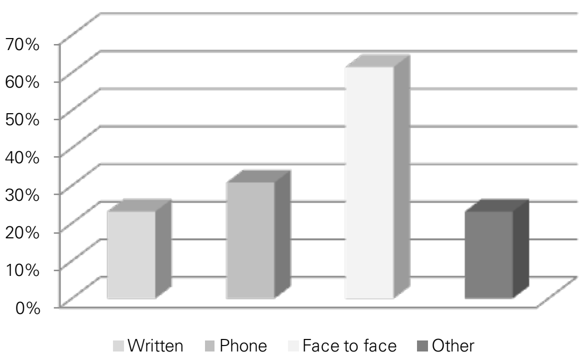
Seeking feedback from clients

Are firms listening? How often are they asking questions? How are they asking those questions?

DOES YOUR FIRM REGULARLY PERFORM CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS?



WHAT FORM DO YOUR CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS TAKE?



"Formal interviews are conducted on an annual basis with select clients. Informal interviews occur on a routine basis with various clients both during and at the close of projects."

— Survey respondent

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Interview

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notes that precious time counts down when you use the traditional method of everyone stating their title. "Eight team members each doing a 30-second introduction will use up a total of four minutes," he says. Using Johnston's introduction methodology, those very introductions each have the opportunity to make vital personal connections and also address project needs.

You don't need to do the one thing you are best at doing

Johnston's research has shown that the "influence of visuals during the interview is dead last." By the time a firm is shortlisted for a project, the hiring organization already knows that those chosen for the interview are capable in their design and technical ability.

Drawings of complex projects are not seen the same way by laymen as by the professional engineer. Johnston points out that selection committees are composed of "brilliant people in their own fields, who now have to make decisions about a huge building project and all they have to relate it to is their bathroom remodel."

Architects rely on what Johnston calls "their gift," being able to express complexity in graphic format, and they are loath to leaving it off the table. For the designer, one beautiful foam-core board can represent hours of collaboration, problem solving, and creative and technical innovation. She insists the same information can be put in a way that the client will understand. Her process is to define alternatives that carry the weight of her collected research and knowledge.

Best interviews

Johnston will sometimes conduct a debriefing session with interviewers to get a handle on what makes a "best interview." It always comes down to personalities and connecting. They will say the interviewees "got the discussion going right away" and exhibited "comfortable behavior." Interviewers want to see a "blending as a team, particularly with the subcontractors." It should not appear as if everyone on the team is meeting for the first time. They have to prove that they "have a clear way to function and each person has a role."

Craig Curtis is partner and lead designer at **The Miller Hull Partnership** (San Diego, CA) and he has worked with Johnston's firm. His firm of 65 employees won several phases of a contract with the U. S. General Services Administration's (GSA) "Land Ports of Entry" projects over nine other national architectural firms. Groundbreaking took place in February 2011 for that project, the San Ysidro Land Port of Entry, the busiest land border crossing in the world.

For the interview, the GSA limited the number of presenters to five. Curtis' team prepared together during the entire process and included a lead designer and project executive from Miller Hull, and three consultants. They were surprised when the interview finished early and the selection panel decided they did not have any further questions.

"Most of the time this is a bad sign," Curtis says. "In this case it wasn't. Apparently we had answered most of their questions with our presentation."

Interview strategy should recognize that you have already established "*how* and that you *can*," Johnston says. "That's what gets you to the shortlist." The strategy of winning is "about connecting with the needs and concerns of the client."

GUEST SPEAKER
Jeffrey Yates

The power of the cover letter

Enhance your credibility by producing a powerful, yet succinct, message.

Marketing teams in the A/E/P and environmental consulting industry put considerable emphasis on the internal content and graphic layout of their proposal packages. Marketers and the diligent efforts of their teams aim for the shortlist by producing quality and outstanding proposal packages as a necessary measure to convey the design sense and thoroughness of their firms. True— this will allow a firm to stand out as the reader weeds out submissions, one by one, in the tiresome stack. Here's a not-so-well-known secret: the *cover letter* can be the most impressionable element of a proposal. This article explains a successful tool for creating cover letters and some best-practices tips on how to develop content to best respond to an RFP. As the first opportunity to reach out, connect, and grab the reader, the one- to two-page cover letter can positively excite the client about the content that they will review in the pages ahead. Yet, although they know the importance of the cover letter, marketers industry-wide still tend to include static, repetitious, and off-topic content that invariably overlooks the needs of the client. These cover letters, void of thought and concept, can easily get a proposal package set aside. Well-developed and convincing cover letters that speak specifically to a client's values and reveal the credible strengths of a firm will promptly move a submission to the "shortlist" group.

A Washington, D.C.-based architecture firm with a broad range of government and private clients developed a tool to help create well-conceived cover letters regardless of client or project type. Upon researching the structure and content of effective cover letters from across all industries, the marketing team developed a template addressing the entire range of the firm's portfolio, existing clients, potential client relationships, and specialized expertise. Like any cover letter, the structure of this template has an introduction, body, and ending. However, within the body section, the template includes smaller segments that can be removed and substituted to support the contents of the proposal that follow. These segments highlight the firm's robust project portfolio by addressing each project type— new construction, design/build, renovation, modernization, master planning, etc., as well as specialized services and diverse client relationships. The marketing team can insert tailored and specific qualitative and quantitative facts, unlike general boilerplate information. By consolidating the cover letter content for the range of project types, specialized services, client relationships, and quantitative project data, the use of this tool has reduced production time by 40%.

Shaping an effective cover letter requires acute research. Analyzing the goals and values of the prospective organization will prove to be a fundamental asset. Incorporating this research should establish a tone for the cover letter that aligns with the client's vision. As in business, people find comfort in fostering existing relationships and building trust with organizations of familiarity. Selection committees tend to select firms that delivered well on past projects. Identifying and including a firm's relationship or past experiences with the prospective organization is vital to staying on top with a selection committee. Firms that lack experience with a potential client can speak to the strengths of their portfolios and specialized expertise with the particular project type— even with other notable clients. For example, firms submitting a package to PepsiCo for a regional distribution center without experience with Pepsi should mention other distribution centers designed/constructed for Wal-Mart in their portfolio. Relating relevant past experience of a firm allows for stronger competitive differentiation that will distinguish the proposal from others in the stack. Recognizing a firm's strengths can be especially valuable to cover letters, particularly if the project presents distinctive or potentially challenging aspects, including urban site security, preservation of monumental historic buildings, or experience in the design of containerized housing units.

Well-conceived cover letters quantify the strengths of a firm. Statistics about specific projects, a firm's portfolio, and the team shape a convincing rationale in the reader's eyes. Examples of this can include the amount of square feet of space designed for education facilities, number of housing units designed in mixed-use development, number of years of experience of the entire project team, or number of years of experience working with the client. Firms with experience working abroad and with international clients should mention the number of offices and similar projects worldwide and even the language proficiency of the team. International clients find this global reach desirable; it can also provide opportunities for additional work in the future for similar projects.

Marketing expert Marilynn Mendell, president of Win*Spin* CIC, notes that a successful cover letter must convey a sincere and genuine pitch expressing why a firm wants the project. An earnest request that speaks from the heart will be memorable to the reader. This humility can also be expressed by thanking the committee for their time and consideration, which will distinguish the proposal package from competitors and other proposals that the selection committee must review.

Proofread carefully— spelling and grammatical mistakes in cover letters taint the credibility of a proposal (and firm) and will limit the submission from advancing to the "shortlist" group. Thoughtful and well-developed cover letters, free of error, will make a proposal stand out among the other submission packages and could be the determining factor for shortlist selections.

Cover letters should be a powerful and succinct document that provides the committee with a desire to read the entire proposal package. The impact of this first impression will ultimately make or break an opportunity.

JEFFREY YATES is Marketing Coordinator with **Karn Charuhas Chapman & Twohey**. Contact *him at jyates@kcct.com.*

BD BEAT

Lisa Schauer

Work together to deliver what you sell!

Use your client development program as a roadmap for project management.

"Strength lies in differences, not in similarities."— Stephen Covey

Choosing a career as a marketer in a technical industry means the burden to understand your teammates and embrace the differences weighs heavier on you. Over the years, the most important lesson I have learned about embracing differences is the strength and opportunity that results from working together. A robust client development program allows marketers and technical team members to excel at what they do best by joining forces to serve your clients.

TALK TO YOUR CLIENTS

Client development tools you can use include:

- **Surveys.** Regular client surveys and assessments can produce the kind of insight that gives you the edge.
- **Focus groups.** They may be derided, but they work.
- **Celebrate with your client.** That includes birthdays and anniversaries.

Client development programs are essential in this economic environment. Invest your resources in keeping clients happy; delivering what you have sold in your proposal is critical. Follow on work not only saves you money, it saves time. Your clients get to know what they can expect from you and you understand their expectations. The mechanics of how to develop these critical relationships should include a strong toolbox of tactics recognizing that each client is different and that a one-size fits all program will not result in the success you may be seeking.

A few client development tools include:

- Client surveys and assessments
- Focus groups to solicit opinions on your brand
- Recognition of special milestones in the life of your client— a client's anniversary with their company, marriage, the birth of a child, etc.

The more you know about your client, both professionally and personally, the greater your client development toolkit becomes. One of the best and easiest ways to paint a picture of your client is to become a partner with your firm's project managers. This relationship should be symbiotic.

For example, we have conducted project close-out client assessments for several years. This is one of only a few of business development's moments to interact with our clients one-on-one. These assessments have always offered insightful comments and opportunities for improvement and/or celebration. Recently, we streamlined our internal process and updated our questionnaire for the assessment. We also initiated a mid-project review process. We met with our management team to provide them with copies of the questionnaire and they were extremely grateful. They now knew the test questions before beginning the project and could essentially study better for the exam. This became an *aha!* moment for me.

We want our PMs to be successful, yet we hadn't invested them in our process. Similarly, we want desperately to be involved beyond the proposal phase to ensure that we are delivering what we sell. Thus, there is a need for both the PMs and BD professionals to work together to ensure that our clients remain happy and want to continue to hire us... often... without competition.

The idea of involving, truly asking not telling, them our process prior to implementation is making all the difference. Two years ago, we implemented a project opening process. It failed miserably. There was no investment. Now, since the *aha!* moment, we are creating a dynamic project opening process that includes thoughtful approaches to sample invoices and draft communication tools. Discussions about carrying sales themes from the proposal throughout the project delivery phase abound. I have had more requests for mid-project client assessment and project close-out assessments than ever before. And, what's even better is that our clients'

Client development programs are essential in this economic environment. Invest your resources in keeping clients happy; delivering what you have sold in your proposal is critical. Follow on work not only saves you money, it saves time. Your clients get to know what they can expect from you and you understand their expectations.

perceptions and opinions of our firm continue to get better and better.

The net result— employees are vested in the need for business development/client development programs and processes, and we are working collaboratively as one team, rather than against one another— and our client is winning!

The moral of my story: Your PMs are as valuable as your clients in follow on work. Keep them involved and invested by having them help you design a program that will connect your clients. The result will be more work, which is good for everyone!

LISA SCHAUER, CPSM is a vice president at **MacKay & Sposito, Inc.** (Vancouver, WA), who is responsible for managing the firm's business development. Contact her at *lschauer@mackaysposito.com.*

Carrying the brand

How two firms integrated their message after a merger.

By DAN NAUMOVICH
Correspondent

ESA emphasized in its marketing that not much would change at Adolfson Associates, Inc. after, a merger.

Along with a foothold in a new marketplace and an infusion of new talent, a successful merger or acquisition also comes with another very important asset—an established corporate brand to integrate into the acquiring firm's marketing strategies. Since a brand is most closely tied to a firm's name, managing the name change is critical to leveraging the capital inherent within. When **Environmental Science Associates** (San Francisco, CA) merged operations with **Adolfson Associates, Inc.**, in 2006, an integrated communications plan was developed that outlined how the branding transition would be carried out.

The idea

Environmental Science Associates, or ESA, is an environmental planning firm dedicated to the principles of sustainability. Having already established a strong presence in California since its founding in 1969, they sought to further their reach into the Northwest by acquiring Adolfson, a 50-person environmental consulting firm with offices in Seattle and Olympia, Washington, and Portland, Oregon.

"Adolfson Associates had strong name recognition and brand identity in the Northwest, thanks to a reputation for excellent work and founder Molly Adolfson's leadership," says Lloyd Skinner, now ESA's Northwest regional director. "Fortunately, ESA understood this issue. We felt it was important to gradually align the ESA name and brand with the more prominent Adolfson brand in our Portland, Olympia, and Seattle operations."

Founder Molly Adolfson and ESA's Director of Corporate Marketing and Communications Lisa Crossett led the communications plan that called for the creation of a sub-brand, ESA Adolfson, for the firm's Northwest regional offices. This allowed ESA to introduce itself alongside the familiar Adolfson name. The value of this sub-brand was evaluated on an annual basis for four years, after which time it was phased-out as specified in the original plan. Today, all of the firm's Pacific Northwest offices operate under the ESA banner.

One particular challenge of integration was that the ESA acronym is more commonly associated with the Environmental Species Act, creating some confusion among clients unfamiliar with the firm. There are also several similarly named firms in the Pacific Northwest marketplace.

"ESA, as a firm, is not well-known in the Northwest. The logo and other branding elements, including staff themselves, help distinguish and differentiate the firm. Elsewhere, and especially in California, the ESA name and branding elements are familiar within the industry. We are confident that using one unified brand will help us better move into new geographies and markets as one, consolidated firm," Crossett says.

The results

While the transition from Adolfson Associates to ESA Adolfson was less abrupt in terms of maintaining name recognition, dropping the Adolfson moniker completely concerned the communications team.

A marketing campaign was created to announce the consolidation of offices under one name. Titled "Same People, Shorter Name," it evolved from an earlier campaign with a similar theme. As part of the effort, key clients were identified and contacted directly through phone calls, e-mails and letters. The media was alerted through a press release. A message announcing the name change was placed on Adolfson's web site, where it will remain for a few months, after which time visitors will automatically be redirected to an ESA web site, launched in May.

The main objective of the campaign was to ensure existing clients that only the name was changing— the trusted Adolfson staff members would still be at their service. To help emphasize this message, photographs of staff members accompanied the written materials so that clients would recognize familiar faces.

Throughout the entire acquisition and transition, the logo and collateral material for both ESA and ESA Adolfson maintained a consistent look and feel, so when it was time to consolidate the brand, it proved

See "Portfolio" on page 6

DETAILS

FIRM SIZE: 300.
MARKETING TACTIC: Integrated communication plan to rebrand regional offices.
COSTS: $2,000 was budgeted for signage and web site updates.

E-MAIL TRIVIA

Andregg Geomatics (Auburn, CA), a 58-person land surveying firm, is celebrating their 65-year anniversary, and promoting it with an e-mail campaign that includes trivia about the past.

"When I started, the firm wasn't doing any e-mail marketing," says Annie Mager, director of marketing. "This was a marketing plan I wanted to implement because it's cost-effective."

For the e-mails, Mager started by developing a template that mirrored the web site. "It's very important to keep everything branded. We've been in business for 65 years, so a lot people know who we are, but we've got to keep our name in front of them," she says.

"We have been a part of some pretty high-profile projects recently, like the Los Angeles International Airport, the Sacramento International Airport, the BART projects in San Francisco Bay, and some work for the Army Corps of Engineers. I thought we could use that experience to promote our firm on the e-mails," Mager says. "Andregg Geomatics performs a lot of land surveying work, and therefore we aren't the prime contractor for a lot of projects; we're usually the smaller sub on a team. Therefore, the audience for the e-mails includes larger firms that then subcontract out to us. So it's important to keep our name out there to the larger firms," she says.

"As the 65th anniversary was approaching, I started to think about what we could do that would be fun and interesting, and I thought, 'Let's do a little trivia.' So I started thinking about sports, entertainment, business, movies, politics— What was going on 65 years ago?"

The firm wanted to announce its anniversary, as well as thank clients for their contribution to the firm's growth and success via a tailored e-mail blast.

They created trivia questions from 1946 (the year the firm was formed) and included a link directed back to the web site to reveal the answers.

"This type of communication offers more interactivity and has the ability to draw our clients back to our web site by including links to certain pages. And we are able to track where visitors are going once they are on our site," Mager says.

"This has been a very successful as a way to regularly communicate to clients and increase traffic to our site so they can learn more about our firm's capabilities and services."

Mager says she can see a traffic increase on the firm's web site every time she sends an e-mail, and tracks the clicks to see if the viewer forwards the e-mail, and when they click on a link to the firm's web site.

Andregg Geomatics is branding all printed materials with the 65-year star.

The anniversary logo will be used all year long to keep it in front of existing and prospective clients. It is used by all staff on e-mails, letterhead, business cards, and proposal covers, as well as on the web site itself.

The firm has been receiving positive feedback from clients on all e-mail marketing campaigns, Mager says.

"The management at Andregg is dedicated to investing resources towards marketing our land surveying services, which is not always the case in the AEC world," Mager says.

Portfolio

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to be an inexpensive, and largely invisible process.

Clients have adjusted to the change, for the most part. Thanks to the communications plan, most of their fears have been allayed, although some confusion with the ESA acronym remains.

"I think we need to remain focused as we assure our clients that we're the same team they're used to working with, only with broader capabilities. And I remain an active and engaged part of that team. We have a smart, technically astute, and fun staff, great clients, challenging projects, and I'm very optimistic about the future," Molly Adolfson says.

Internally, the change has also been well-received, although some staff members who predated the Adolfson acquisition remain nostalgic for the old name.

"Fostering a one-company culture" is one of the five objectives set forth in ESA's five-year strategic plan. To that end, the communications plan and rebranding effort has been a success.

"Having all the offices use the ESA name helps us meet this strategy and objective. Because ESA is a 100% employee-owned firm and is committed to a one-company approach, the firm felt strongly about promoting itself through one brand," Crossett says.

Want to try it?

ESA's method for transitioning a brand proved effective for their situation and needs. When they acquired **Philip Williams & Associates** in 2010, they followed the same formula and carried out operations as ESA PWA for a period of time.

The lesson to be learned from ESA, however, doesn't really involve changing names or rebranding, it's more about anticipating client concerns and addressing them in a proactive manner. ESA knew that there would be misconceptions that Adolfson was going away, so they worked hard to ensure clients that the core of its business— its people, values, and service— would remain the same.

BIG VIEWS

CBT Architects (Boston, MA), a 140-person professional design firm providing services in architecture, interior design, and urban design, is disseminating *CBT Views*, an interactive web-based newsletter that promotes the firm's culture and current happenings through a strikingly designed platform.

"*Views* reflects how we 'VIEW' our firm," says Kristi Sprinkel, public relations manager and associate. It is a biannual publication that communicates the philosophy of CBT to employees, clients and prospective clients, the media and industry peers. The publication promotes the firm's culture, showcases current projects and new photography, educates on industry trends, and shares staff news. It allows the reader to get to know the firm's staff and projects on a more intimate level, and provides insight into the internal workings of the office. The publication is a complement to a weekly internal newsletter that covers time-sensitive news and information.

"An informed staff is an empowered staff," Sprinkel says. "The content of *Views* is tailored to the interests of our staff while being informative and engaging to external audiences too."

Each issue begins with a Note from the Principals— a collective message from the firm's leadership that helps to inform staff about the firm's current state of affairs and plan for future success. Each issue also includes a comprehensive marketing review and current project profile. *Views* is also an opportunity to position the firm as thought leaders through bylined articles that are timely and align with the firm's business goals. For example, the article "Renovate & Reuse: Higher Education's New Mantra" positions CBT as an expert in a sustainable approach to academic work.

Views also has a strong human interest component, and it is an opportunity to recognize people within the firm both personally and professionally, Sprinkel says. From highlighting the firm's bowling team to a digital slideshow of staff's vacation photos, *Views* aims to create a personal connection by profiling people's interests and lives outside of the office. Each issue also emphasizes topics of interest, such as social media or the value of local farmer's markets.

In addition to the content, the graphic design of *Views* is equally as important, Sprinkel says. The publication highlights the firm's graphic design capabilities. Each issue is designed by a different member of the graphic design staff and is a creative vehicle to promote the design talent and culture of CBT. The graphic designer has creative freedom over the layout and design of the publication, which allows each issue of *Views* to have an unexpected look.

The current issue was designed by John Sullivan, CBT's newest graphic designer. Sullivan used inspiration from his favorite designers to develop the layout of the current issue of *Views*. Along with the Swiss design, CBT project photography has been incorporated to visually highlight the firm's work. The issue was laid out in *InDesign* using the new exporting feature that is designed for use on mobile devices. The new feature also allows for page turning and global navigation simultaneously. The goal was for *Views* to read more like a magazine than a web site, Sprinkel says.

Views was originally distributed as both a print and electronic publication, but as marketing budgets have decreased and digital communications have become the norm, the firm has shifted to making *Views* solely digital. *Views* was posted on CBT's web site and intranet, links to the publication were e-mailed to staff and CBT's database, and *Views* was promoted through social media on Facebook and Twitter. "The response to *Views* has been tremendous. The average time spent on the *Views* page of CBT's web site is almost three minutes, which is 382% longer than the site average. We have also received a great deal verbal positive feedback from staff and clients," Sprinkel says.

ROAD TO RESOLUTION

LiMa Solutions (short for "litigation management") specializes in alternative dispute resolution and neutral claim management for the A/E/P and environmental industry. The new company started with blank slate marketing-wise, but developed and designed the logo, tag line, and web site, with the web site intended to be "a reference tool for the industry as well as describing our process," says Michael Ruetz, business development manager with LiMa.

LiMa's founders' unique skill sets have enabled them to develop what they call a value engineered-alternative dispute resolution (VE-ADR) mediation process. This new paradigm creates an accelerated, cost-effective and fair environment for settlement, Ruetz says. LiMa can help in this process through proven project management tools utilizing the latest communication technologies, keeping all stakeholders current with events and issues in real time.

"We kicked off the web site with an e-mail blast, press release, and an old-fashioned road trip we affectionately called 'The Road to Resolution' tour." The group (Ed Martinet, president, Paul Viau, vice president, and Ruetz) hit the road the end of April, to speak at industry conferences and seminars in an attempt to get the word out at gatherings in places such as the U.S. Legal Support offices in Florida and California.

"We met face to face with the industry's leading mediators, judges, and lawyers, explaining our new approach. Our strategy was to have the web site and our VE-ADR presentation up and functioning prior to the West Coast Casualty Construction Defect Seminar," a widely attended industry event, Ruetz says. "We have a very specialized market, and that's the best attended seminar in our industry, with over 1,500 participants this year." This strategy was well received and successfully created a buzz about LiMa Solutions, Ruetz says. "During the course of the event, the LiMa staff was able to give personal VE-ADR presentations utilizing their iPads," he says.

Rick Righi of Righi Hernandez Law Firm being interviewed by Michael Ruetz.

LiMa also hired a videographer to record conversations with attendees and a seminar that founder Ed Martinet moderated. "These video clips will be posted over time on our web and Facebook sites. This is going to keep the buzz going!"

Frederiksen

From page 1

technology, and BIM, so I prepared myself for two days with a bunch of tech nerds. However, what I found instead was a collection of 140 brilliant minds, including business owners, principals, and managers representing IT, human resources, marketing, finance, and operations— all openly exchanging ideas and practices about how people, teams, and firms share knowledge. It was high level, strategic, and incredibly inspiring.

So I left the conference, my mind spinning with ideas, and I kept coming back to tribes. We are surrounded by, and a part of, many in our everyday lives, from family relationships and our spiritual groups, to communities and the workplace. Tribes are formed by common bonds and focused on connecting people and ideas. Would you say that your firm, departments, and project staff are tribe-like? Or do they simply function as groups of individuals who in proximity to each other share little more than the office kitchen?

Marketing tribe

Anyone in the firm can be a member. It isn't limited to the marketing department or just those involved in business development. Build a marketing culture by regularly sharing information with staff about project leads, chases, wins, losses, awards, etc. Encourage feedback and involvement. According to ZweigWhite's *2010 Marketing Survey*, 79% of firms hold regular marketing/business development meetings and attendees typically include presidents, principals, and marketing directors. Only 54% include other marketing staff (managers, coordinators, etc.) in these meetings. I'm not implying that such meetings should be open to anyone and everyone, but what does this say about a firm where all marketing department members are not invited? It says to me that marketing is undervalued, probably overworked, and definitely unappreciated. I guarantee no one wants to be a part of that tribe.

Company tribe

There are many ways firms can instill a tribal culture. During the annual business planning process, solicit staff input on big issues that need to be addressed. Establish quantitative goals and a task list, and give

Would you say that your firm, departments, and project staff are tribe-like?

a written copy to staff. If everyone understands the company's mission, they are more likely to rally around it and do what they can to support and achieve the initiatives. Share good news and bad, and practice open-book management. Revealing financial information mitigates employee concerns that the firm is making too much or too little. Simultaneously, you build trust, teach them the basic economics of the business, and help the firm be more successful.

Industry tribe

One of the speakers at KA Connect said, "When you share innovative ideas in public with your peers, it raises the bar in your profession." I have wondered why, as an industry, we often hoard our best practices. I've known principals who refused to write whitepapers or submit for marketing awards because they fear giving away information to the competition. In all honesty, it isn't that difficult to find competitive intelligence. So why not demonstrate thought leadership and share those ideas that will promote and improve your profession? A few years ago I was a panelist for an SMPS program titled "Lessons from the Legends." We talked openly about successful marketing pursuits, creative promotional strategies, interview mishaps, etc. The program was beneficial for many young marketers seeking new ideas, but it was also an opportunity for the seasoned professionals to laugh and share stories, a common characteristic of tribes. It was one of the highest-rated programs that chapter had all year.

Think about the tribes in your life and consider the impact your involvement and leadership can have on the future. When you have time (17 minutes and 26 seconds, to be exact) watch Seth Godin's Ted talk "on the tribes we lead" at *www.ted.com*. Tribes and their leaders don't follow the rules, don't accept the status quo, and are constantly seeking to move their cause forward. Drums and dancing are optional.

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AWARD WINNERS

Dan Dennis recognized: Dan Dennis, president of **Dennis Corporation**, has been recognized by South Carolina's District Office of the Small Business Administration as the 2011 Small Business Administration's South Carolina Small Business Person of the Year.

Dennis Corporation (Columbia, SC), is a 90-person civil engineering, surveying, and construction management firm, and No. 51 in *The Zweig Letter* 2010 Hot Firm List. Dennis was selected for this award due to Dennis Corporation's staying power, growth in number of employees, increase in sales, financial performance, innovatiion of product or service, response to adversity, and contributions to community oriented projects.

"Dennis Corporation would like to dedicate this award to its employees and clients, for without their hard work and continued support, the success of the company would not be possible," said Dan Dennis, who founded the firm in 2005.During the last five years, Dennis Corporation has managed to make a significant impact on South Carolina's economy by providing jobs, services, and giving back to the community. Dennis Corporation takes its commitment to the communities in which it works very seriously and has contributed over $250,000 to 80 charities to date.

Elliot Cooper, District Director of the Small Business Administration South Carolina District Office, said of Dennis, "Your foresight and tenacity fueled your company's phenomenal growth, and you used its growth to create good jobs and invest in your community."

An award ceremony was held in Columbia on May 4, 2011, at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center in conjunction with the 2011 Salute to Small Business. Dennis will compete for the title of National Small Business Person of the Year during the SBA's National Small Business Week held from May 18-20, 2011, in Washington, D.C.

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