

Fortunately, advances in technology have allowed design professionals to make quantum leaps in both the quality and speed of delivery of marketing submissions and materials.

Even though design professionals are aware of these techniques, there is often hesitancy or even real reluctance to move aggressively into a proactive marketing program. Such a program takes work and resources. Marketing, business development, and public relations do cost money, in the form of time and actual dollars. Lots of heated debates occur about marketing expenses, and what “industry average” is or ought to be. In truth, there is no pat answer. But if marketing is thought of as an investment, the picture will become clearer. Just as individuals pick the amount of money they want to invest, and just as they pick the stocks or bonds they wish to use to reach their financial goals, design professionals must determine how to invest in building their practices. They must decide what they want to do and how much they want to spend. If they are smart, they will keep track of what they invest, and what they get in return, in the form of new fees. Periodically, they should compare the two. In a new effort, one dollar may be spent to make five. But in two to four years (depending on the sector being entered), tangible results should be seen. Marketing efforts should yield a return on investment that allows a practice to flourish.

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## WHAT IS MARKETING?

So what is this thing called marketing? “Marketing” is used as an all-encompassing word, but it can be really broken up into three components. *Marketing* generally refers to all of the activities that prepare us to approach a prospective client sector. *Business Development* refers to the activities in which we interact directly with these prospects, which leads to sales, those activities that actually close the deal. *Communications*, of which public relations is a major part, refer to those activities that garner visibility in the clients’ worlds.

Business development and sales activities are activities that we will examine in Part Four. Briefly, business development begins with identification of a potential client, qualification of the lead (is it viable, and is it right for the firm?), and continues through a period of “courtship” until the time comes for a sales

pitch. Networking—keeping in touch with friends in the industry—is another important activity that falls within business development.

In this chapter, we will examine the aspects of marketing related to developing and maintaining a company identity and making plans. These components of marketing include determination of company position, preparation of a strategic plan (which generally looks forward some three to five years), a marketing plan (which is prepared annually), and a marketing budget (which supports the marketing plan). Market research is also included, which may be associated with exploring a new type of client, a new location, a new service, or the firm's current image. Finally, to market effectively, designers need to develop and maintain certain systems. These may include lead-tracking systems, project/personnel databases, visual resources (photographs, slides, and/or digital imagery), and brochures.

This chapter will also address marketing communications. The part of communications called branding affects both how the work is done and how the work (and the firm) is perceived. The part of communications that is more outwardly focused is called public relations. The goal of public relations is to garner visibility in a positive way and, to the largest extent possible, control the content. Such control is not particularly easy when an editor or critic writes about us or one of our projects. But we can create our own advertisements, news releases, articles, exhibits, and speeches, and with some effort, get our story out in the way we want it to be heard.

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## SELF-DEFINITION

### Identify the Firm's Practice Models

The first step in marketing is to have a clear sense of the company's identity. The design firm should evaluate just what type of company it is—what kind of work it values, the degree of specialization, the practice model, and what differentiates it from other design firms. Only when the firm has identified its position within the industry can it develop a brand identity for the firm.

Design firms are like snowflakes: no two are exactly alike. Yet it is possible to place firms in broad categories. In 1987, Weld Coxe, founder of The Coxe Group (consultants to the design industry), and David Maister, a Harvard