

# Features

## Marketing Trends for 2007 and Beyond

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It's no secret that marketing architectural and interior design services has grown more sophisticated in recent years. The business climate and our own ambitions for our firms drive us to compete harder for work. Technology enables us (or should enable us) to do more with less, to stretch our time and resources and utilize them more efficiently. At the same time, the profession of design marketing continues to emerge, and specialists like me work with firms of all sizes (either as full-time employees or as consultants) to help them be more strategic in allocating their marketing resources and implementing their business strategies. Looking back at what it was like to market design services a few years ago or even last year, a few broad trends become apparent:

### 1. Graphic Sophistication

If a technology exists, it will be used. Desktop printing technology has evolved considerably over the last few years, both in terms of quality and speed. As we all struggle to present our firms and our work as clearly as possible, our documents will become more colorful and more graphically intensive. The downside here is that while it is cheaper and faster than ever to print a color brochure, it still takes as much time to plan and design it. The more work we do in color with complex layouts, the more resources will be spent on graphic design.

### 2. Faster and Faster

Time is money, and clients of every type recognize that the sooner they can complete their project, the sooner they can stop paying double rent, or begin to utilize their new space to make revenue. The pressure on design and

construction professionals to move faster bleeds over into the marketing process. While technology enables us to create documents more quickly, it doesn't enable us to think any more quickly. With some client types, a two-week turnaround for an RFP response used to be typical; 48 hours is more the norm these days. This focus on speed, combined with the capability to produce documents easily in full color, creates a real quandary for our industry: given a limited amount of time to respond, what should you focus on, your graphics or your message?

### 3. Differentiation and Specialization

What are you known for? Though you might like your reputation to be about quality design and a high level of service, you're probably known for the project types you specialize in. Like it or not, it's easier for your clients to think of you as "the restaurant designer" than to think of you for your contemporary style or the other intangibles or barely tangibles that define your approach and your work. Not that this is entirely irrational: if I'm a client, and I'm designing a lab or a school or a fashion retail space, I want to work with somebody who knows what they're doing. The benefit to specialization in your practice is that it is much easier to build a reputation by doing one thing very well than it is by doing many things well. The downside, of course, is that if you do something very well, you may be condemned to repeat it.

### 4. Got strategy?

With very little time to respond to opportunities, it is more important than ever to have an underlying strategy that guides you in making decisions about what opportunities to pursue and what level of resources to invest. In an article published online last year, business

consultant **David Maister** makes the case that if you aren't saying no to some opportunities, you don't have a strategy (<http://davidmaister.com/articles/4/95/>). It's vital that you make decisions about where you're trying to take your business so that you can be prepared when opportunity knocks. Consider working with a marketing consultant (or in-house marketing staff) to develop a strategic marketing plan to guide you. As the saying goes, "if you fail to plan, you plan to fail."

### 5. Integration of communications and project delivery

Marketing is obviously the front end of the design process—it's where the work comes from. But there is a role for marketing and communications not just at the beginning of the project, but at every stage of the design process. As the design team works with a client to develop a project, there are opportunities to create communication tools to enhance your marketing efforts. How can you capitalize on the design you are doing today to win additional business tomorrow? How can you capture and document the design process to tell a story to a future client, or to the press? I think that this is really the next evolution of marketing and communications in design. How can we come to think of marketing not as something that happens first, but as an ongoing process that is integrated with our projects?

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