

## Metrics Don't Matter; Content Does

by Mike Sweeney



Near the end of 2012, most A/E/C firms that had started a website redevelopment project a year prior had still not completed the work.

What might have been a quick project dragged on indefinitely – due, no doubt, to attention being constantly diverted to proposals, and indifference or indecision from those at the top of the organization, as costs started to outweigh the hoped-for benefits.

This means that many A/E/C websites in 2013 remain out of date and slow in taking advantage of current web technologies and in publicizing the current activities of the firms.

Meanwhile, social media sites and email marketing platforms are maintained by large programming staffs to ensure that they are delivering value to users (and now, to shareholders, too). They have provided marketers with a “real-time” (or nearly so) way to connect with their customers, seemingly in the nick of time.

A/E/C firms that have invested time into developing Facebook and Twitter presences have reported that they have generated a lot of website traffic. But even so, firms don't always have the internal cohesion needed to Tweet regularly or blog with care.

Email marketing platforms make outreach easier, and their campaign management and design features can make a broadcast communication seem like a personal one. Analytics can prove how effective these channels are in click-through numbers. But nobody reads everything! So if these numbers aren't large, how can they be meaningful?

A/E/C marketers and business owners used to look to print publication in

Architectural Record or ENR for validation. Today's “metrics” give marketers just as false a sense of security, accomplishment, and certainty about the effectiveness of what they do every day.

That mass-market public audience doesn't really exist anymore. Instead, your audience is made up of your social graphs (i.e. Your Facebook page fans and Twitter followers) and email lists.

*But nobody reads everything! So if these numbers aren't large, how can they be meaningful?*

Nakedly, it's just you and your employees – and their friends and followers – that have any exposure to your marketing news, and that have any reason to care. The best you can hope for is that these people spend enough time on Facebook to be influential, and are sophisticated (and generous) enough to hit the “Like” button next to your latest status update or photo.

Email newsletters and social channels mainly help you keep your tribes loyal (which is only slightly better than just showing the world that you're alive). *Quality content is what really matters.* And this content needs to be consistent across all of the channels through which you market. Here are 4 things to keep in mind:

### 1. Content should have broad appeal

Your channel content can feature professionally relevant articles, timely advice, news about your firm, and even recommended reading! Your content should also appeal to the diverse interests of bloggers and freelance journalists who collect ideas and sources for their stories. Make sure that your content can – and will – be Liked, shared, and referenced by your networks.

### 2. Content should be familiar

Posts and emails should occur regularly, and follow a familiar pattern. Once your readers are familiar with their structure, they can read them selectively, and you can still be “top of mind.”

### 3. Content should connect across channels

A well-designed email provides multiple links to your company website. Even if your website isn't a sales-oriented online store, it can feature a download, article, or project profile that will attract interest.

Email click-throughs may help you keep your website high in the search engine listings. User activity at your site can also be measureable.

### 4. Content should be a collective activity

To achieve all the above, content cannot be tasked to one person or one department. Cultivate as much participation as possible by appealing to diverse interests and skill levels.

Website, social, and email marketing are currently not being balanced very well except by the few A/E/C firms that have the money, time, and motivation to invest there. A balance is possible, but it still has a high price tag.

If company website content is unable to keep pace at the end of the chain of links, tweets, shares, and Likes, this may indicate more than just a marketing team's inefficiency or overwhelm.

In addition to the marketing department's role of simply keeping the firm's name “out there,” it is to continuously be generating content – great content! ●

**Mike Sweeney, founder of Design-product Systems, is a marketing consultant and project manager serving the A/E/C industry. He can be reached at [info@DesignProductSystems.com](mailto:info@DesignProductSystems.com)**