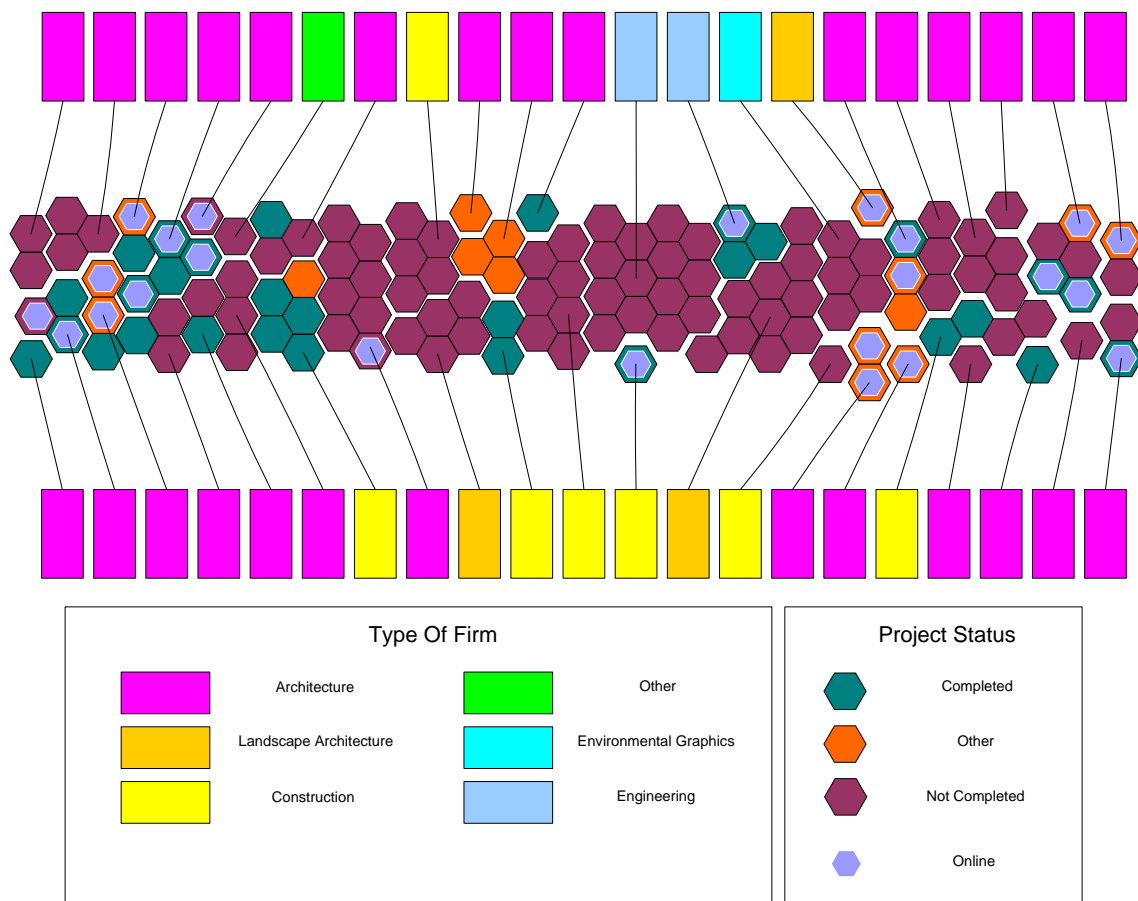


Design-product Systems

Marketing Excellence for Design Professionals

Infographic: **1/6** Of Newly Completed Projects Appear Online Within
3 Months of Their Completion

A review of 132 projects reported by 42 design industry firms reveals that only one in six firms can turn a project into a marketing tool within three months of completion.



Contact us today to learn how you can quickly leverage your newly completed projects so you can become more visible and connected to your markets.

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REPORT BRINGING PROJECTS ONLINE: A SURVEY OF TOP A/E/C FIRMS SHOWS WHY PR IS NOT ENOUGH

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Abstract/Executive Summary

Completed building projects are to an A/E/C practice what the life line is to the hand. To valuers, strategic partners, and potential clients, it indicates vitality and predicts longevity. We surveyed 132 projects reported by 42 A/E/C firms that are members of the Boston Society of Architects to see whether these projects were displayed on company websites. About 25% of projects reported were completed in the preceding two-month period. 10 recently completed projects appeared on the websites of seven reporting firms three months after they were reported. One in six firms demonstrated this agility as a competitive advantage.

Design-product Systems provides concise, effective description and presentation of complex design propositions from the A/E/C, High-tech, and scientific industries. We develop content that clearly represents the value of our clients' design work and promotes our clients' career goals.

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Bringing Projects Online:

Introduction

Completed building projects are to an A/E/C practice what the life line is to the hand: an indicator of vitality and a predictor of longevity. Practices that can efficiently integrate newly completed projects into their portfolios and marketing materials for use in business development realize many more benefits than those that do not. [For example, reporting a project externally but not on a firm's own website deprives the firm of a link. Firms saw value in publicizing their work externally but not in their own sites.]

While this work is within the purview and ability of principals in charge of business development or marketing professionals, it is challenging and time-consuming work. It requires a variety of skills (writing, layout, coordination), plus prior knowledge and focused attention to identify how the project will meet the practice's marketing needs.

Design-product Systems surveyed 132 projects published in the March/April issue of the Boston Society of Architects's (BSA) Chapter Letter to see how quickly firms with reporting capabilities put newly completed projects onto their websites.

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Method

The BSA Chapter Letter's "fame/PROJECTS" section in the March/April issue consisted of project news on 132 projects from 42 member firms. The reporting submission period was November 3, 2011 - January 11, 2012. The Chapter Letter was distributed on February 22, 2012. Design-product Systems surveyed websites between 3/7 - 4/11.

In an Excel spreadsheet, we recorded for each project: the project name, firm name, home page URL, project page URL (if one existed), date the site was reviewed, and the type of firm. We noted whether a project photograph appeared in the publication. For each project reported, we determined that the project was either "Completed" (indicated directly in text, and assumed to have been completed within the reporting period), "Not Completed" (i.e. begun, ongoing, etc.), or "Other". We treated project mentions that included awards or certifications received as "Other". We assumed that these projects were completed prior to the reporting period.

We didn't differentiate whether a project included on a website was in a press release, mentioned in a list, or on a page of its own in a portfolio.

Most non-architecture firms included the name of the architecture firm(s) they worked with on the projects they reported.

Results

Two-thirds (28) of the reporting firms were architecture firms. Of the remaining 14, 3 were landscape architecture firms, 7 were construction firms, 2 were engineering firms, 1 was an environmental graphics firm, and 1 was a specifications writing firm.

Out of 132 projects reported, 23 projects (17.4%) appeared on the reporting firm's website. Of these: 10 were Completed, 3 were Not Completed, and 10 were Other.

Of the 42 reporting firms, 19 firms reported a total of 31 Completed projects. 21 of these projects did not appear on their firm's website.

Eleven firms reported a total of 16 awards notices; 10 of these projects appeared on their firm's website, and six did not. We did not ascertain that the project pages had been updated to include the honor received.

85 Not Completed projects were reported by 25 firms.

Of these, 72 projects were reported by 16 firms that did not report a Completed or previously completed project. Five firms reported one Not Completed project each, while eleven firms reported three or more. The most reported by an architectural firm was eight, while the most reported overall was 14.

Of the five, one firm (Integrated Design Group) posted a mention of their Not Completed project in a press release. ARC and Cambridge Seven Associates each had one Not Completed project posted online. All three projects are with past or current clients.

Less than one quarter (31; 23.5%) of the total projects were recently completed. Approximately one-eighth (16; 12.1%) had been completed before the period of interest.

Firms Reporting	Projects Reported	Projects Online	Not Online	Total	Percentage
11	Other (Award)	10	6	16	12.1%
25	Not Completed	3	82	85	64.4%
19	Completed	10	21	31	23.5%
	Totals	23	109	132	
	Percentage	17.42%	82.58%		



Of 12 firms that reported one Completed project apiece, 3 posted their projects on their websites. Eleven of these were architecture firms, and the sole construction firm (Consigli) was in the successful three.

These three, plus one firm that reported 2 completed projects (Tsoi/Kobus) were the only ones that posted all completed projects they had reported. (100%). Hutker Architects posted 3 of its 4 completed projects. ARC and RDK Engineers posted one each of their two and three reported projects, respectively.

Three construction firms reported more than one completed project without posting anything to their websites. We did not look for these projects on their architects' websites when architects were identified.

Seven firms (five architecture, one engineering, and one construction) posted the 10 completed projects that appeared online. They are listed in the table below.

Company Name	Projects Reported	Projects Online	Pct
Hutker Architects	4	3	75%
Tsoi/Kobus & Associates	2	2	100%
Finegold Alexander + Associates	1	1	100%
Consigli Construction	1	1	100%
Shepley Bulfinch	1	1	100%
ARC	2	1	50%
RDK Engineers	3	1	33%

Discussion

Typically, the firms that report project news do so in almost every issue of the Chapter Letter, which has been published bimonthly since 2011. These firms are usually larger, or they have engaged public relations help from a number of firms that serve the A/E/C space. This, plus 14 other BSA member firms that did not post in "fame/PROJECTS" but did in "fame/PEOPLE" make up the contingent of regular contributors.

Larger firms are in the habit of publishing a rundown of all active projects. Others cite milestones. This helps them stay visible within the community.

A project page that includes a summary and some graphics is an opportunity to capture interest and drive traffic to the site once the curiosity has been piqued.

Very few A/E/C firms are taking full advantage of this opportunity. Placing a notice in a newsletter is quite removed from these other activities, and is like a headline without an article underneath it.

This would be a lot more obvious if Chapter Letter news was published online, and hyperlinks could be included with submissions.

Large construction and engineering firms report projects that they have collaborated on with member architects. In some cases, these architects themselves do not post their own projects (indicating the capacity of the firm, its size or level of participation in the organization as a way of generating work).

Firms that report one project with a good written description or an image (either a photograph or a rendering) are well positioned to easily post a project online. This suggests other limiting factors.

New projects with existing clients or facilities are easier to post online. The value of this is minimal.

Firms have outdated website tools and architecture, and this could affect how quickly they accomplish this task. We noticed a high number of sites with Flash animation on the home page. We did not record which sites used different platforms such as Drupal or WordPress. This may make the task easier.

In some striking cases, we noticed that there appeared to be a “Chinese wall” between current work and the firm’s online portfolio. It seemed to be intentional, as though a portfolio online was much like a printed one, in that it was not intended to change except periodically and all at once. This idea has considerable advantages. Firms that do a lot of small projects have to choose ones that sell the firm’s ethos and vision, while many others are unglamorous projects that pay the bills. Still, in these projects, there are many opportunities to set the message of the firm in the work being done.

We found ourselves looking at the “News” or the “On The boards” sections of the site when they existed, expecting to see at least a PDF project sheet or press release. This was preferable to clicking into a portfolio that usually is divided into project types or markets or disciplines.

The larger the firm, the less confident we were that we would find the project reported.

Shepley Bulfinch’s site seemed to have everything and nothing. We used a “search” box within the site to find the first project “Harvard Innovation Lab”, and the second project (“Smilow Cancer Hospital”) was under a different portfolio tab. We liked the navigation once we got used to it, and we liked the integrated page with projects, Twitter feed, and selected blog articles. TRO JungBrannen’s site was also difficult to use. The site was undergoing a redesign following a merger in 2007.

Some smaller firms had neglected their websites but had great public relations muscle.

Several firms may report a collection of projects because it is efficient to list them all at once.

Firms that used marquees on the front pages wisely used them to attract users to their newer project pages or project announcements.

Many firms are considering web redesigns. This could be contributing to the lack of agility. Other factors could be: lack of in-house technical skill, lack of coordination, influence to set large-scale priorities, etc.

One in six (7/42) firms that consistently publishes project news also complements their announcement with a project page on their website. It is significant that, with a two-month advance period between submission and publication, more firms did not post newly publicized projects online.

We chose this sampling method because we assume that these firms have dedicated marketing resources, and have made public relations/publicity a priority. Reporting firms value participating in the industry and value the publication as a channel. They also report consistently enough to suggest that they have developed a process around it.

The cost of public relations work may be relatively low compared to overhead required to update websites internally, and IT expenses of maintaining access and tools. But the benefits of public relations without a matching activity are significantly less.

Conclusion

We wonder if it is important to marketers and principals to put their recently completed material online quickly. We believe there are advantages to doing so that complete the marketing picture. With existing resource and time constraints, as well as the knowledge, ability and skill of staff to gather, distill, and present newly completed projects as marketing, there is ample opportunity to integrate and systematize the work into a process that benefits a firm. Marketing new work to advantage makes full use of all your current tools (public relations, articles, website, Internet search, social media) to engage decision makers and stay visible.

Firms that have some agility in this area can benefit. We know that firms are less agile here. We know that firms may see this as a low priority or a small advantage. This may be true in light of the work, discipline and coordination needed to do it well even once. Doing this routinely and developing it into an internal practice can become a brand weapon as distinctive as how you make client presentations. This too is part of the continuum of design, presentation, and marketing that A/E/C principals and marketing professionals must recognize in order to maximize as a competitive advantage or differentiator.

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