

FOCUS ON CONSTRUCTION & DESIGN

Eight ways to improve perception – and the bottom line

By **BRIAN FRALEY**

Special for Lehigh Valley Business

The Greater Lehigh Valley design and construction industry, like the rest of the world, has changed dramatically over the past two decades. The marketplace has become increasingly sophisticated and competitive, which is driving the need for architecture, engineering and construction firms to increase their focus on improving client perception to generate business.



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Perception is defined as “the way you think about or understand someone or something.”

How is your firm perceived? How does it affect your firm’s workload?

The perception of your firm affects your ability to procure work. It also affects your client relationship, and, as a result, your profitability on projects.

A client with a positive perception is less likely to second-guess you, allowing you to work more efficiently. If, however, the client has a tentative perception, you will be bogged down with questions on your judgment calls, battles over extra work and even delayed payment.

Changing perception is like trying to tow a dump truck with a Volkswagen Beetle. It’s the reason you must control the perception of your audience before it turns sour.

Perception is fleeting. The way your prospects perceive you is constantly being molded

by what they see and hear. Shaping perception requires ongoing effort. It’s not like a project you design or build and move on.

The framework for improving perception includes:

■ BRANDING

Your branding is the strategy that integrates these tactics: It must be consistent, attractive and reflective of your firm, team, service or product and customer service.

■ WEBSITE

The appearance of your website must be your top priority. You have full control over it, which makes it your most important piece of marketing real estate.

Understanding that your target audience defaults to an Internet search to find and check out your firm; this is your digital first impression. Your website must appear visually attractive and consistent, easy to navigate, absent of typos and poor grammar, and reflective of your brand.

And keep it simple.

■ SOCIAL MEDIA

Not yet on social media? It’s time to change that.

Your competition is there and getting entrenched as you ignore it. Do it in house or hire a firm to do it for you.

Too many architecture, engineering and construction firms are using the wrong strategy (and it varies by platform), so research before you begin creating your firm’s digital footprint.

■ LOGO/TAGLINE

You need a logo. The tagline is optional.

What matters most is that they enforce your brand. They are the symbols of your business. Make them count.

A well thought-out logo and tagline can improve perception over time and reinforce your firm’s brand and expertise.

■ PUBLIC RELATIONS

What does the media say about your firm?

In the very least, you should be sending out press releases to publications that your target audience reads.

Don’t wait for news to develop. Create newsworthy events. Get to know the editors and their preferences and be readily available if they contact you.

Post your published content on social media and your website for increased exposure and reach.

■ ADVERTISING

Traditional advertising has always been about shaping perception.

Despite what the naysayers preach, print advertising still works, especially in the design and construction market. Make sure your ads are clean, effective and brand-consistent.

They say in advertising to go where the eyeballs are, so make sure to target the publications your target audience reads.

■ WORD-OF-MOUTH MARKETING

What is the word on the street about your firm?

The perception of brands these days is largely driven by what others say about them. This mindset is especially true of the millennial generation.

Outperform on the project, keep your customers happy and do your best to address any negative talk about your firm.

Make sure your online presence is clean, as well. Do a Google search and set up Google alerts for your firm to monitor online activity.

■ TESTIMONIALS

So many architecture, engineering and construction firms neglect to collect and use testimonials.

What a wasted opportunity. What others say about you is perceived as a stamp of approval.

Put testimonials on your website. You can also use them occasionally in your newsletter, advertising and on social media.

While this list is far from exhaustive, it lays out a basic framework that will improve your firm’s perception and position in the marketplace.

The game has changed in the architecture, engineering and construction marketplace. Make perception a priority and your path to victory will be clear.

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