

The Importance of Brand Identity

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A common buzzword heard throughout the industry today is branding. While the concept behind the word is a familiar one and conjures ideas of the golden arches of McDonald's or ranchers branding their cattle, actually setting out to build a brand in the A/E/C industry can seem overwhelming. Further, many dismiss the notion of branding as too expensive – something only the big firms with deep pockets are capable of tackling. However, with a carefully planned and consistent course of action, even the smallest of firms with minimal marketing dollars can realize powerful branding power.

According to Al Ries and Laura Ries, co-authors of *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding*, the most frequently violated law of branding is consistency. "Markets may change, but brands shouldn't," notes Ries and Ries. "They may be bent slightly or given a new slant, but their essential characteristics (once those characteristics are firmly planted in the mind) should never be changed."

Lack of consistency is certainly a common pitfall for many design and construction firms, especially in sales and marketing materials. All too often, proposals are generated with different logos and no consistent message or theme throughout. The harm in such a practice is the next time your company is submitting a proposal to the same firm, your name may not even trigger a memory with them. By providing a consistent message in your proposals and presentations, your company develops a personality and creates credibility in the marketplace. Your proposals will stand out amongst the crowd by developing a clear and consistent message.

The importance of consistency does not end with proposals and presentations. Conducting a marketing audit will help you determine how consistent your firm's materials really are. To do this, gather all information that actually leaves your office – either through the front door, email or fax – and examine each piece carefully for inconsistencies in your message or theme. Don't forget items such as advertisements, coffee mugs or other giveaways and logo wear, business cards, invoices and more. Reviewing these materials at the same time will help you see obvious discrepancies, but will also allow you to evaluate which message you want to send.

Another key concept to remember is the importance of logo consistency, especially since your logo may be your sole identity for your firm. Although the logo that you see a hundred times a day may look old and tired to you, it is important to remember that to your current and future clients, this icon is a symbol of who you are. A logo should represent the quality and expertise that your company represents. Frequently changing your logo will destroy any penetration you have in the marketplace, so resist the urge to tweak depending on the presentation. Instead of a complete image overhaul – which takes both a large time and monetary commitment – you should simply refresh and fine-

tune your logo and corporate identity over time. This will give you the ability to capitalize on the strengths of a consistent brand while ensuring that your logo does not become dated.

Beyond logo usage, there are a variety of every day opportunities available to help promote your brand identity. For example, displaying a job site sign at your latest project will draw attention to your company's name for a relatively low cost. If a passer-by is really impressed by your project, they may just give you a call. Imagine if they drive a few more miles and see another impressive project by your firm with a similar job site sign. They know at a glance that your firm is a part of that project as well. However, remember once again the importance of consistency. If you have two different signs with different logos, because one project was a strip mall and the other was a hospital, future and current clients may not recognize the diversity of work your firm is capable of handling.

If you still aren't convinced that branding is something your company should be concerned with, consider that your brand just may help you develop strong relationships in the minds of both current and future clients. In fact, one could argue that branding is even more essential for those firms with minimal dollars than those with vast resources. You may not be able to afford the expensive advertisement in the local business publication, but you can develop an in-house newsletter to send to clients, place job site signs at projects, as well as develop a website. The key to success in building a compelling brand identity lies in the development of a well thought out action plan and consistency in all you do, send and touch in the community.

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