



Recall Power...

## One dozen techniques to make clients remember *you* first

By Anne Scarlett, printed in *CE News*

In this service-oriented industry, clients tend to hire people rather than companies. We know this. We also know that a solid company brand makes the relationship-building process — aka business development — easier and more effective. Brand-name recognition translates into instant credibility and makes it significantly easier for technical folks to create client relationships beyond the ones that already exist. Countless articles have been aptly written on the value of branding and consistent marketing, all in the spirit of making your firm stick within the minds of your prospects and clients.

So, as a civil engineer, what can you do to become more memorable? How can you personally make an impact so that you are top-of-mind when that municipal project you've been tracking finally receives its funding, or a developer you've been courting at long last wins community approval to break ground?

For this article, we are going to make the assumption that your firm has — or is in the process of developing — a solid brand in the marketplace. We are also going to assume that your firm maintains a commitment to business development, and that it creates and executes an annual strategic marketing plan. If neither of these statements hold true, then we'll need to address these matters in future articles!

But for now, back to you. Here are a dozen steps to make sure that when a real project opportunity arises, prospects will remember you. These will, incidentally, position you as a more valuable asset within your firm.

1. **Become versed with your company's marketing approach.** Engineering firms have varying degrees of inclusion regarding access to marketing efforts. One thing is certain: your firm will greatly embrace your interest and intentions to become more memorable. If you are not familiar with your company's plan and approach, make an appointment with whoever makes the most sense — Director of Marketing, Principal in Charge of Business Development, Marketing Coordinator — to gain an understanding of the strategic goals, client development plan, value propositions, differentiators, and key messages.
2. **Put your mouth around the words.** Once you're clear on the firm's messages, practice stating them in various contexts. Consider rehearsing with an audience — a professional colleague, a family member, your cat. Practice until it becomes second nature; this will allow you to devote full attention to your prospect, which in turn will make a positive impact.
3. **Be seen!** Opportunities abound to be visible. Why not offer to partake in prospect visits and networking events? (Often, the marketing person will accompany you; together you will make a great team!) Be seen in outside contexts by serving in board or committee positions within client-focused organizations. The more that your prospects see you, the more connected (and memorable) you'll become. Position yourself as an expert resource; work with your marketing staff to secure speaking engagements, publish white papers, and write articles.
4. **Be respectful of prospect preferences.** I am appreciative when a sales person asks my communication preferences. In today's information-rich, fast-paced world, it's easy to become overwhelmed and frustrated. By noting your client's preferred method for contact, you are demonstrating a sincere respect for their time. (As a side note regarding email

communication: if you are a writer like me {read: lengthy emails!} then make sure to provide a brief summary at the onset of the email, then organize the remainder into sections so they can choose the level of detail they wish to digest.)

5. **Be remarkably responsive.** How cool is it when someone consistently returns your email, phone calls, or requests for information within a 24-hour time period? You would think this professional behavior would be a no-brainer, but in fact, you can develop quite a memorable impression (and earn extra points on the reliability scale) by simply being responsive.
6. **Do great work....and reconcile mistakes before they become mammoth.** It's true that good work speaks volumes, but then again, there are plenty of good firms out there! Many of us are vying to create life-long client relationships because we know that every time our firm loses a client, it loses money and risks tainting its reputation. To be remembered in a positive light, we must perform beyond the norm. One way: get periodic feedback from each client to uncover any level of dissatisfaction. This will not only help you correct the immediate situation, but will also help prevent future problems. While not every project will end smoothly, you really can play a role to re-energize relationships — provided that you and your firm are willing to listen and learn from mistakes.
7. **Leverage your own personal differentiators.** What makes you memorable to your co-workers, community, and friends? If you truly don't know, then sit down and ask them. It never hurts to have a clear idea of why folks are members of your 'fan club', for we all have our respective fans. Maybe you are trustworthy or have great leadership skills; maybe you are diplomatic or intricately thorough; maybe you're just downright hilarious. Whatever your attributes, use them to boost your confidence when interacting with prospects.
8. **Stay focused.** No matter how sophisticated your prospects and clients, they will best respond to straightforward, focused information. Take care to communicate with clarity, and note that less can often be more. Planning ahead is one way to ensure focus. Create an outline in advance of the purpose of your phone call or visit. And if you catch yourself digressing during the communication, then stop, acknowledge the digression, and get back on track. It is far easier for folks to keep you top-of-mind if they are crystal clear on your message and offerings.
9. **Accept marketing as one part of your role.** It's unlikely that you had a vision of becoming a full-time marketer when you originally chose your technical career path. Yet, if you can recognize the multi-faceted value of marketing, then you'll discover that it ultimately will enhance your technical experience. Perhaps you've experienced this scenario: a marketing director hands an engineer a calling list of prospects/clients, and the engineer instead occupies himself with anything remotely related to design, production or technical work before he 'finding the time' to make the calls. This is a natural response, because people choose to perform tasks that they feel the most capable to handle. So, why not build a comfort level by seeking direction and coaching from your firm's marketing experts? If calling prospects is not your thing, then maybe you're ok with giving a presentation to an audience, or maybe you enjoy writing technical articles. Choose whatever works for you; clients and prospects are more likely to remember those that are confident and comfortable with their outreach.
10. **Collect testimonials, and let them help tell your story!** Don't be shy about asking clients for testimonials. Do it while your client is still enthusiastically 'high' from a job well done. Send a simple form with open-ended questions, or have a third-party interview the client upon project completion. When thanking the client for his candid response, ask for permission to quote him in future marketing materials. And when using a client as a reference, always make sure that you 1. have his permission and 2. give him advance notice on the nature of the call.
11. **Seek guidance from existing client relationships.** Often, existing clients become friends. On occasion, selectively meet with them to get their insight on the industry as well as their feedback on your approach to prospective (non-competitor) clients. Many clients will be receptive to helping you grow your business (provided that your growth is not

a threat to the service you provide them) because they recognize that the more evolved your business, the deeper your resources and more informed your solutions.

12. **Relax.** 'Nuff said.

As an engineer at any experience level, you have choices. You can choose to try one or two steps, or you may wholeheartedly decide to adopt all twelve. One thing is certain: the positive impressions you make on your prospects and clients will reap rewards (and recollection) for years to come.

If your firm does not publish, much less create, a marketing plan, then you're in a bit of a pickle in terms of finding ways that you can contribute and/or ways that you can better serve as an ambassador of your firm's message, intent, et al. It is possible that instead, they have incorporated strategic marketing into the annual business plan, in which case you can most certainly go through the same process of identifying opportunities for inclusion. Some of you already hold leadership positions in your firms, and there is a reason that you became a leader in the first place. You're smart, and you know what you need to do if your firm does not currently have an effective strategic marketing plan. Of course, if you need any help or clarification on how to create an all-inclusive plan and reap real rewards, then please feel free to contact me and I'll be happy to help make it happen!