

RIGHT | NOW

Get your firm's name in the news

There's no better way to get your firm's name out and make others think of you as the expert.

By DAN NAUMOVICH
Correspondent

Deadlines are looming, clients are clamoring for your attention, and HR wants your staff evaluations, ASAP. So, when a reporter calls or e-mails looking for some professional insight into a story, it's easy to push that one to the back burner, if not off the stove altogether. But at what cost?

According to Susan Shelby and Pauline Harris, two public relations professionals who serve clients in the A/E/P and environmental consulting industries, firms are missing out on a golden opportunity when they don't take the time to respond to media inquiries.



Susan Shelby,
Founder and
Principal,
Rhino PR.

"Positive publicity is very important because it allows a professional services firm to showcase the expertise and experience of its staff. Spreading the word about all of your services allows you to reach potential new clients or perhaps additional work with an existing client," Shelby says. She is the founder and principal of Rhino PR in Hamilton, Massachusetts. Her agency works with A/E firms on both long-

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term programs and shorter engagements.

Responding to a reporter, whether it's taking a couple of minutes to answer a few questions or several hours collaborating on a story, will definitely result in unbillable time. That doesn't mean it isn't time well spent.

"Most A/E firms are on a tight budget when it comes to marketing and simply do not have an advertising budget that would support the generation of the type of attention one would like to garner. PR helps to support that effort without a lot of cash outlay," says Harris, owner/principal of SPIN in Baltimore, a marketing and public relations firm specializing in integrated marketing for the built environment.

According to Harris, being highlighted in an industry publication establishes credibility in the marketplace, promotes the firm's culture, attracts potential employees and influences decision makers. What's more, the news format lends an air of objectivity that is often absent in advertisements and marketing materials.

"It's not perceived as a 'chest-pounding' message when received through this

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Keeping
Contact



Code
for success



Architecture firm
rebrands itself

We're on Social Media!

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www.facebook.com/ZweigWhite
http://blog.zweigwhite.com/
www.linkedin.com/company/zweigwhite
www.youtube.com/user/ZweigWhite

Media

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medium," Harris says.

Both of these experts agree that the free publicity offered through the media, whether mainstream or industry, is important and that firms need established procedures to take advantage of opportunities.

PR essentials

One of the first things a firm needs to do is designate a point of contact through which all media inquiries are filtered.



Pauline Harris,
Owner/
Principal,
SPIN.

"Having a single person responsible for media inquiries is essential, whether it is a staff member trained in PR or an associate from a PR firm that represents your business. This professional should be armed with up-to-date information about the company and direct access to key members of the firm who would need to be reached for comment," Harris says.

It's also recommended that anyone in a firm who will be speaking to a reporter receive media training. These spokespersons need to be aware of company policies in terms of what types of information can and can not be divulged. They should also be aware of any confidentiality issues in regard to specific projects, clients, or technologies. And, as a public face, they should be trained on how to speak confidently and competently while telling their firm's story.

While it's important to be prepared, it doesn't mean that every media inquiry is deserving of your full attention. After subjecting an inquiry to a go/no-go evaluation, it may be that a polite "no thank you" is the prudent tack to take.

"We evaluate each opportunity that presents itself based on the audience of the publication: Will it reach our client's potential clients? And the focus of the article: Is it appropriate for our client? At the end of the day, it's all about winning new work," Shelby says.

Proactive strategy

A media-savvy firm won't sit and wait for a reporter to call and then decide how to respond. To maximize opportunities, a proactive approach to earning publicity should be included in marketing and business development plans.

The first step is to research industry publications and other outlets that target the audience you want to reach. Many publications will have an editorial calendar on their web site that will show which topics will be featured in upcoming issues, allowing

contributors to determine the best opportunity for placing a story. Being familiar with editorial guidelines will also increase the likelihood for a successful placement.

Once a story is published, there are some follow-up steps. If the article contains any factual errors, it's important to make the editor aware of them. If the errors are significant, a published correction can be requested.

It's also important that your clients are made aware that you've been featured in a publication. E-mailing a link to the article or purchasing reprints for distribution is a good way to get it directly in front of them.

"It should not be happenstance that your clients or potential clients will read or see it," Harris says.

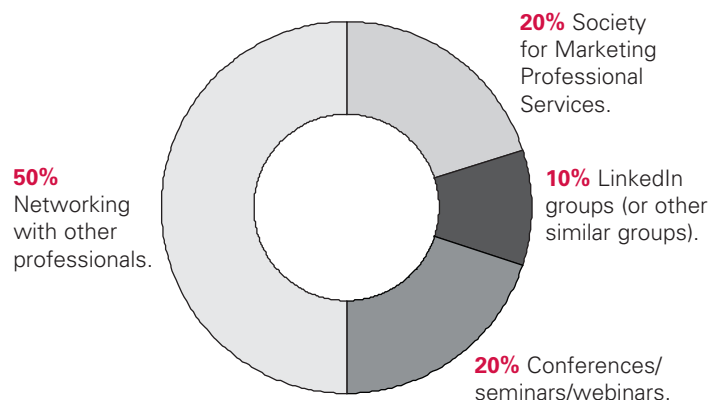
Taking the time to respond to the media, or to initiate contact, is all about increasing exposure and shining a light on your firm. The more people know about a firm, the more comfortable they are doing business with them.

"Many professional service firms, especially in the A/E/C industry, believe that 'everyone knows what we do.' However, they may not, or they may not understand all that you do," Shelby adds.

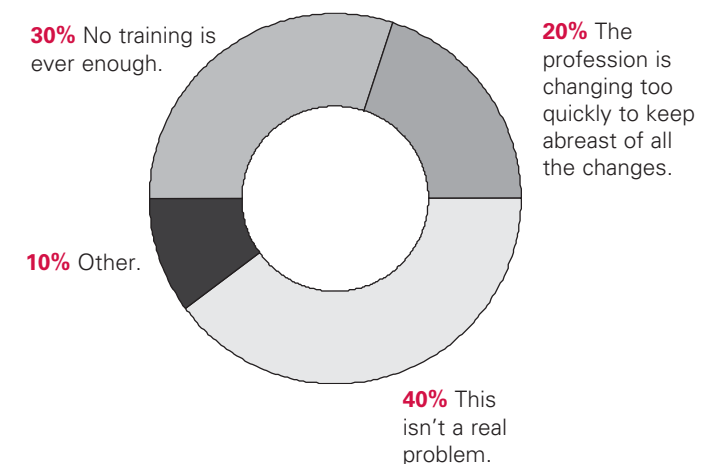
With all of this in mind, maybe it's time to take media opportunities off the back burner and start cooking up some publicity. You never know how many potential clients will be sitting around the table. ▀▀

TREND | LINES

How do you keep informed (primarily) about changes in the profession?



I feel that...



Results from online reader survey.

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