

TALK IS CHEAP:

WHY YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO IGNORE PUBLIC RELATIONS IN A DOWN MARKET

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Why should you start a public relations program when the real estate, design and construction markets are down? The same reason that you should have an ongoing public relations program in a good market. Part of being a professional service firm is communicating your expertise to different audiences in order to further your business goals.

Public relations, like marketing and business development, is as important to our industry as walls are to buildings. Yet, at the first signs of a recession, these are some of the first areas to be cut. Fiscal responsibility does not, and should not, pledge any firm to an oath of silence. Here are some simple ways to maintain a healthy public relations program to weather any kind of economic forecast and not bust your budget:



- 1) **Decide what you want to be when you grow up.** Not all service firms are created equal. Each company has its own areas of expertise, wealth of talent, and specialties. If you don't know who you are, you won't be able to communicate your uniqueness to your clients. In a tough economy, it's even more important to craft your messages or update your mission statement.
- 2) **Get on the radar.** Or, at the very least, don't fall off it. With so many businesses struggling these days, it's more important than ever to be present to your clients, potential clients, and peers. Now that companies are spending less on marketing and advertising, a little investment will go a much farther way towards making you stand out. Or, consider cost-effective out

reach activities, such as local speaking engagements or participation in your favorite professional organization, particularly if it will help you to meet new clients.

- 3) **Choose quality over quantity.** You don't need to spend endless resources or time on outreach to your clients and the press. For example, you might find that it's more effective to spend your time writing a substantive article on a trend or a topical issue for a leading journal than sending out several press releases for projects that won't generate much buzz. Whatever you do, do it strategically and do it well. The competition is fierce!
- 4) **Teach, don't preach.** The media is always looking for great content, but it shouldn't always be directly about you. Outside audiences will respond better to firms that can discuss topics that are substantive and educational by nature, not showy. Trends and tips are always good takeaways.
- 5) **Get ready, get set, go!** Use your extra time to finish the projects that you can never seem to start, like your mailing list or data collection. Or, take the time to get back in touch with clients who you haven't seen. Have lunch or even co-author an article—it can be a great way to stay connected. ■

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