

Construction firms can benefit from differentiation

Pre-fab, stick-built, modular, custom design, cookie-cutter – it's all out there in the commercial construction market.

So who are you? What do your prospects think your expertise is in? Do you promise all of it to everyone, or none of it to no one?

In today's highly competitive commercial building industry, if you don't define the market, your prospects or – worse yet – your competitors will redefine you.

Every time I meet a new client I ask them one simple question: "When comparing like or similar categorical services, what makes your offering different (not better) than any other competitive service?" I wait calmly for a response with my pen poised. I ask again and, after much thought, the answers come, remarkably the same, client to client, industry to industry. They say: "It's our people. It's our service. It's our integrity."

I amicably challenge with the response: "So what? Everyone believes that about their company. Now tell me something different."

It's a welcomed rare occurrence when I hear this reply: "Well, we're fast." Or, "We only build community-centric facilities,

Starbucks took the commodity out of coffee and changed the brand landscape.

recreational centers, halfway shelters and the like." Or, "As builders, our specificity is focused on ecological compliance and energy conservationism."

Why is this kind of response rare? Three reasons can explain it:

- One, commercial builders and developers, the great ones, are experts in building and developing, not marketing.

- Two, the economy heavily influences their next commercial opportunity (commercial construction is dependent upon growth of commerce), such that having the next job is more important than qualifying the right job.

- And last, history robbed this industry of a specific language to help propel its true artistry and design-build expertise.

It all started with the word "general," giving birth to phrases such as general contractor, general building construction and general services. These kinds of generalities lead to a general disinterest in the prospect's perception of the field. And generalities are generally boring, and lead to unsophisticated marketing trends such as price-base analysis versus value proposition of services and products.

When, over time, industries do not reach a more urbane level, they become a sum total of their parts – steel becomes steel, marble is marble and wood is wood.

Yet Starbucks took the commodity out of coffee and changed the brand landscape by re-naming everything, even its size offerings – larges became known as venti.

Our own government named a war plan the strategic theatre. I don't know about you, but I love the idea of drinking a venti in a strategic theatre. That certainly sounds more compelling than black coffee in a war bunker, doesn't it?



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So what is the answer for commercial construction?

In a word, differentiate. And many construction companies throughout the United States are doing just that. How? Offer a unique position for the building process. Don't sell the materials, the timeline or pre-construction checkpoints. Sell the emotional excitement of the client's expectations. Sell the passion, such as a statement that "We Love

What We Do."

Next, drop everyone else's language and invent your own, as Coronado Builders did with their ValuePlus Transformation Qual-

ity program, defining itself as a new "process of continuous improvement that empowers team members to achieve great performance," as defined and measured by their customers and stakeholders.

Or perhaps use oppositional marketing, as one commercial construction company states: "We are breaking all the old rules."

Another industry leader is even selling the cleanliness of construction, positioning its offering as the supplier of "the world's most advanced inorganic antimicrobial-coated steel ... inhibiting the growth of a broad array of bacteria, molds and fungi," which many commercial construction facilities may view as beneficial.

Another California-based commercial construction company focuses its design

and construction practices on "reducing the negative impact of buildings on the environment and its occupants."

We differentiated how a client built as an integration of conventional construction materials and modular design technology, which we termed, "M-Fusion."

What are the common characteristics of these successful commercial construction companies? Differentiate first, create a marketing edge through this visibility second and, lastly, do what you do – build.

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Christopher S. Mohr, MBA, CGFM, RSBA
Treasurer and Director of Business Affairs
Dublin City Schools

Ruscilli is proud to have managed construction of the new Dublin Jerome High School. Attractively situated on a 92 acre campus, this 250,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility will open its doors to students in the fall of 2004. Ruscilli is pleased to have once again been a partner in Dublin's tradition of excellence in education.

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