The Keys to Marketing in Architecture

From branding to augmented reality, marketing in architecture is quickly becoming a focus for smaller and larger firms to take their services to the next level.

There is no one-size-fits-all marketing strategy that will work for your small architecture firm the same way it will with an established organization. Most larger firms acquire new clients through word of mouth, which can differ greatly from the marketing of smaller competitors. It is no secret that marketing in architecture can be outdated and it’s time that we become proactive and innovative in our approach.

Marketing is usually seen as a luxury that smaller architecture firms can’t afford and the bigger firms don’t care to prioritize it. Contrary to popular belief, architecture isn’t only an inbound business. Connecting clients with your brand, setting a strategy, and utilizing innovation like augmented reality (AR) are the future of marketing in the AEC industry.

Even Architects communicate their brand

Communicating your brand begins in what you stand for. As an architect, we believe that we can solve any issue through design, yet we need to show where our specialty lies and the value we bring.

“We are an innovative, award-winning firm…”

The way your website looks, the messaging you deliver, and your marketing materials all must portray the same branding and values that your firm represents.
The mission statement can be seen as the pilot of the ship, it helps to steer how organizations can define the other intangibles that make up their marketing approach: target audience, value proposition, and strategy.

A large part of marketing and establishing a consistent inbound pipeline of RFPs comes with determining your target audience. Whether your focus is commercial projects or residential, defining this helps you communicate the areas you specialize in as a firm, making your efforts more efficient as a team while instilling confidence in your clients.

All projects are multifaceted, with multiple layers that need to be attended to. Technology, equipment, and systems are becoming tailored to specific functions or areas. Whether it’s hotels, educational institutions, or private homes, finding a niche is important when it comes to client presentations and your marketing foundation. As this evolution continues to scale, a broad approach can hurt a firm more than it helps.

Before there was a fear of committing to a specific direction for your firm but generalists are in a lesser position as clients want to know that your firm’s specialty is in tandem with what they're looking for. Even generalist firms specialize in a select few markets. Defining your markets helps you begin to narrow down your target audience.

Marketing in architecture is headed towards the thinking that steers the internal decision making in marketing agencies today:

Are your services for businesses or individuals? Where are they located? What is their lifestyle like? Their age? Social status?

**Value Proposition**

When marketing any service you provide - especially when it is business-to-business focused - you want to sell the problem you solve rather than the product.

Customers want to know the tangible value that you’re bringing to the table. Whether it’s a single family looking for a custom residential property or a multi-building project, the client needs your value of your services to be clearly communicated. Your value proposition should reflect your target audience; including the answers to concrete questions about what your clients should expect, how your services differ from competition, and your general work process.

Gaining trust from your clients comes with helping them feel understood and following through with what you’ve promised to provide. The key to a good value proposition is first having the expertise to offer and communicating it so your clients can understand.
Strategy

Establishing your outbound and inbound strategy is the foundation of any marketing approach. Outbound techniques are considered to be outdated as they include traditional advertising practices like cold calling, cold emailing, newsletters, and other outreach tactics.

Inbound marketing has become common practice for innovative architecture firms. The bigger firms tend to have an influx of RFPs for forthcoming projects but mid to smaller sized firms may struggle with these inbound clients. There are generic and mandatory tasks to put yourself in the best position for potential prospects to find your work. These tactics involve creating and sharing content, building communities through social media platforms, and creating experiences that your customers can interact with.

Let’s explore how technology and augmented reality can help improve your inbound marketing initiatives and internal processes as an AEC professional.

Use Augmented Reality to Your Advantage

Marketing in architecture is beginning to adapt to more traditional practices, yet there are innovations that are also hitting the marketing that can prove direct ROI for firms both small and large.

The power of technology shouldn’t be undermined, especially when it can be used to enhance your product’s appeal. With architects, developers, and contractors, augmented reality (AR) has been used to help sell building projects as well as help teams internally improve design.

Augmented reality allows architects and development firms to work with material they already have, 3D models, and bring it to life outside of the flat screen. AR has been used in video games and entertainment for some time now. Retail is even adopting this innovation but this technology has proven vastly effective within the AEC industry. The use of AR in the AEC space has matured over recent years and now it has become a vital tool internally and a differentiator when looking to win projects.

Augment has been used by bigger firms in the likes of Gensler, Skanska, and Aecom.

Our software helps both small and large AEC firms show potential building designs in augmented reality through iPads and other mobile devices. Augment integrates with many of
the available 3D modeling software, allowing firms to quickly export content from Revit or 3DS Max to show in AR through Augment.

**Visualization in real environments**

Visualization in architecture is a never ending conversation because no two minds can truly imagine the same vision. Architects use augmented reality to interact with their virtual models, making “what if” design scenarios much easier to manipulate rather than a physical model that has to be remodeled to showcase other options in an effort to reach an approval.

Property visualization is necessary in many stages of a real estate project. When pitching to clients, designing internally, collaborating on your vision with developers, and even contractors looking to estimate the logistics of a work site.

Augmented reality has fit well in the architecture space where future property can be seen in 3D and manipulated easily until the vision is up to par.

Architects collaborate with designers, developers and others on the job to communicate their vision at each milestone throughout the project. Before, visualizing future builds was done with tangible prototypes that would have to be deconstructed and rebuilt to see how different floor plans and a property landscape would look when completed.
It’s easy to drop the ceiling of the main floor by a "foot" in real-time on the 3D model to help imagine how it would look through augmented reality. Using your 3D models as this canvas saves a great deal of time and bandwidth. It also helps you visualize the potential build in a realistic way that you can continue to manipulate quickly and easily.

“Lowering the ceiling by a foot would look like this…”

When a stage in the design process is finalized, these approvals no longer require the shipment of physical models. Models through Augment can easily be shared, exported, and seen through mobile devices.

AR has an abundance of design uses beyond visualization, too. It can be used for design analysis to pick out conflicts in property structure by virtually walking through the completed model. It can even assist when coordinating prefabrication of building components.

Interactive Marketing

With the stiffening competition, getting a client to consider your portfolio or brochure is tough in itself but it still isn’t enough. Much like marketing, winning over clients is the goal and innovative, engaging presentations is the differentiator.

Design is subjective so there is a need to engage the end user when marketing in the AEC industry. To stand out from a stack of other reputable firms, especially as a smaller competitor, architects are using augmented reality to turn their flat 3D models into an interactive experience.
AEC professionals have acquired the skill to turn a 2D plan into a 3D form in their minds, but who is to say your 3D form and what you are visualizing is the same as what another is visualizing. We are not even talking about stakeholders who don’t have that skill.

This added dimension of visualization gives life-like insight into the design details which can’t be achieved through a 2D image or even the current uses of 3D models. Overall, designers and builders have found a greater ROI when using augmented reality to streamline the modeling stage. **Augment** is an example of a mobile solution that seamlessly integrates with Revit and SketchUp, allowing developers to easily launch their 3D models right before them at true scale.

**LSI Architects** is a British company in the real estate and construction industry. The firm’s goal is “to produce buildings and foster environments, which are modern and innovative”. Their value proposition is clear through their mission statement and AR fits right in with those initiatives. LSI uses Augment to showcase new projects, like student residences projects. At project events, the firm uses Augment’s app to allow prospects to change their static 2D blueprints into interactive, virtual standing buildings on top of the blueprint map.

Even outside of one-to-one presentations, for public projects using AR to bring the visualization to the community before the building has been completed. To the untrained eye, floor maps and blueprints can only be so exciting, but a 3D version of what’s to come can stir quite the bit of eagerness and bring valued awareness to your firm’s brand.
Where is AR and architecture headed?

The future of architecture and construction in augmented reality will boom with the advancement of AR hardware. The market already has working products like DAQRI and the Microsoft Hololens; their adoption in the field is on the horizon.

Imagine using 3D models through augmented reality to give architects and the builders an exact idea of the relevant dimensions, size, texture, and shape of a particular building element such as a wall or ventilation system, for example. It will be much easier to determine the amount of raw material needed to build elements of the building, allowing for accurate estimations and avoiding unnecessary waste of resources. The forthcoming years in these industries could evolve to where workers on the field are all equipped with AR headsets.

Augmented reality may become the biggest influence in the coming year in the architecture and building design industry. Yet, virtual reality also poses some valuable use cases that architects can find useful. Augment is a software solution that is active among the AEC community. Find out how Augment helps architects today.