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How the A/E/C Community Uses Social Media These Days

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Posted by [Neal Leavitt](#) on May 23rd, 2012 at 8:09 am

Architecture, engineering and construction firms, often lumped together under the moniker ‘A/E/C’, have until recently lagged considerably behind other professions in jumping on the social media bandwagon.

The numbers are steadily increasing but a white paper issued in August 2011 by the Society of Marketing Professional Services ([SMPS](#)), entitled, ‘The Client’s Use of Social Media and Social Networking’ demonstrated it’s still an uphill climb. More than 1,600 surveys were distributed; 160 responses received. The breakdown of firms using some form of social media was 36% engineering; 24% architecture; and 17% for construction, landscape design and facility owners.

“For many construction firms, all their work is about getting a project off the ground,” said Daryl Andrews, vice president of marketing and business development at 360 Construct, a building management firm. He added that it’s still a slow-go for the construction industry to use social media as part of their business strategy.

Most architectural firms currently using social media tend to be larger, primarily due to the investment in time/labor and having the requisite skills to navigate/communicate effectively on key social media sites like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

The engineering community, on the other hand, has been quicker to adapt social media. Way back in Fall 2009 (probably equates to about 50 years in tech time), [CE News](#) conducted a survey on social media and mobile devices that was sent to about 750 civil engineering firms. Slightly more than half- 51% - said they use regularly use professional networking sites like LinkedIn; 30% said they use social networking mediums like Facebook to promote their business; 20% use Twitter or blogs. Those percentages have undoubtedly increased.

“Engineering firms can take advantage of social computing tools for knowledge management, expertise sharing and information retention, which is especially critical with the pending retirement of baby boomers and incoming millennial generation,” said Brian Zeve, managing director, Microsoft Professional Services Industry. “Web-based collaboration through wikis, blogs, tagging, and other content management tools can provide firms with a whole new way of architecting knowledge and enabling input and expertise to bubble-up within the firm.”

The current social media flavor of the month, [Pinterest](#), has exploded onto the scene in recent months and quite a few A/E/C firms are now sharing their ‘pins’ in the form of visual portfolios of previous jobs, ideas, and designs conducive to their respective business. Most A/E/C firms usually have a welter of images for key projects so Pinterest is fast becoming an attractive forum to showcase work.

So with the aforementioned in mind, here are a few examples of how a handful of A/E/C firms in the U.S. and abroad are effectively using social media:

Burns & McDonnell

Established in 1898, the venerable Kansas City, MO-based firm has more than 3,400 employee-owners including engineers, architects, construction experts, planners, estimators, economists, technicians and scientists. [Burns & McDonnell](#) plans, designs, permits, constructs and manages facilities worldwide. The company also ranks 26th in *Fortune*’s 2012 list of ‘100 Best Companies to Work For.’

While the 113-year-old firm has roots dating back to the 19th Century, Burns & McDonnell hasn’t rested on its laurels and has readily embraced 21st Century social media avenues.

For starters, the company maintains a comprehensive [Careers Blog](#); recent posts have included ‘How to Establish Your Online Presence’ (see YouTube video in this post; the company also maintains a dedicated [YouTube](#) page containing numerous videos); ‘LinkedIn: 4 Things You Need to Know About This Powerful Tool;’ ‘7 Tips for Stress-Free Business Travel;’ and ‘What Recruiters See When They Read Your Resume.’

Posts are cross-linked to the company's LinkedIn site and tweeted.

Burns & McDonnell also uses [LinkedIn](#) for recruiting - two recent posts, for instance, advertise openings for a telecommunications coordinator in the Kansas City headquarters, and a project manager-substation design, in Wallingford, CT.

The [Facebook](#) home page currently has 915 Likes; it also features numerous shared links to stories in the news that are of interest to employees, project photos, even volunteer opportunities – a recent one was for Jazzoo, the Kansas City Zoo's largest annual fundraising event.

As of today, the company had 3,271 followers on Twitter (@BurnsMcDonnell). In addition to company-related tweets and retweets, Burns & McDonnell also uses Twitter for recruiting. Here's one example from yesterday: #Engineering student looking for the coolest jobs? Check out @BurnsMcDCareers.

Snow Architects

Located in Liverpool, United Kingdom, [Snow Architects](#) is a RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) Chartered Practice; projects range across the board – residential properties, apartments, restaurants, hotels, mixed-use city center developments.

Pauley Creative, a UK-based digital marketing agency, interviewed Dave Cornett, Snow Architects company director. Here are some of their key observations:

The firm utilizes a wide variety of the most popular social media tools – Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter; posts photos/videos on Flickr, Vimeo and YouTube. Cornett indicated he is also using QR codes and Augmented Reality (AR) to help with practice development.

“We've been using QR codes in our printed brochure to link to additional information on the website, such as videos or additional photographs of the project,” said Cornett.

Pauley Creative added that Cornett's enthusiastic about how AR can be applied to architecture.

“We've done some image based AR and 3D models to show clients; they've been impressed when I pull out my iPhone and guide them through their building,” said Cornett.

Pauley Creative reported that Cornett has also been looking at geo located models – these are superimposed over a phone's camera as you look at the site.

“We've had a lot of Twitter interest in this worldwide, which is something I didn't expect. The main disadvantage right now is that there isn't a single app which can do all the things I would want to so it's a case of switching from app to app,” said Cornett.

Cornett said that social media has helped increase brand awareness for his practice.

“Most people have actually now heard of us when we go to industry events in Liverpool and Manchester; we have also had job enquiries via Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook on the back of a tweet or status update which jogs someone's memory,” said Cornett.

Martell Home Builders

The Moncton, New Brunswick construction firm is one of Canada's largest home builders.

The company made the plunge into social media because of a key problem – customers didn't know where to find them when they needed them. So [Martell](#) resolved this by adding a 'Where's My Contractor' feature on the web site which lists Twitter accounts of the firm's managers – this way clients could see what they were doing and know how to find them. The web page is also connected to a Google Map API (application programming

interface), which puts a stickpin on a map, making it even easier for customers to find their contractor.

Martell's Twitter page is popular – to date, @martellhomes has 12,495 followers and the company tweets about a half-dozen times each day on a wide variety of topics – some recent tweets (with links) have included: '21 ways of turning pallets into unique pieces of furniture;' 'Top 10 ways to add value to your home;' and 'What tool can you not live without? 14 must-have tools for new homeowners.'

The company has an extensive YouTube archive – there are currently 79 videos for viewing covering a wide expanse of helpful homeowner-related topics. Some of these include:

- How to fix a door latch
- How to adjust or replace a shower
- Maritime energy solutions

While the jury is still out on whether social media is generating billable projects, it's definitely helping the A/E/C industry connect with the public and ultimately may lead to new collaborations and clients.

Jing Liu, principal of Brooklyn, NY-based [Solid Objectives-Idenburg Liu](#), an architectural design firm, believes social media will gain momentum across the A/E/C divide over time but with a caveat:

“Younger people who are in their 20s are very much in touch with the technology,” said Liu. “Online there is so much information, however, that I don't think people completely trust what they read. They need to get know you personally before they give you a project.”

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1.  *Moltisanti* says:
[May 24, 2012 at 12:00 PM](#)

: O

[Reply](#)

2.  [Dave Cornett](#) says:
[May 29, 2012 at 3:09 PM](#)

Hi Neal,


Thanks very much for the mention of myself and my company, greatly appreciated.

Do you think more and more professions will see the benefit in social media?

Regards

Dave Cornett
SNOW architects

[Reply](#)

3.  [Josh Miles](#) says:
[July 29, 2012 at 6:10 PM](#)

Neal,

We've seen this in our practice too. I think there are two overwhelming factors at work:

1. A/E/C firms don't expect their clients are on social media to begin with. They may associate their prospect a little too much with their employer. For example, the woman who works for the large public institution may be very active on social media, even though you may expect the "institution" to be "behind the times."
2. A/E/C firms don't think they'll actually get any business from social media. I'll admit, you probably won't get a design project from one tweet, but even if you assume it will never be successful for biz dev, social is a great way to attract talent and build valuable links to your website content.

You might enjoy the free chapter "Five Fears of Social Media" available from my Bold Brand book website - boldbrand.com - I'd be curious to hear your feedback.

Best,

Josh Miles
Miles Design

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