

Best practice

Winning credit for your work: An expert's view

Chapter 6.03

Contributed by Cynthia L. Taylor, APR, Principal, Capstone Communications

Summary

Securing basic credit and even modest visibility for design projects is a frequent frustration for architects. If your firm does not have the resources for a high-impact publicity campaign, a few simple steps can still help you receive appropriate credit. The process does not have to be time-consuming or expensive, but it does require a little creativity and follow-through.

Write it down

One of the first and most important steps begins with your contract. Include a requirement that all project publicity will mention your firm. Whether your firm is the “prime,” part of a design-build or JV partnership, design architect or architect-of-record, be sure this is addressed in your professional agreement.

Next, create a solid description of the project. While you may need to refine this profile as the project moves forward, develop the overview as early as possible. Include the basics that will be helpful to reporters, such as:

- size and major program areas
- key objectives: what will the building accomplish for the owner/user?
- design highlights and unique challenges
- sustainability measures
- notable use of building materials
- schedule milestones

- your company's name and role, along with other key firms on the team

Give it away

Give the description to your client for their approval and use. They will appreciate having the architectural perspective; it may help in their own public/media outreach. Once approved, share the description with subconsultants, contractors, public officials, brokers, and others who may find it helpful. If your internal marketing team hasn't already been involved with developing the project profile, make sure they are also copied: they'll need to add it to resumes and the project database. They may also be able to assist with additional steps to get the word out.

Post it

Use the information as the basis for a news release. Include a rendering if available, and clearly indicate that the image should be credited to your firm.

Again, be sure to have permission to post and send out a news release—don't pre-empt or surprise your client. If your client wants to lead the media outreach effort, ask if you can contribute to their media list or send your own version—subject to their approval of the timing—to a supplementary media list (including AIA newsletters, design trades, and beat reporters who cover architecture).

Sending out a news release early on accomplishes many things. Ideally, you'll receive publicity during the design phase. You've contributed to the searchable archive of information on the project that reporters may draw upon later. You've also signaled to your client and other team members your pride in the project—and the expectation that you will be mentioned in other press materials that may be generated.

Kirby Lee Davis, Tulsa bureau chief with *The Journal Record* in Oklahoma, offers this advice to architects: "Many times we don't hear of your work until construction starts—and the emphasis then is on the firm building the project, owning it, or moving into it. My first recommendation would be to remind people of your existence by putting out a press release on each contract you land or complete."

Share the credit

It's worth repeating: Be sure to credit other firms contributing to the project design and construction, as well as the client. "It's critical that anyone who submits a press release about a building project identify all the major players," says Ned Cramer, editor-in-chief of *Architect* magazine. "Every publication, *Architect* included, does its best at fact checking. And it causes a big problem for editors when the subject of an article isn't fully transparent about the project team, whether intentionally or not. I have seen firms lose out on opportunities for publication because of their bad habits when it comes to sharing credit."

Stick with it

Perseverance pays off. In addition to sending out a news release and having your project profile readily available, use social media tools to post updates about project progress. Think of your “photo ops”: from charrettes and public meetings to construction progress. Blog about interesting challenges and opportunities the project has presented, and link the blog to future news releases at key milestones.

Speed it up

Once a project is nearing construction completion, many architects don't think about publicity again until they have final photography in hand. But on the local level, this delay often means you'll be left out of the spotlight when the building opens. Be sure your design description is updated and ready for use at media tours and the ribbon-cutting ceremony. With your client's permission, send the updated overview or a news release, along with media-ready quotes, in advance to newspapers and any public officials who may be speaking about the project.

Show up

Show up for all of the major milestone events—groundbreakings, topping-out ceremonies, and ribbon-cuttings. Seek an opportunity to speak at the event if appropriate. Look for reporters and share your insights on the project. Have your project overview with you; it will make their job easier.

The Journal Record's Davis emphasizes the importance of explaining your design, whether in writing, at the podium, or in a one-on-one conversation with a reporter: “One thing to keep in mind is that many journalists, even at business papers, have only a rudimentary education on business at best. The key is to explain what you do in not just laymen terms, but in ways that help them grasp the complexity, importance and long-term impact of architecture. Help them see the beauty and poetry of the designs, the excitement and joy architects have in their work, and that may just fuel reporter interest.”

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About the contributor

Cindy Taylor is the founding principal of [Capstone Communications](#). An accredited public relations practitioner, she has been specializing in the design and construction industry for more than 25 years. She can be reached at ctaylor@capstonestrategy.com.