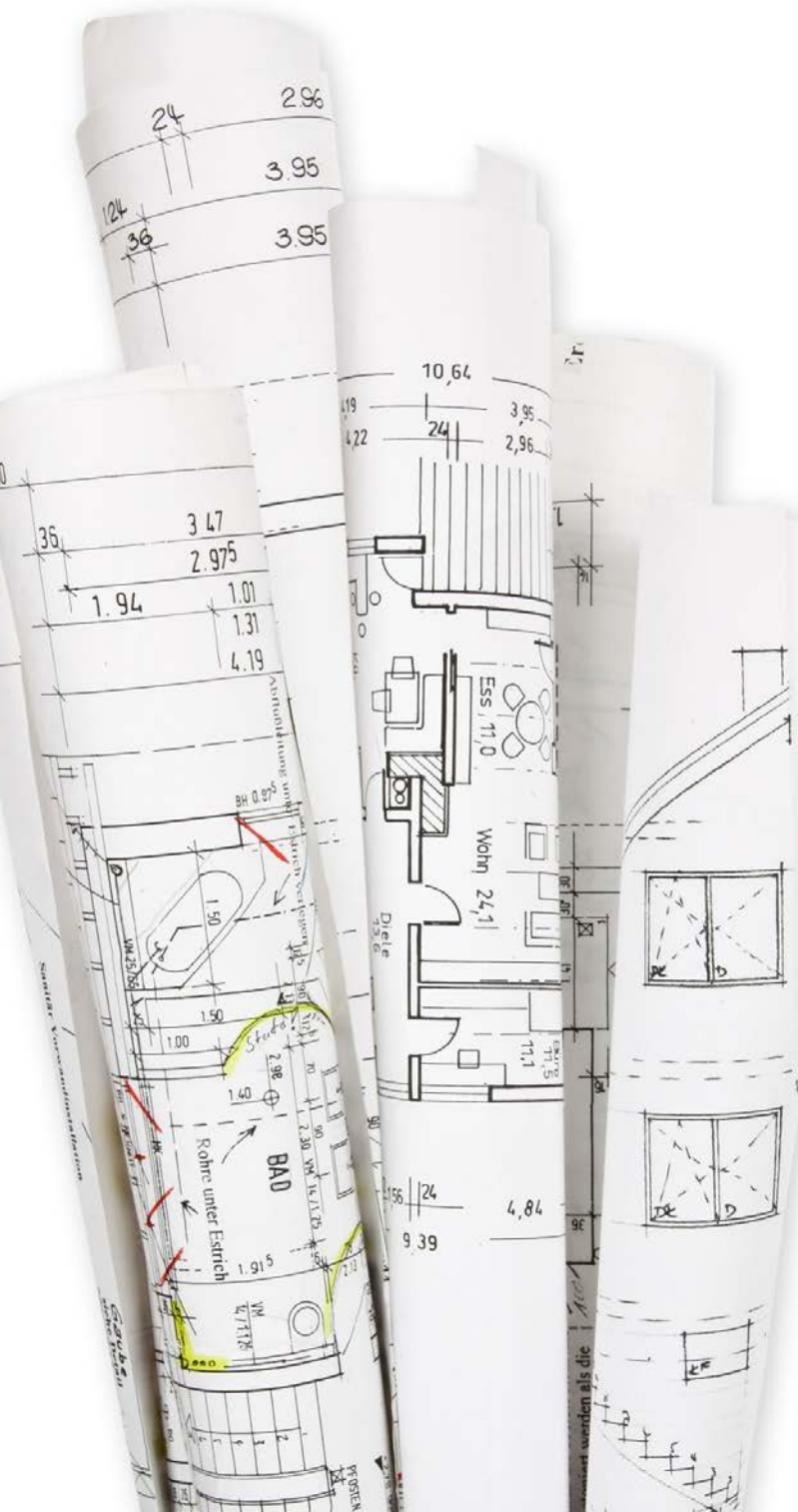


BUILDING BLOCKS

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GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR DESIGN FIRMS IS GOOD RISK MANAGEMENT

*By: Eric O. Pempus, FAIA, Esq., NCARB
DesignPro Insurance Group*

Successful public relations raises a design firm's profile and reinforces its brand and market positioning, whether the firm is small, medium or large. This also applies whether the firm is newly established or has a long-standing practice of architecture or engineering. Each firm should have some game plan to reach out into the community—locally, statewide, regionally and/or on a national level. And the plan does not have to be complicated, but it does have to be periodically updated and refreshed.

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WHAT IS INVOLVED IN A PLAN

A firm's plan should be aimed at communicating a large wide range of messages to prospective and existing clients, as well as potential employees, current staff members and consultants. This promotes good risk management for a design firm. More than media relations, a good public relations plan should include multifaceted qualities and not putting all the eggs in one basket. For example, this could include the firm's strategic goals, short and long range, and assessment of market conditions. The plan likely will involve:

- online and media publications such as articles written and design awards,
- portfolio of past and current projects,
- background of firm's management and other staff members,
- attending conferences and other events not only in the firm's profession but also allied professions.

In other words, a public relations plan could include crafting and executing communication strategies to shape and maintain a positive public image for an organization, including media relations, content creation, event planning, and even crisis management should a firm experience disaster such as a fire or flood.

In more detail:

- **Strategic Communication:**

Developing and implementing communication plans to achieve specific PR goals, such as building brand awareness, improving reputation, or launching new products.

- **Media Relations:**

Building relationships with journalists, media outlets, and influencers to secure positive media coverage and manage potential negative publicity.

- **Content Creation:**

Writing and editing press releases, articles, blog posts, social media updates, and other communication materials to share information with the public.

- **Event Planning:**

Organizing and executing events, such as press conferences, product launches, and community outreach activities, to generate publicity and engagement.

- **Social Media Management:**

Developing and implementing social media strategies to engage with audiences, build online communities, and monitor brand reputation.

- **Crisis Management:**

Developing and implementing crisis communication plans to address negative publicity or emergencies effectively.

- **Research and Analysis:**

Conducting research to understand public opinion, identify target audiences, and evaluate the effectiveness of PR campaigns.

Public Speaking:

Delivering presentations and engaging in media interviews to represent the organization and its message.

- **Building Relationships:**

Cultivating relationships with internal and external stakeholders, including employees, customers, investors, and community members.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:**

Tracking media coverage, social media engagement, and other relevant metrics to assess the effectiveness of PR efforts and make necessary adjustments.

A STORY

A medium sized architecture firm with in-house engineering specializes in libraries on a national level. The firm's management and midlevel staff members belong to library consortiums such as the American Library Association (ALA) or the American Association of School Librarian (AASL), or even specialized organizations at hospitals, museums, colleges, the military, or in government.

In addition, the firm attends conferences like the American Library Association Annual Conference in Philadelphia, June 26-30, 2025, or the Association of College and Research Libraries in Minneapolis, April 2-5, 2025. Conferences include trade shows with a booth or table spreading the firm's out-reach, and opportunities to speak on a related topic. And at conferences and conventions, don't forget your "elevator speech" targeting your audience.

OPPORTUNITIES ARE ENDLESS

Consider involving a local organization as a public official. Related to the design professions, firm members can participate on a government board or commission—a planning commission, an architectural design or engineering board, a preservation and historic board, or a board of zoning and building appeals. A good public relation plan is normally drafted and updated by a marketing or communications department, but will be even more effective with a buy-in and participation from firm leaders and all staff members.

Press releases are welcomed with recently completed design projects (but make sure you check your facts) and other newsworthy events such as a project groundbreaking or a merger of design firms. Also, lead a building hard-hat tour during construction of one of the firm's projects. As all instances, make sure you get your client's permission. The American Institute of Architects' Standard Form of Agreement Between Owner and Architect, B101, states:

§ 10.7 The Architect shall have the right to include photographic or artistic representations of the design of the Project among the Architect's promotional and professional materials. The Architect shall be given reasonable access to the completed Project to make such representations. However, the Architect's materials shall not include the Owner's confidential or proprietary information if the Owner has previously advised the Architect in writing of the specific information considered by the Owner to be confidential or proprietary. The Owner shall provide professional credit for the Architect in the Owner's promotional materials for the Project.

There is a wealth of information on this topic. Start with the "All About Public Relations (<http://aboutpublicrelations.net>) or the Society for Marketing Society of America (www.smps.org).

About the Author of this Risk Management Building Block Article

As a risk manager for the last 19 years for the design profession, Eric has experience in professional liability insurance and claims, architecture, engineering, land use, law, and a unique background in the construction industry. Prior to risk management, he has 25 years of experience in the practice of architecture/engineering, and as an adjunct professor teaching professional practice courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels for the last 37 years at Kent State University's College of Architecture & Environmental Design.

As a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and AIA National Ethics Council 2021 Chair, he has demonstrated his impact on architectural profession. He has presented numerous loss prevention and continuing educational programs to design professionals since 2000 on topics of ethics, contracts, and professional practice in various venues across the United States and Canada. He has been the former member and chair of his city's Board of Zoning & Building Appeals for 24 years, and is a licensed architect, attorney, and property & casualty insurance professional.

His educational background includes a JD from Southwestern University School of Law, Los Angeles; Master of Science in Architecture from University of Cincinnati; and BA in psychology/architecture from Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

The above comments are based upon DesignPro Insurance Group's experience with Risk Management Loss Prevention activities and should not be construed to represent a determination of legal issues but are offered for general guidance with respect to your own risk management and loss prevention. The above comments do not replace your need for you to rely on your counsel for advice and a legal review, since every project and circumstance differs from every other set of facts.

Disclaimer: The viewpoints expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and are not necessarily approved by, reflective of or edited by other individuals, groups, or institutions and this article is an expression by the author to generate discussion and interest in this topic.

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MEET OUR PEOPLE:



Brad Bush, CPCU, AU
Principal
brad.designproins@wichert.com



Eric Pempus
FAIA, Esq., NCARB
Risk Manager
eric.designproins@wichert.com



Connor Bush
Account Executive
connor.bush@wichert.com



Mike Pettit
Risk Manager
mike.designproins@wichert.com



Roger Perry
Account Executive
roger.designproins@wichert.com



Tracey Heise
Account Manager
tracey.designproins@wichert.com



Tracy Combs
Risk Manager & Loss Control Specialist
tracy@wichert.com

DesignPro Insurance

5991 Chandler Court, Suite A
Westerville, OH 43082
614-794-4820

www.designproins.com

2301 Blake Street, Suite 100
Denver, CO 80205
614-426-3045