

What I have learned about marketing engineering firms.

This is just some of my experience as a sort-of solo guy that I offer to those considering marketing engineering firms. Take it as you wish, there are different and just as successful approaches. But regardless of the approach one must see the natural fit of the two services.

Forget about the terms, civil, environmental, structural, etc., and classify all engineering firms as those offering surveying and those not offering surveying (NOS). Although, disciplines, such as: Civil, geotechnical and environmental may have more job opportunities, you will find most disciplines have a need for surveying at some point. Of those offering surveying there are two types; hoarders and progressive. Hoarders are those that keep all their eggs in one basket and pull them close to the chest. In my experience they have a higher tendency to consider price a marketing tool, and often use surveying fee reductions to acquire the more lucrative engineering portions of the contracts. Progressive have a tendency to think out side the box into partnering ideas that may enhance their potential for job capture. They would rather have ½ of a \$500K job that went for the \$500K than all of a \$500K job that went for \$350K. Of the (NOS) firms there are two types; elitists and realists. The elitists tend to place high value on their own services and lower value on their consultants; where realist know its all about professional product and client satisfaction – ACT (accurate, complete and timely)..

I personally target the progressive and realists. Identifying them is the hard part; it always takes help and may take years. Now I have to develop relationships with these prospects and I have to start by asking myself “What am I looking for?” The first thing being what type of work I want to perform, because I will perform best doing the things I like. 1.) I want to make decent money. So I really don’t want to get into development that has – well “developers” beating the “cheap as you can” drum. 2.) I like and am equipped to do mostly boundary and topography. 3.) I don’t want to get into the construction staking where you get last minute calls and high liability defending yourself for a mistake you didn’t make. So I target public projects requiring design surveys where the construction contracts require contractors to get their own construction staking. You ask is that a small market - Not at all. Not only am I going to go after the firms (I like) seeking these large lucrative projects, but the agencies themselves. Now all the (NOS) realists are targets, but with the progressive, I am only going after the ones I can offer something special to, such as a local presence or additional support – especially if I have relationships with the agency.

So now I need to know which of these engineering firms have relationships (history) with these agencies I’ve identified, and I mean “good” histories. And then I need to sell “me” - “What do I bring to the table?” First, I don’t want to be a hindrance, so I make sure I am amply qualified, have a “record” of experience in the specific need, that I am fully insured to the limits required by most

agencies, am readily available to go to work, and most importantly I am equipped for this work including using compatible and interchangeable software format. Second, I need intangibles that separate me from a small or large survey firm that has maybe three crews and a larger office staff. Why am I the better deal? The MOST successful point of my entire philosophy is and has always been – “you deal directly with me on all issues.” I do most the field work, all the office work, I have first hand knowledge of both and I bring that to every meeting, and they are dealing with the decision maker. That sells like nothing else. The third thing I bring is I too am progressive, although I avoid the bloody edge, I do traverse the cutting edge of technology. I can offer new and varying approaches to projects. I act as their survey project manager from proposal to delivery. I will literally write the survey portion of the proposal for them. I will go with them to the presentation to answer any agency questions if needed. It sells.

But, how do you get to these firms and agencies – well you must have name recognition and turn that into history. Although a letter is not really a negative it rarely generates a job. No, you can't beat face to face. Professional society meetings and local business groups are one way. Nothing wrong with cold calls if they can lead to a face to face lunch (you buy). Never miss an opportunity to introduce yourself, and don't spout BS about you, get to know them first, remember you are seeking knowledge. On the other hand, you MUST eventually move that relationship to you, because its “not who you know, it's who knows you” in the long run. I suggest getting to know staff for two reasons they often suggest consultants to the uppers and they eventually move up, or take your name with them as they move elsewhere. Also you end up dealing directly with them on survey issues. Remember a foot in the door is always only a start. When someone calls about a potential job, never respond “what's in it for me?” BUT “how can I help you?” You are in a service industry.

Alan R. Divers
Professional land Surveyor
Placerville, CA.