



## A Rare Breed

Does your firm have a business development or marketing rock star? If you do, consider yourself extremely blessed.

Professional services marketing and business development professionals are a rare breed. I have heard and continue to hear what a struggle it is to find a technical designer who can also develop client relationships well. The rarest bird is the one who can also integrate strategic vision into their professional equation.

Talented marketing professionals in the A/E industry are equally rare. No college or university offers a marketing program for professional services – they all focus on product marketing, which is not the same. Marketing professional services is selling a promise; you don't walk out of the showroom with anything tangible, just the belief that the person you have just hired has the talent to design something that will meet your needs.

Given the scarcity of these professionals, one would think that they represent a highly compensated, highly coveted position in the company org chart. Ironically, that is rarely the case. Selling often is seen as secondary to any technical competency, and marketing at worst has taken the position of a glorified “admin.”

Why the disconnect? Perhaps the role of “selling” professional services in the past has been abused a bit. Because many engineers don't enjoy it, the folks that did dive in created smoke and mirrors and underperformed, while the technical folks watched and became a bit jaded. Likewise, most tenured marketing professionals are self-taught non-designers to a large extent, who struggle to shake the shadow of “admin.” I continue to be amazed at how many marketing managers and coordinators answer company phones and set up coffee for meetings.

What steps should you be taking to nurture or develop your business development and marketing rock stars? First, recognize the value they bring and manage them at the highest and best use of their time. They are key components in your firm's growth – guard their time that way. Secondly, develop them. Give them the opportunity to add new skills and expand on their existing talents – invest in training for them. And last, but not least, reward them through their compensation and through recognition.