

PUBLIC CLIENTS SOUND OFF

Marketing and presenting to public clients gets very repetitive, and it even gets overwhelming at times. They all want to give every consultant their due, but every week they may receive 100 letters, 50 cold calls, and numerous e-mails. It's impossible for them to handle all of it. Therefore, it's important to know the things that turn them off, as well as the things that turn them on. Here's a potpourri of pet peeves and helpful comments

Pet Peeves

According to some clients, the most obnoxious thing a potential consultant can do is show up at their office demanding a meeting. They dub it an "intervention." And most times cannot, or will not, accommodate them.

Another pet peeve is that some of the marketing people that call on them are not as knowledgeable about the profession as they are in communications. "It has to have substance, or it becomes a dance of communications," they maintain.

References are critical.

They make extensive use of references and background checks, and draw upon their sister agencies to do this. Have you ever had clients call your reference and find out they're not there anymore, are dead, or worse, given you a bad reference? They all have. Their advice: "please check your own references, and make sure the phone numbers are current."

Joint ventures are tricky.

When a national firm with a signature designer and a local firm joint venture on a project, the team isn't always coordinated. One client commented: "I've had to introduce the lead designer to the project manager for the first time at the interview. You should be coordinated, but you don't have to rehearse it to the point of a stage production."

Is LEED an important criteria?

"All of our projects must be certified. Our goal is silver. The lead designer should have LEED experience, and be included in your portfolio in dealing with sustainability."

About proposals:

"We wanted to know whether you cared if we were your client or not. The person reading the proposal can easily pick the ones who really put care into them, as they stick out from the rest, and the ones that are boilerplate, you can spot them in an instant."

About site visits:

"The people who came to the site and took photos, and went on our web site and found out what we were doing, and walked around, or called and asked questions, usually came up with something useful that differentiated them from the crowd. The crowd is indiscernable."

About interviews:

"I'll grant them an interview, and ask what strengths distinguishes them from the rest of the firms. People who say they can do everything can't be remembered. You have to make your firm different. You have to figure out some specific aspect of the job that will make you stand out, such as knowing the date of commencement at an educational setting, because you shouldn't be working on site on the project on that day. Little things like that stick out wildly in your favor."

About relevant experience

"What we select is bright capable people. We've moved away from wanting to see exact experience in that project type. We're also looking for a 'threshold of pain that's qualitative.' Who are you giving up for our project. Often you'll get who's available, as opposed to who is the best person. Who are the people that we want, as opposed to the people they want to give us."

About experience

"We select on experience, but also on their capacity for complexity. Personalities are also a big factor. We look extremely closely at who is the PM and PIC, and we are not shy about saying we like your team, we like your work, but we need the other partner to be involved."

About the project manager

“It’s really important to know the agency that you’re proposing to, that they have a personality that is written down, but not in stone, and often interpreted by the various people using it. It matters greatly who the PM is how the selection process goes, you need to know down into the organization.”

A major project was recently won by a small engineering firm over five formidable larger firms, because they offered a senior VP as project manager on the project, since their research showed that was the level of involvement and commitment that the client wanted.