

The background of the entire page is a vibrant red color. Overlaid on this red background are several concentric, circular ripples that resemble water droplets hitting a surface. The ripples are most prominent in the upper half of the image and fade towards the bottom. The text is centered horizontally and positioned in the lower half of the image.

THREE-PART HARMONY: THE WINNING DIALOGUE

DesignIntelligence®
MEDIA
August 2024



THREE-PART HARMONY: THE WINNING DIALOGUE

Dez Joslin

CEO, **Enarche Design**

Aligning marketing, business development and practice for success.

A Call for Change

After years of asking firm leaders their priorities, the same themes consistently rise to the top:

- Fill the pipeline and win more work.
- Create a culture that attracts and retains great talent.
- Establish brand recognition that goes beyond select individuals.
- Produce impactful work that makes people's lives better.

At the core of it, we all want to create something that matters and lasts.

Why, then, do many firms unknowingly sabotage their ability to achieve these goals in a scalable way? Perhaps it's because leaders are empowered to solve firm challenges without understanding or considering the entirety of how their firms function. With good intentions, silos are constructed, and many initiatives and systems are designed to serve one or two disciplines rather than all the parties who might benefit from them.

It doesn't have to be this way. Firm leaders can connect typically disparate disciplines – marketing, business development (BD) and practice – to optimize their efforts and foster more collaborative

working environments. Not only does this create more consistency throughout a client-engagement or project life cycle, but studies reveal that highly aligned firms *grow up to 19% faster and are 15% more profitable* than nonaligned firms.¹ Many other industries have figured this out and have dedicated resources to improving these connections. So, what is holding us back?

How We Got Here

Historically, marketing and BD disciplines were frowned upon in our industry. So much so that in 1909, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) banned architects from competing based on fees and using even the most basic forms of marketing and BD.² As McGraw Hill Construction put it, “It was as if Starbucks were forced to charge the same amount as Folgers but could not state why their brand was unique.” Instead, they relied purely on word-of-mouth—a philosophy based on “the work should sell itself.”

Architects weren’t the only ones affected by this mentality. In 1962, the National Society of Professional Engineers implemented a code of ethics that prohibited its members from listing their names in the newspaper.³ It later placed extreme limitations on which marketing practices were permitted.

In 1980, these restrictions were lifted when the AIA repealed its code of ethics (almost a decade after the US Department of Labor deemed them a restraint of trade). Even still, many firms didn’t change their stance on the topic due to the stigma. It wasn’t until pressure mounted from the recessions in the late 1980s and early ’90s, along with changes in client cultures, that architects started taking marketing and BD more seriously.

Progress has been made since, but it’s been slow. In fact, you may still hear the phrase, “The work should sell itself,” thrown around. In today’s firms, practice is often seen as a sacred cow, with all other functions merely there to support their efforts. Because of this, many AE professionals have a hard time accepting the contributions of others as critical to their business. While BD (because we still dare not say **sales**) is more widely embraced within many firms, it is still underleveraged. Conversely, marketing remains deeply underappreciated and misunderstood – typically relegated to BD support and proposal generation.

“
To remain relevant, we must recognize the power of looking at marketing, business development and practice as equally important and mutually reinforcing. Aligning these functions closes integrity gaps, optimizes holistic solutions and accelerates the achievement of firm goals.”

However, a changing of the guard is taking hold, and emerging leaders are increasingly advocating for new ways of working. Let's look at how.

Creating the “Winning Dialogue”

Despite differences in approach, marketing, BD and practice can and should align to create and establish value in the market. At **Enarche**, we call this the “winning dialogue” – when all three areas of a firm break out of their silos and embody a shared brand identity to reach firm goals.

Here is an example of how this might play out in a different environment. Imagine interacting with a public figure, let's say, a famous public speaker named Kevin. The first interactions with Kevin are from a distance, primarily through social media, blogs and online

videos (marketing). You find him incredibly insightful and immediately seek out more of his content. After following him for several months, you decide to attend a conference where Kevin happens to be speaking. After his talk, you bump into each other and really hit it off (BD) – he's personable, leans in and shares invaluable advice on a topic you're struggling with. Through your short interaction, you decide to hire Kevin to speak at your next leadership retreat. This is where the rubber meets the road – the third and final step in affirming Kevin's value. In preparing for the retreat, you and Kevin build a meaningful relationship (practice). Not only is his perspective sharp, but you can also tell he genuinely cares about the success of your firm and team. Ultimately, the leadership retreat is such a hit that you book him to speak again next year and immediately start recommending him to all your peers.

Creating the Winning Dialogue



Why did this story have such a fairytale ending? Because Kevin is the real deal. Your experience with him was consistent *and* engaging in all three forms of interaction. Instinctively, you want to tell everyone about it. Of course, this is an example of when it's done right, but you could envision the same scenario with a different outcome.

The “Winning Dialogue” is about closing integrity gaps – the difference between an organization’s values, brand promise, code of conduct and what actually happens in day-to-day behavior and decision-making.⁴ A client’s experience should be cohesive at each stage of their journey with your firm, from navigating your website to completing a project with you. Maintaining this consistency is the key to creating loyalty and advocacy.

The Challenge to Act

Marketing in the built environment industry is no longer just about name recognition and beautiful portfolios. It’s about clarifying, communicating and proving the value that only your firm can deliver – over and over again.

To remain relevant, we must recognize the power of looking at marketing, business development and practice as equally important and mutually reinforcing. Aligning these functions closes integrity gaps, optimizes holistic solutions and accelerates the achievement of firm goals.

Let’s start a new chapter, together.

¹ Phill Harrell, “Perspective on Alignment: Outdated Stereotypes, Pipeline and Revenue Goals for Marketing,” Forrester 2020, <https://www.forrester.com/blogs/sales-executive-perspective-on-alignment/>.

² Jane Kolleeny and Charles Linn, AIA, “Marketing: Lessons from America’s best-managed architectural firms,” Architectural Record (2002), <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/ext/resources/archives/practice/pdfs/02marketing.pdf>

³ Scott Butcher, “A Brief History of Professional Services Marketing,” Aecumen, April 24, 2019, <https://aecumen.com/2019/04/24/a-brief-history-of-professional-services-marketing/>.

⁴ Ralph Schneider, “Closing the Integrity Gap: How to Build a Healthy Culture,” LinkedIn, January 27, 2020, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/closing-integrity-gap-how-build-healthy-culture-ralf-schneider/>.

*Dez Joslin is the founder and CEO of **Enarche**, a firm focused on bringing holistic marketing and business development expertise to the built environment industry. With a background in and out of the A/E space, she is passionate about developing unconventional solutions that help her clients think beyond the what to infuse the why, cast vision, scale their organizations and build stronger, strategic brand identities. As CEO of Enarche, Dez leads a team of strategists, operationalists and creatives who rally behind one goal — connecting you with your ideal client.*