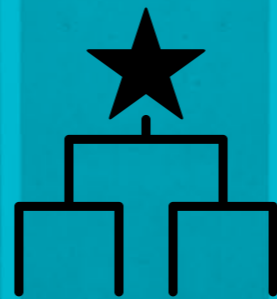




Building Your Business

WORKING OUT A BUSINESS STRATEGY
FOR YOUR ARCHITECTURE FIRM TO GET AHEAD



ABOUT THE EBOOK

Running an architecture practice is like running a marathon. It takes careful planning, plenty of energy, and it takes time.

Realizing your firm's potential is a key element in conquering your most pressing business challenges as you concentrate on growing your architecture business. It requires you to go beyond working hard and smart. In this ebook, you'll read about:

- Finding the right positioning and building your brand
- Using networking and social media to nurture your business and reputation
- Staying balanced as you win and retain new clients so you can achieve sustainable success and continue to move your architecture firm forward

CHAPTER 1

Building Your Architecture Firm's Business: 3 Essential Tips to Help You Pull Ahead

Originally published on
www.lineshapespace.com
by Curt Moreno



INTRODUCTION

Building your brand for your architecture firm is about working smart as well as hard, especially when you're first starting out. But growing the business shouldn't keep you up at night. Finding a niche can help you market your firm more efficiently. Learn to describe your mission in varied ways to appeal to a range of clients. Put social media to work to help build your reputation, boosting your efforts to take your firm to the next level.

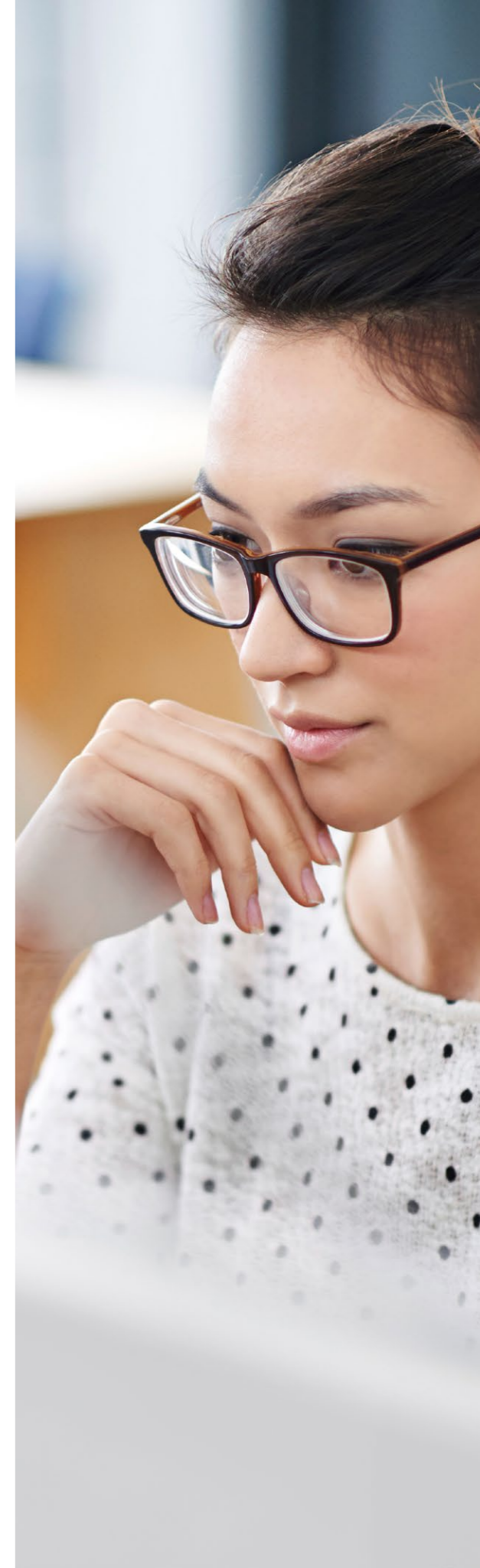


1. Stand out in a niche.

One of the largest concerns of any business – be it an architecture, interior-design, or civil-engineering firm – is to secure enough work to be sustainable. Most of the time, the answer is to try and appeal to as wide a scope of potential clients as possible. The problem with that logic is that, by appealing to the largest possible audience, a fledgling business can be easily dwarfed by the incumbents.

Rather than striving to be a big fish in a big pond, start your business as a small fish in the smallest-possible pond. **By focusing your marketing and branding efforts in an isolated niche of your industry's larger market, your firm stands a much better chance of becoming a star.**

Excelling in a given niche can only serve to bolster your success at later efforts to expand into additional market niches, with greater chances of a winning larger percentage of available projects.



2. Vary your message to sustain your mission.

So once you have decided on your firm's niche in the industry – your specialty – the more traditional branding efforts can begin. Instead of trotting out the company line at the drop of hat, try changing it up. Take on the challenge of not explaining your firm's services, ideals, or mission statement the same way two times in a row. This may seem contrary to the notion of developing and adhering to mission statements and elevator pitches, but in reality, it's just the opposite.

No one benefits from the oversimplification of complex ideas. Using buzzwords or other snazzy jargon to describe your business does it a disservice, because of course what you do is not simple at all.

Possessing an understanding of your firm's goals, ideas, and services to such a complete degree enables you to discuss them using everyday language at any given moment. This level of familiarity brings a more intimate level of understanding than memorizing a tagline ever could.



Sascha Wagner

President/CEO

Huntsman Architectural Group

"We strive to convey a consistent brand experience across all of our channels – our website, social media, printed material, presentations, our office space, and the most important brand ambassadors – our professional staff. Hearing them speak confidently and passionately with potential clients (and hires) about our firm's values and about great project experiences is the best marketing."

3. Don't underestimate social media.

Once you have a complete understanding of your firm, you are going to need a venue to show off your new conversational level of knowledge.

The web's hottest zones for branding success (and challenges) are social networks. Carefully choosing a limited number of networks – or even a single network – is an effective strategy to begin with. This limited scope could give your firm the best possible chance to allocate the necessary resources to make the most of your chosen network. But starting out small doesn't mean you can't go big later, once your firm has established a successful track record.

There is no doubt that today's consumers are savvier than ever before. This creates challenges for today's businesses that could never have even been imagined in decades past. Still, the same situation that creates challenges also creates opportunities.



Sascha Wagner

President/CEO
Huntsman Architectural Group

"We use social media to convey what it's like to work here, who we are as people, and as a snapshot of the fun and creative moments of a designer's day. Our collegial atmosphere is something we are very proud of."

SUMMARY

If you're ready to pull away from the pack, you need to draw attention to your architecture firm and build a memorable reputation, Curt Moreno recommends the following three tips to get you started. Even if these efforts don't result in overnight success, you'll be building a better business in the long run.

- 1 Market your firm better by finding the right niche
- 2 Appeal to a wider range of clients by describing your services differently
- 3 Make social media your friend

CHAPTER 2

3 Things to do for 5 Minutes a Day to Grow Your Business


Originally published on
www.lineshapespace.com
by Anne Bouleanu



INTRODUCTION

In addition to marketing their firm's brand carefully and maintaining strong client relationships, business owners know how important it is to keep in touch with trends in the industry. Ann Bouleanu suggests three ways architects can better position their firms for growth by dedicating just five minutes per day.





HOW TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

Staying on top of small-business trends, marketing, and maintaining strong client relationships are the cornerstones of business success. With little time to spare and a constantly busy schedule, however, it can be difficult for some firms to bring in new business while trying to focus on the daily ins and outs of running a company.



In order to stay afloat and thrive financially, it's vital to keep new business flowing in. This doesn't have to take all day, though – here are three things you can do for five minutes a day to grow your business.

1. Check in with clients.

Do you have a project currently underway with a variety of clients? Set aside a few minutes each day to check in with one or more of these customers to see how things are progressing. An email doesn't take long, but it will make a huge difference with regard to how your business is perceived. Excellent client-relationship management can lead to word-of-mouth references, which are the crux of many business plans.

Checking in regularly with clients during projects also has other added benefits. Developing a strong relationship with a client during the design process opens the lines of communication, which means customers will feel comfortable coming to you with any issues they may have, ensuring better customer service. Effective communication also opens the door for further conversations down the line – after a project has been completed, a business owner can reach out to past clients to ask them how they felt about their experience, and whether they have any references for future business endeavors. Tapping these previous customers for testimonials is yet another way architects can drive new interest in their business.



Sascha Wagner

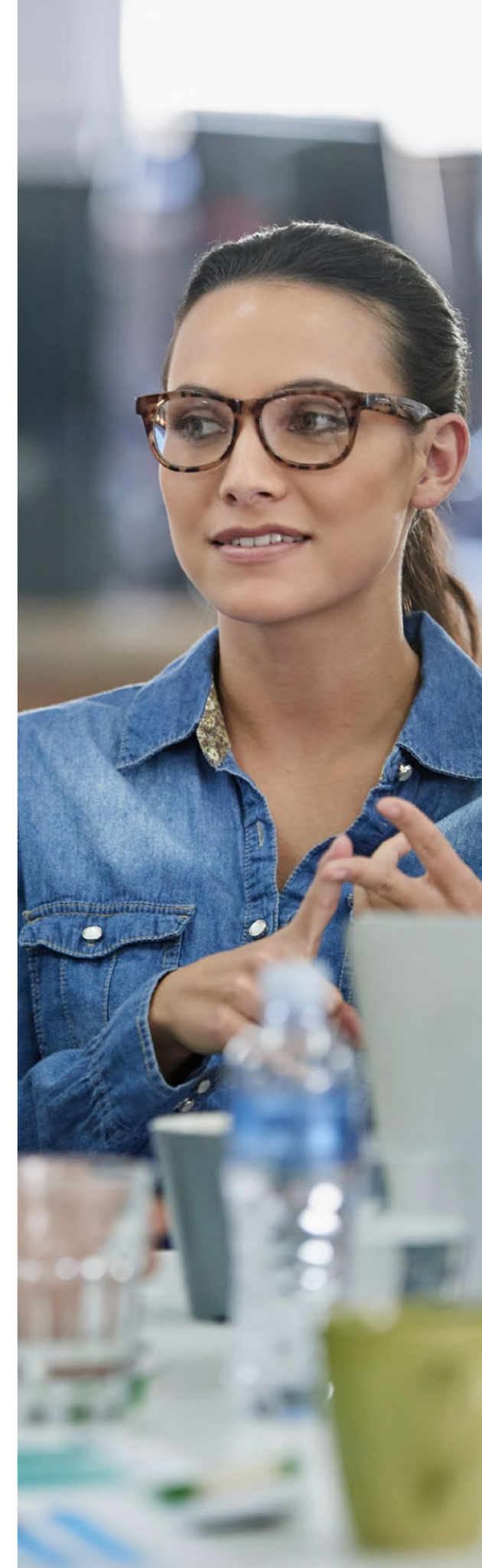
President/CEO
Huntsman Architectural Group

“Our network is large but it’s manageable because we have all of our senior staff regularly checking in and interacting with their contacts, attending events, and paying attention to new opportunities.”

2. Look for networking opportunities.

On any day of the week, there are countless networking events happening around the country. Luckily for those who aren't exactly fond of networking, there are also online networking sites that can similarly do the trick. On LinkedIn, for example, there are multiple groups dedicated to discussing small-business issues, starting creative endeavors, retaining clients and more. Take a few minutes each day to look around on these sites and read up on industry trends and see what the competition is up to.

Attending networking events can also be a great way to bring in new business. Schedule out a time – say, once a month – when you'll make your way to a networking event, hand out business cards, and talk to potential clients and collaborators. Every day, look around online for new networking opportunities, and mark them down in your calendar. After just a few minutes each day, you'll have scores of networking opportunities available at your fingertips. Networking is still one of the best ways to bring in new clients and achieve success, so don't be shy.



3. Get on social media.

A comprehensive social-media and marketing strategy can make a world of difference to a business, and it can be an effective way to bring in new business. What's great about social-media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter is that once a firm has set up a profile, it can improve brand reputation and pull in new clients in just a few minutes' worth of work.

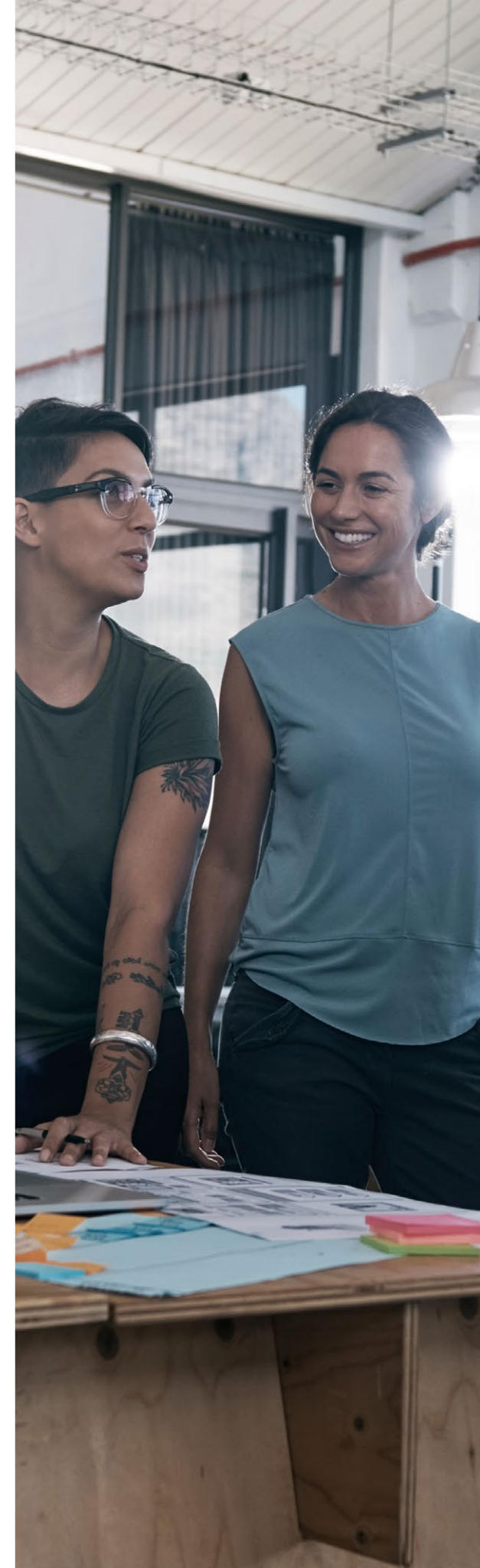
Architects should take five minutes out of their schedule every day to check social media accounts. Platforms connect customers directly to a business, and that's something architecture firms should take advantage of. Customers often head online to rate services and products, ask owners questions, or even make suggestions for how to improve the customer experience. A small-business owner should spend a few minutes each day checking out these comments, taking into account what customers have to say. This is a great place to respond publicly to comments and invite customer responses. Showing responsiveness and a willingness to interact, a business built up with social activity catches the eye of social consumers.



HOW TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

Another great thing about social media is that companies can show off new products, designs and collaborations, or share company news that would interest potential clients. According to *Business Insider*, entrepreneurs should view social-media outlets as a virtual marketplace where customers gather. It's a space where architecture firms can find out more about their customers, advertise to specific users, and build a modern, tech-savvy brand. A strong social media presence is hugely important in today's digital era and can grab the attention of potential clients in an instant.

No matter how busy you are, be sure to take a few minutes each day to share a link or news item or to correspond with the public on social media. It's definitely worth your time.



SUMMARY

Encouraging a steady flow of new business is an essential element of growing your business. Even if a busy schedule can make it difficult to prioritize the process. Anne Bouleanu recommends doing the following three things every day for five minutes to keep your business thriving.

- 1 Keep in touch with clients to keep lines of communication open
- 2 Look for networking opportunities to keep our finger on the pulse and build new customer relationships
- 3 Actively use social media to draw attention to your firm's brand

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CHAPTER 3

4 Steps for Finding New Clients to Keep Building Your Business

Originally published on
www.lineshapespace.com
by Daniel O'Donnell



INTRODUCTION

Achieving balance can be a struggle for many architecture firm principals. Daniel O'Donnell encourages businesses to try these four steps – performing pro bono work, pursuing online leads quickly, prequalifying your clients and budgeting your marketing wisely – to uncover new ways to grow your client base and stay in balance.





One of the biggest questions for a business owner is how much time to dedicate to contracted clients versus prospects. As an architect, understanding that balancing act and managing your time between existing and new clients is crucial.



Forbes contributor and entrepreneur Alex Lawrence advocates strongly for businesses to develop a strategy for client retention, highlighting a statistic from Gartner Group that:

80%

of your company's future revenue will come from just 20% of your existing customers.

THE NEW CLIENT BALANCING ACT

Furthermore, finding new clients can dig into your bottom line. According to the consulting firm Lee Resource, attracting prospects will end up costing you five times more money than holding on to current clients.

So on the one hand, putting too much emphasis on pursuing new clients can be a pitfall for your business. On the other, if you depend 100 percent on your established client relationships, you run the risk of stagnating and watching your work (and possibly company) dry up. So when the time is right, you need to fill the pipeline. Here are four things to do in pursuit of new clients.



Sascha Wagner

President/CEO
Huntsman Architectural Group

“We’ve built a network of long-term relationships one successful project at a time. These relationships include clients, project managers, brokers, and our project partners – contractors, consultants and product vendors. Everyone is a potential referral. This approach may even sound old-fashioned, but over 80% of our work comes from repeat clients or direct referrals.”

1. Do spec work to establish a presence.

Doing pro bono work does more than make you feel better about yourself and your business.

Taking on the occasional project for a nonprofit helps the common good and can have the secondary benefit of generating promotion for your business. Case in point: The 1+ organization brings nonprofits together with architecture and design firms willing to do pro bono work with at least 1 percent of their time. The Public Architecture firm launched 1+* after taking on a passion project to design a temporary public park at 17th and Castro Plaza in San Francisco. The result? Public Architecture garnered press in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *New York Times*, and former San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom [spoke at the project's opening](#)*.

Naturally, volunteering your time to help people or a community in need should be your number one goal in taking on pro bono work. Otherwise, if karma has anything to say about it, the press and accolades won't be chasing you down the street to pat you on the back.



* theoneplus.org | modative.com

2. Follow up on leads to grow your client base.

The Wall Street Journal recommends responding to information requests or downloads as quickly as is feasibly possible. Locating new clients can get competitive, and time isn't necessarily on your side, so following up with an online prospect requires digital dexterity and sufficient staffing for client-relationship management.

The *Journal* also indicated a third-party service provider such as [LeadQual](#)* – which charges upwards of \$5 per lead – will contact prospects within 50 seconds and continue working to bring the client around. Yes, that requires some extra capital set aside specifically for winning new clients, but it's worth considering if you have a hard time managing online leads.



* [leadqual.com](https://www.leadqual.com)



3. Prequalify prospects to increase efficiency.

Don't get ahead of yourself and assume anyone who's been in touch with you will instantly become your lifelong client. *The Next Web* recommends that businesses develop a list of criteria that they should use to evaluate prospects before pursuing them with all your resources.

First, make sure the products or services a potential client expresses interest in are part of your company's offerings. For example, if a business approaches you, an interior architecture firm, looking for help with a new commercial development, but you don't have the resources to pull off this kind of project, it might be better to refer the business to another service provider. And if the stars align and you provide exactly what your prospect is looking for, you still need to make sure your schedules and budgets are compatible.



The Next Web

How prequalifying your potential clients could save you time

READ THE
ARTICLE



4. Attract new clients with a smart marketing plan.

According to *Entrepreneur*, marketing makes up roughly 10 percent of the overall budget for the majority of startups – allegedly not enough. Marketing tactics for businesses are often underfunded and less effective than they could be. To put this into some perspective: Barnes and Noble spends about \$10 per person for its marketing and advertising, while the telecom firm Sprint spends upward of \$315 per person.

In its article on setting a marketing budget, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is a bit more conservative and encourages businesses to really do the math. “Businesses with revenues less than \$5 million should allocate 7 to 8 percent of their revenues to marketing ... [assuming they] have margins in the range of 10 to 12 percent.”



While the goal is to maintain secure, longstanding relationships with clients, there's always room to grow and build new bridges. As bestselling author and marketing guru Seth Godin says,

“Change is not a threat,
it's an opportunity.

Survival is not the goal,
transformative success is.”



SUMMARY

Business owners work hard to find the right balance in their quest to create winning proposals and grow their client base. If you're looking for ways to stay agile, Daniel O'Donnell recommends trying out these four steps to keep you on your mark and ready to respond to changes as they arrive.

- 1 Give a little away in spec work to enhance your reputation
- 2 Prequalify potential new clients to increase efficiency
- 3 Promptly chase down online leads to keep your business growing sensibly

CONCLUSION

It takes time and some strategic planning to successfully build your brand, nurture it, and acquire new clients. Realizing your firm's potential helps you discover new ways to conquer your most pressing business challenges, which in turn allows you to focus on finding new clients and writing winning proposals. As your reputation and your business grow, it's important to stay in shape – both financially and mentally. After all, more clients mean more work, and a good work-life balance helps you go the distance. Want to find out more? Then please read our article ["Time Management for Architects: Create a Proper Work-Life Balance to Avoid Burnout"](#).