

PROMOTING ARCHITECTURAL FIRMS IN THE NETHERLANDS

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ABSTRACT

Proposal: This paper reports on a project to survey the promotion practices of Dutch architects. Although it is not difficult to find marketing advice for architects there has been very little research into the actual marketing practices employed. What is clear, and is often repeated in the literature, is that it is generally assumed that architects do not devote adequate energies to promoting their practices. The researchers felt that it is necessary to first establish the actual practices of architects before formulating generalized advice for the profession.

The research was based on three empirical methods: a survey of the members of the Royal Institute of Dutch Architects (BNA), a series of case studies of architectural firms, and a series of interviews – not only of architects but also of clients, project managers, and marketing consultants. The intention of the interviews was to make possible a comparison between the supply and demand sides of the market.

Through the survey it was established that the majority of architects are actively working to promote a specific image of their offices. This includes both internal promotion – informing the staff of the firms image – and external promotion. 40% of architectural firms have a long term strategy, 42% a promotion plan, and 50% have some knowledge of how they are perceived in the market. This is a better picture of the situation than was given by the consultants in their interviews. No clear pattern of relationships emerged between promotion practice and type of firm, with the exception that larger firms were more active in promotion than smaller firms, and strangely, that firms active in the public sector were more active (this despite the fact that public sector work is obtained through the European Tendering procedure).

Interviews of clients showed that the individual clients follow different strategies in selecting architects than do professional clients or project managers. However, reputation and name familiarity play a large role in both areas. The findings lay to rest the common assertion that Dutch architects, at least, do not actively promote their practices. What remains to determine is which practices are more successful.

Keywords: Architectural Management, Architectural Firms, Promotion, Marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although quite a few authors have made a great point of the urgent need for architects to attend to the promotion of their firms, very little is known about what architects actually do. Aside from an interesting set of case studies by Kioussi and Smyth (2009), and the examples provided by various marketing consultants in their books (clearly unrepresentative), almost nothing has been published. What is published is a wealth of material on marketing in general and several very inspiring texts on how architects themselves should market their firms. These include Bruce and Cooper (1983), Coxe (1983), Haupt and Kubitzka (2002), Koren (2005), and Linton Clary et al. (2005). These are all full of useful advice, but none of them attempt a survey of the marketing activities of architectural firms. The researchers therefore felt that it was high time for an attempt to determine just what architectural firms were doing to promote themselves. The study focuses on Dutch architects, and will conclude with some remarks about the possible generalization of the results to architects elsewhere.

The research was carried out in late 2008 and early 2009 as part of the first author's masters thesis (Roberti, 2009) when effects of the credit crunch were beginning to be felt.

2. METHOD

The research was carried out as an explorative research project as described by Baarda & De Goede (2001). The method for this research was constructed from three techniques: a survey, a series of interviews of clients, project management firms and marketing consultants, and a series of brief case studies. The survey of architectural firms provided a general picture of how Dutch architects promote themselves. The survey was sent out to the membership of the Royal Institute of Dutch Architects (BNA). 235 architectural firms responded, approximately 8% of the membership of the BNA. Of these 71% were firms of 10 FTE or fewer. Where results have been correlated to firm characteristics this has been done with a significance of $\alpha=5\%$ and therefore of a 95% certainty.

Interviews of clients, including individuals (2), housing corporations (2), a developer (1), and project managers (3) provided insight into which promotion instruments are perceived to play a role in their architect selection process. Public clients were excluded as the European Tendering process excludes the direct influence of most promotion techniques. Interviews with the two consultants shed light on the generally accepted understanding of promotion for architectural firms. The interviews were semi-structured interviews based on a list of open questions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. They were then coded and analysed using Atlas.ti.

The case studies of four firms served to add depth and specificity to this picture. For each case descriptions of the firm organization, of how the firm obtains work, of how the firm promotes itself were collected, of which promotion instruments were used, and of the role of promotion internal to the firm. The cases were chosen to span a range of firms, in terms of both age and size. The cases were based on interviews with principal architects, and an examination of promotion materials produced by the firms. These interviews were also based on a list of open questions, recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed in Atlas.ti.

The survey, the case studies, the interviews and the literature form the four sources for this research. The multiplicity of sources permits triangulation. The research questions are answered first for each source separately. By describing the results for each leg of the 'triangle, the similarities and differences between the different sources become clear. By combining these results in this fashion the research provides reliable, comprehensive and complete answers to the research questions.

The research was structured around two fundamental marketing concepts: strategy and promotion mix.

Kotler (Kotler and Armstrong 2004) states that it is important for a business adopt a long-term view and develop corporate vision, a strategy, and an identity. The identity is the picture of itself the corporation seeks to convey to its target audience. A corporate image, on the other hand, is the picture of the corporation as it is perceived by its audience. This audience may be seen as the sum of clients or

customers, competitors, colleagues and suppliers, or these audiences may be defined and addressed separately.

As architects' clients are most often other businesses, they are primarily interested in industrial or business to business marketing and not in mass consumer marketing. Business to business marketing is distinguished from consumer marketing through the importance of relationship building and personal contact. This is particularly true of architecture as we are concerned with large multi-year projects with high uncertainty and in which there is a desire for a great amount of information. Rather than selling a product, architects are selling their expertise and experience. Clients must believe that their architect can quickly understand their problem and find a solution in the form of a feasible design. They seek above all confidence and certainty in what are perceived as highly risky projects.

The total promotion mix consists of a specific combination of five promotion tools with which a business uses to convey its promotional message: Advertising, Public relations, Sales promotion, Personal selling, and Direct marketing (Kotler and Armstrong 2004). Advertising is any non-personal presentation of ideas products or services associated with and paid for by a specific company. Public relations is the construction of a good public image through obtaining favourable publicity. Sales promotions are short-term incentives to purchase a product or service. Personal selling is the use of a designated sales staff to personally approach customers to make sales and build relationships. Direct marketing is customised communication to specific selected customers to make sales and build lasting relationships. However, it should be kept in mind that clients do not make any distinction between the messages received through different promotion tools, rather the various messages merge into an image of the business.

3. CASE STUDY FIRMS

The four firms selected for case studies were Maria Teresa de Matos Matilde Architect, Cepezed, Fokkema Architecten, and Hootsmans Architectuurbureau. A range of firms was selected so that the cases would provide the broadest possible view. The firms chosen are distributed over a range of size (in fte's) and age.

Maria Teresa de Matos Matilde is a sole practitioner, working primarily for developers, and often in collaboration with other architects. Her clients come to her through word of mouth. Although she has not developed an image for her firm, she has developed a consistent minimalist graphic style for her firm which clients generally appreciate. She has done little promotion and has experienced difficulty acquiring new projects, however she had recently followed a course in acquisition at the BNA (Royal Dutch Architectural Institute), and plans to apply several of the recommended tools in the near future.

Hootsmans Architectuurbureau <www.hootsmans.com> had been established only two years before they were interviewed. Rob Hootsmans founded the office after nine years service in the Government Buildings Agency. Hootsmans work at the GBA was primarily in the role of client, and he has developed a sensitivity to the needs of clients. Their strategy, therefore, has been to provide a high quality of service and client orientation. Over time Hootsmans has developed a specialisation in large complex projects, based on the commissions he has received and completed. In certain circles the firm is known for this specialisation and clients with such projects come to Hootsmans. Hootsmans is not an active networker, he does no corporate entertainment, rather he tries to deliver good designs that meet the client's needs. Thus, while many projects do come into the firm through his network, this is not a result of direct marketing, Rob Hootsmans is himself responsible for bringing in projects. His employees rarely bring any projects in. At the time of the interview they had about 15 employees. As they have plenty of work, promotion has a low priority. The firm has no secretary nor is any employee specifically assigned to promotion. Any work required for promotion is given to the design staff. However, they are attempting to move from primarily public buildings to housing (where the market seems to have declined less after the credit crunch). They are signalling this to the industry through participation in competitions. The firm has a website. They have had a number of projects published, and occasionally send out a portfolio, but little effort is made for active acquisition. Rather the firm hopes to attract new work through providing a high quality of service. Hootsmans has begun to consider the promotion of his firm more carefully. He is taking steps to promote the firm in a more professional

manner, both through improving service quality by assigning staff to tasks that suit their abilities, and by carrying out explicitly promotional activities. Until now little attention had been given to attracting new projects as there had always been enough work in house.

Fokkema Architecten <www.fokkema-partners.nl> is a medium sized service oriented firm with 30-35 employees. Founded 12 years ago, they have grown steadily, and have a steady stream of work.. The office is specialized in office projects, both buildings and interiors. One partner is assigned to direct promotion with the assistance of one or two of the general design staff. Their promotion is directed at two markets, potential clients (to attract new projects), and young architects (to attract new staff). Their projects are regularly published in the architectural press. They have regular office drinks parties, a quarterly newsletter, brochures, and an extensive website. Potential clients are invited to the firm's offices and given presentations of their work. These presentations are always tailored to foreground projects in sectors similar to the visitor's. The firm has recently adopted a new house style, and redesigned their website to go with it. The firm has also recently moved to a new location and the partners chose an office, which better represented the firm than their previous accommodation. Most new projects come through repeat business and personal networking. Projects come in through one of the three partners. Sometimes clients request specific personnel for their projects. This typically happens with repeat clients or with clients with multiple projects. In such cases clients may approach the firm through the staff members with which they have been working, and with whom they wish to work again. Although personal contact is important to such clients, in the end, however, the partners and staff work as a single firm.

Cepezed¹ <www.cepezed.nl> is a well-established medium sized firm with 30-35 employees including a designated PR officer. They have a well-known signature style strongly associated with a pre-fabricated approach to construction. Their work is regularly published in the Dutch architectural press and they have brought out several monographs, including *The Work of Cepezed* (2007) which won an RIBA

¹ Cepezed was also selected as a case by Kioussi and Smyth in their study of brand management in design-led firms (Kioussi and Smyth, 2009)

International Book Award. They take on a wide variety of projects, in both size and type, and have a steady stream of work. Cepezed regularly applies for public sector work through the EU tendering procedure. They have also built a large network of contacts over their 35 year existence through which projects regularly come into the firm. As the firm often develops innovative applications of materials, they collaborate on promotion with suppliers. The firm does not maintain a mailing list, but does have an extensive website.

There is a fulltime specialist responsible for PR, acquisition and marketing. Staff members are not explicitly informed about the goals, vision or image of the firm. Rather staff are attracted to working for Cepezed because they are familiar with how the firm works. The image of the firm attracts a certain sort of designer.

Cepezed is not just an organization; it is first and foremost its people. Personal contact is very important. Occasionally people working for clients or engineering firms remain in contact with Cepezed long after a given project has been completed. With individual (house) clients contact stops after completion of the project, while contact with project developers is maintained after completing the project. The choice to keep in contact depends largely on the firm's needs at a particular moment. People who are particularly useful to the firm include especially those with a 'double role' such as architects who also teach at an architecture school, lecturers who are also directors of consultancies or work for project management firms. The maintenance of such relationships is considered very important. It is also important to keep relations informed of the firm's own activities.

The emphasis is on publications, but in addition the office is frequently asked to give lectures and provide students with information. This is important because students eventually reach positions of responsibility and this improves the firm's name recognition and reputation. In addition to the promotional value that the many books published by the firm provide these books also generate local and international publicity in the form of reviews. In addition to the quality of their design work, and a good network, Cepezed considers their books to be their most important marketing tool.

3.1. STRATEGY

All four case study firms have considered a long-term vision. The three larger firms have shaped their promotional strategy around their vision. Fokkema Architecten and Cepezed have a clear promotional plan in place. Hootsmans Architectuurbureau plans relatively little promotional activity, choosing to concentrate on their quality of service. De Matos Matilde is currently considering how to translate her office strategy into a concrete promotional plan.

Two of the firms claimed to have a good idea of the image potential clients have of them. Hootsmans indicated that their firm is known for the specialism of their principal architect Rob Hootsmans, and Cepezed is known for a specific signature that attracts some clients while discouraging others. Fokkema and Cepezed both have staff assigned to promoting the firms. None of the four case study firms collaborated with clients to promote their firm. In three cases the firm addresses promotional efforts not only towards potential clients but also towards potential employees. Two of the firms have made attempts to obtain commissions in new building types, through competition and advertising in trade publications. Neither have made a concerted effort as of the time of the interviews they both had sufficient work in house.

Only at Fokkema Architecten were staff regularly informed of the vision and plans of the firm. At Hootsmans Architectuurbureau the staff are expected to be aware of the firm's vision and goals simply through their long service with the firm. At Cepezed staff come to the firm because they are already aware of the firm's vision and working methods. Thus in neither of these firms are staff explicitly informed.

3.2. ADVERTISING

Two of the case study firms make no use of advertising. One uses signboards on building sites. One placed a banner in a popular website for architects. However, this was intended to attract perspective employees rather than clients. Advertisements, for example in magazines on the internet, or at trade shows, were

not used because the firms interviewed believed that they had little benefit and did not reach the right audience.

3.4. PR

Fokkema and Cepezed actively pursue publications and maintain contact with the press. Both firms are frequently published. The other two firms take no initiative for publications are much less well published. In addition to articles, Cepezed has brought out several monographs. The other three firms make use of portfolios and firm booklets. All four case study firms have a website, but only Cepezed is satisfied with theirs. Hootsmans and Fokkema want to make their websites more professional, while De Matos Matilda's website is still under development.

Hootsmans Architectuurbureau does three or four competitions per year. Fokkema Architecten and Cepezed will only occasionally do a competition. At Fokkema Architecten competitions are done more for the stimulation they offer the firm than in the expectation of winning. Cepezed will participate in invited competitions by find that open competitions offer to small a chance of winning to be worth the effort and cost.

All four firms are involved in professional education, lecturing or giving workshops.

3.5. SALES PROMOTION

None of the case study firms reported making any use of sales promotions. Hootsmans Architecuurbureau and Fokkema architecten will occasionally offer a more competitive fee for projects they consider very attractive, but they do not see this as a form of discount or sale promotion.

3.6. PERSONAL SELLING

The cases provide a contrasting impression. At the time of the interviews, Hootsmans and Fokkema did not actively seek commissions, as both had enough work in house. Neither did, De Matos Matilde, as she relied on coincidental approaches from clients. Cepezed pursues mainly public commissions through the European Tendering process, where the initiative lies with the architect.

Commercial commissions come into Cepezed mainly through the partners' networks. All four firms indicated that personal contract was an important factor.

Maria Teresa de Matos Matilde and Cepezed both maintain relations with clients after a project is completed. At Hootsmans relies on work that comes in through their network and reputation. Fokkema and Cepezed both indicated that clients will sometimes request that a specific designer work on their project.

3.7. DIRECT MARKETING

Among the case study firms only Fokkema uses a mailing list to send out newsletters. Hootsmans and Cepezed do not send out regular mailings as they do not want to annoy potential clients with unsolicited mail.

4. INTERVIEWS

4.1. STRATEGY

The consultants both said that architects often do not have well developed strategies. Only a few large specialized firms have a proper strategy. Further they asserted that architects often have little idea of their identity or image or the similarity between the two. The importance of the coincidence of image (in the minds of the potential clients) and identity (in the minds of the architects) was reinforced by the fact that reputation plays an important part in the selection of architects, and that it is common for project managers and clients to enquire among their colleagues about previous experience working with different firms. The consultants emphasized that good service is a prerequisite for a good reputation. Thus project wind-up meetings with clients can serve to resolve any outstanding issues while consolidating the impression of quality service and therefore one's reputation. One consultant stated that architects must have a clear idea of what types of commissions they want to acquire, and must direct their promotional message towards these commissions. Clients are not interested in the details of an architect's firm, they are interested in their vision.

The clients stated that experience with their building type was an important factor in architect selection. They were unimpressed with unbuilt projects, and looked to

an established track record in a building type for confidence in the architect's service quality. The backgrounds of individual designers assigned to the project were also important, especially where these had had experience with the building type in other firms. This said, several of the clients indicated that they were willing, once in a while, to take on a less experienced firm for the sake of a fresh look at their building type. One project manager indicated that for him it was not per se the experience of the architect that was crucial, but the combined experience of the architect and client.

The reputation of architectural firms plays a role in the choice of architectural firm by professional clients and project management firms. Of particular importance is any previous experience the client or project manager has had with a firm. Clients and projects managers will also ask informants in their networks about experience with architectural firms under consideration.

As good previous experience and reputation are important for the choice of an architect, the successfully completion of current projects is also part of how the firm promotes itself. The track record and reputation of a firm derive not only from the final product. Nor does promotion of the firm end with obtaining a commission. Promotion includes the way an architect works, the firms processes and procedures, how the architect relates to other parties in the design process. The project manager and consultant interviewed both asserted that it is advantageous for an architect to have a concluding discussion with the client when a project is completed. In this manner the client can make clear the degree to which they were satisfied with the service and the final product. Any remaining issues can also be addressed in such a meeting. In this manner the architect can round off the project with a positive impression while gaining insight into how he or she can improve their service.

A second interviewed consultant stated that as firms grow larger the staff no longer knows what the vision and goals of the firm are. He sees this occur frequently, and when it happens the messages delivered by staff to the market become unfocused. The survey, on the other hand provided a more positive picture (see below). In addition He remarked that there is a difference between firms that bare the name of

the founding partners and those that do not use the names of individual architects. Typically employees in firms not using the principal architects names are much better informed of the firm's vision and goals.

One of the client interviewees suggested that it would be beneficial for architects to collaborate with their clients to promote both firm and project. However, he notices that this seldom occurs. He is himself rarely approached by an architect to collaborate in promotion.

4.2. ADVERTISING

The consultants stated that advertising does not encourage trust in clients. A good name and reputation for reliability are much more important.

The clients were similarly disinterested in advertising. They claimed already to be in possession of information regarding a sufficient number of architectural firms to choose from. Again, reputation is more important.

4.3. PUBLIC RELATIONS

The consultants recommended promoting the architect's vision rather than the firm itself. They suggested that this is the best way to encourage third parties to express in interest in the firm and to mention the firm in conversation. Brochures must stand out. Websites too, as most are too similar to each other, too dull, and not professionally designed. Placing finishes in design competitions can be a useful way to draw attention to a firm. However, competitions require a large investment, and provide no certainty of the result. Further, smaller firms will generally find it hard to compete with larger more noted firms.

The clients make use of architectural publications primarily to keep abreast of trends in the field. Unless the project is very unusual, they rarely contact architects on the basis of a publication. However, name familiarity does play a role in architect selection. Once client stated that flyers and brochures were seen to have little value. They are mostly filed in the bookcase. While another complained that architects prefer only to show beautiful pictures. He made a plea for architects to present the results of their project in terms of the clients brief and the way they fulfilled it.

Where there is publicity attached, the clients saw competitions as a useful way for architects to promote themselves. They noticed that winners of competitions for young architects such as Archiprix and European often turned up later as leaders of good firms.

The clients and project managers interviewed stated that they use publications to stay abreast of trends in architecture. Individual architects are rarely approached on the basis of publications. According to an interviewee from a housing association publications do help build name recognition, and that does play a role in the selection process. One project manager said that not any project can be published. Magazines themselves are a filter – selecting only projects that meet their standards of quality.

One consultant stated that he does not read everything that arrives in his office as there is simply too much. If something seems particularly nice he may notice it. He suggested that when someone has had no previous contact with an architectural firm, any information they send must be outstanding. Thijs van Oosten indicated that attractive promotional documents are sometimes retained. Flyers, short newsletters and similar small documents have very little value.

Several interviewees indicated architects who have won or received honourable mention in a published competition will sometimes be noticed. Mere participation in a competition is not enough. One developer stated that an architectural firm can only effectively use a competition for promotion if the competition itself receives substantial media attention. According to one project manager was of the opinion that usually it is only large experienced firms that can make a statement through a competition. One must finish in the top three for there to be any positive effect.

4.4. SALES PROMOTIONS

The clients interpreted this category in terms of price discounts. Although price was seen as an important factor, it was generally seen in terms of a price/quality ratio. Further price negotiations occur after architect selection not before. The clients reported that they had had no experience of architects offering discounts as a means of acquiring a project.

4.5. PERSONAL SELLING

Maintaining contact with the firm's network including but not limited to potential clients is of great importance. However, according to one consultant, this does not come naturally to architects. When meeting a client for the first time, he suggests seducing them so that they ask the architect questions rather than coming out with a prepared sales pitch. It is about creating a relationship, rather than transmitting bureau statistics. And in creating this relationship it is better to let the client do most of the talking. Architects far too often try to sell their ability as generalists: "We build everything." However, the consultants believed that clients find this claim disingenuous. It is better to choose a target group that matches the abilities and track record of the firm.

Clients are primarily interested in the specific services and performance an architect can offer them. They are less interested in the architects 'storey'. Reputation and the experiences of colleagues are important in considering new architects. Email, newsletters and brochures are less important. Personal contact is also important on the client side. It is essential to know exactly who, which designers, one will be working with. Even within one office they felt that architects differ in quality and working methods.

The clients stated that architects usually take the initiative to send brochures and information packages or newsletters. Clients only seek out architects when they have a project going. This applies as well to approaches by architects to clients. It is a matter of timing. When they do not have a project at the appropriate stage they are not interested in contact with architects seeking work.

From the interviews it can be concluded that network, word-of-mouth, and track record are the most important factors used by clients to appraise new architects. These three avenues often give an architect an 'in' that makes initial contact with a client easier than when making a 'cold contact'.

4.6. DIRECT MARKETING

The clients indicated that they valued the occasional newsletter from architects. It is important that this be short and concrete, but it is frequently not the case.

However, clients do not react to newsletters, approaching architects only when they have a commission to award. One client remarked that few architects sent out newsletters.

5. SURVEY

5.1. STRATEGY

The survey of Dutch architects indicated that 40% claim to have a clear long-term vision and strategy, while 43% considered their strategy. Approximately half the architects claiming to have a long term plan also have a promotion plan. Fully 90% of the respondents strive to maintain a specific image or reputation. While half claim to know the image their clients have of them. 25% indicated that they work regularly with their clients to promote their firm, and 61% does this occasionally. Only 6% of firms have a marketing professional on staff. This is not surprising seeing that 71% of the respondents worked at a firm with a work force of 10 or less.

70% of firms claimed that their staff were informed of the goals and vision of the firm and in 73% the desired identity was explained to the staff.

Larger firms, and firms with projects distributed over a larger area, often have a considered strategy. The same is true of architects who work for housing corporations or for public sector institutions. Firms that work primarily for individuals are, by contrast, much less likely to have a firm strategy.

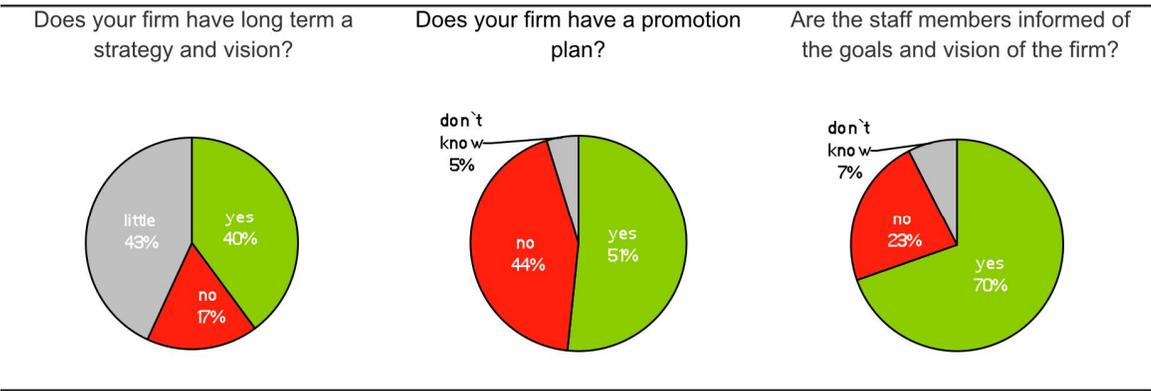


Figure 1 Long-term vision and strategy

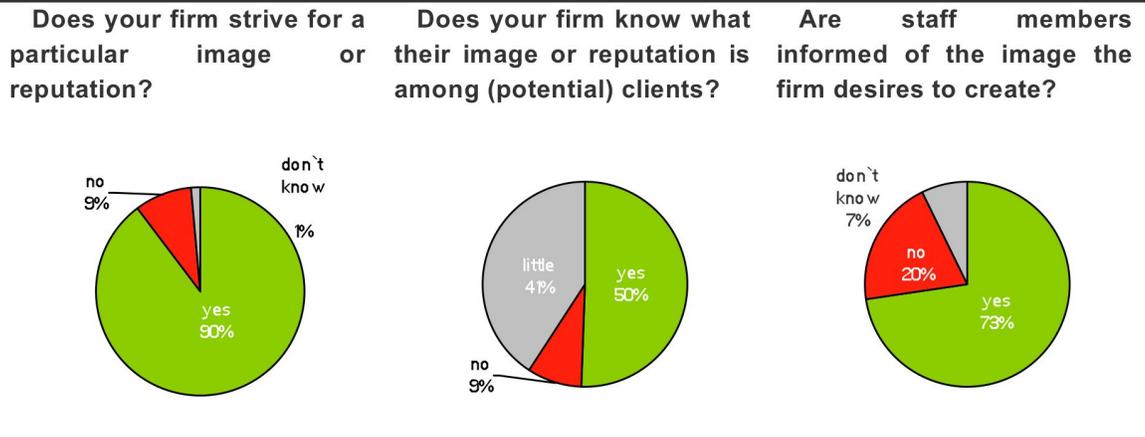


Figure 2 Image and reputation

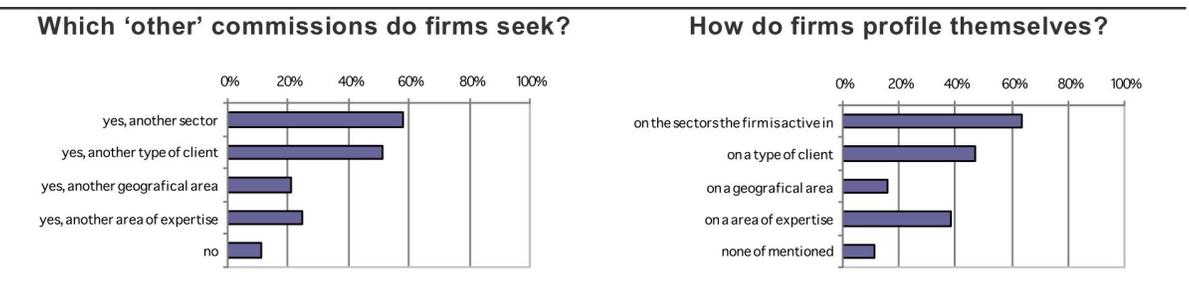


Figure 3 Other types of commissions sought and firm profiles.

5.2. ADVERTISING

The survey indicated that other than placing a sign at a building site little use is made of advertising by Dutch architects. What little advertising there is was placed by large firms, and is incidental. Although these firms report that they use advertising to increase name recognition, fewer than 1/4th of them had a promotion strategy in place. Both expense and ineffectiveness were given as reasons for not using advertising.

Fewer than a quarter of the firms that do use advertising have a goal, plan or budget for their advertising. So when architects use one or another form of advertising, it is usually mostly in an opportunistic manner instead of a strategic manner.

5.3. PUBLIC RELATIONS

Fewer than half the firms surveyed had a publication or newsletter in the last two years. One third of the firms have 1-5 publications, and 11% had more than 5 publications over the same period. Radio and television are not often used, while print media and internet are quite commonly used. Nearly half of the architects responding to the survey have contact with the press. One third of the firms take a more passive stance and make no initiative to get projects published. While 37% do take initiatives, and 29% stated that the initiative comes from both their firm and the press.

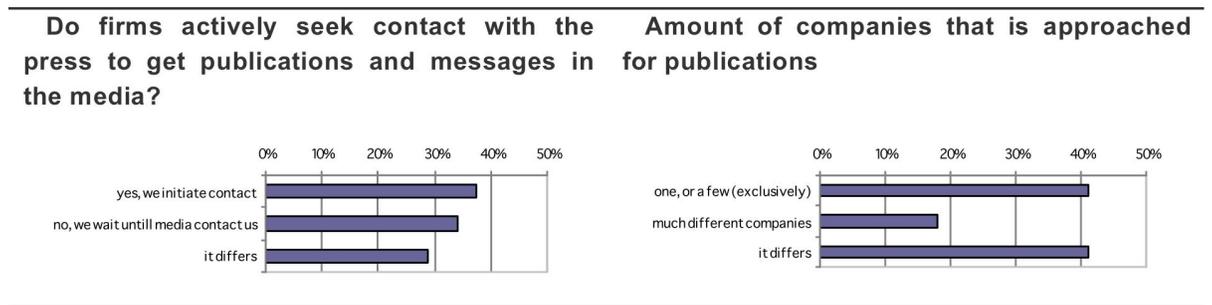
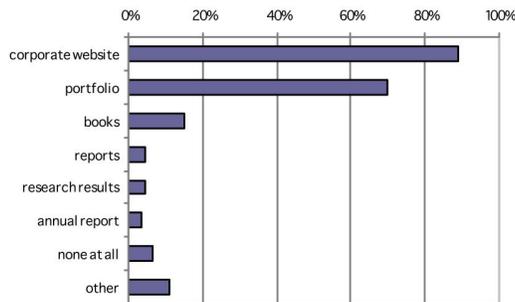


Figure 4 Publication activity.

The majority of firms have a website and a portfolio. Most firms also have a house style and letterhead. Nearly all architects indicated that clients come to their offices at least once. In 79% of cases the design of the firms offices has been made with the intention of receiving clients and making an impression on them. The firm's accommodations are therefore an important means of communicating with clients.

Which promotional media do firms produce themselves?



Which materials are produced in the house style?

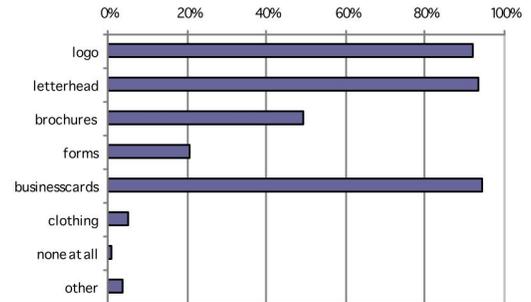


Figure 5 Firm self-published media and house style.

Brochure(s) of informatiepakketten die bureaus hebben

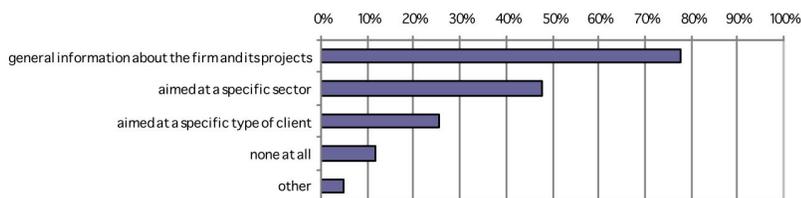


Figure 6 Brochures and information packages.

71% of the architects go to PR events such as lectures, conferences exhibitions, or tours organized by other parties in the construction sector, but only 13% of firms organize PR events themselves. 16% neither go to PR events nor organize them themselves. It is primarily the larger firms that make use of PR events.

Three quarters of architects indicate that they believe that their firm must be engaged in some form of community work (including charities, community services or advocacy, or sponsorship). Half of the surveyed firms were engaged in these activities on an occasional basis, while one quarter are regularly engaged.

71% of firms participate in competitions and 25% do at least three per year.

Number of times per year firms participate in competitions.

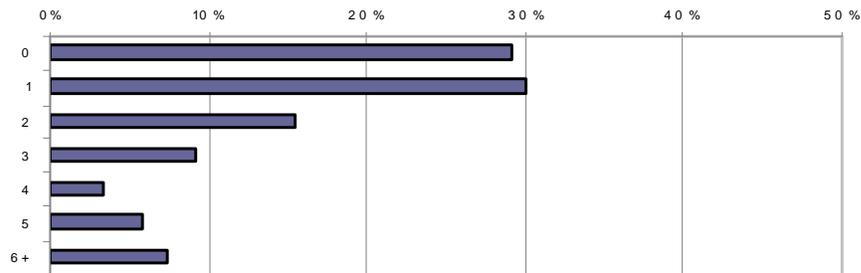


Figure 7 Participation in competitions

5.4. SALES PROMOTIONS

In general sales promotions play no significant role in promoting architectural firms. Most such tools are never used. Promotional gifts are more frequently used than other sales promotion techniques. As is practice of offering competitive fees to repeat clients. The reason sales promotions are rarely used is that architects do not believe that they work, rather it is believed that they give clients a bad impression. Further few firms have the financial reserves required to make use of this technique.

5.5. PERSONAL SELLING

Three quarters of the architects actively seek and approach potential clients. Of these two thirds gather information about the client to be used in their approach. On average, Dutch architects have contact with former clients once a year. This is primarily in the form of personal contact, in visits, or by telephone.

Approximately half of the architects poled indicated that they seek commissions in building types or with clients outside their normal practice, while a fifth seek commissions outside their geographic area. Architects seeking work with new types of clients outside do not seem to consistently target one client type over any other. It seems that firms that are seeking work in new sectors, or in a new geographic region are more targeted in their approach, choosing a specific sector or location.

5.6. DIRECT MARKETING

Most of the firms surveyed maintained a client file or mailing list. E-mail is the most popular means of reaching clients, although new editions of firm brochures are most often sent by post. These mailings were not seen as aimed at achieving an immediate response. And fewer than half the respondents distinguished between different target groups in designing their mailings. In two thirds of the firms, mailings were addressed only to business or individuals with which the firm already had a relationship. Only a very few firms allow one to subscribe to their mailings.

Only 12% of firms have no form of brochure or information package. Most firms offer a generalised bundle of information about the office and their projects. Fewer than half target their brochures towards specific sectors, and only a quarter target specific types of clients.

5.7. OPINION AND RESULT

In the survey architects were asked if they would prefer to promote their firm more actively than they currently do. Half of the respondents indicated that they would like to do more promotion of their firm through public relations. Slightly less than half would also like to make more use of advertisement or direct marketing. Sales promotions were clearly less popular – only 14% of firms indicated that they were interested in making more use of this tool.

According to the respondents, the promotion of architectural firms primarily increases name recognition. To a lesser extent promotion was seen as a means to increase turnover, or bring in more or better projects. The category 'other' was used by some respondents to indicate that it was difficult to measure the results of promotion efforts, that there was no benefit, or that no promotional efforts had been made. Promotion was seen as of limited value in increasing profits, increasing client satisfaction or in reaching firm goals.

In which areas do architects want to do more promotion?

Return on promotional efforts.

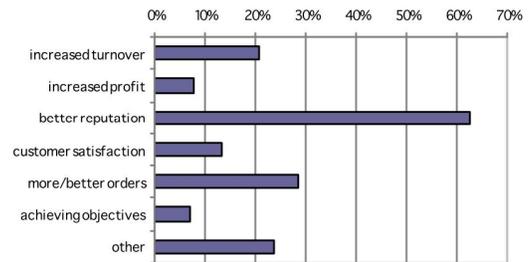
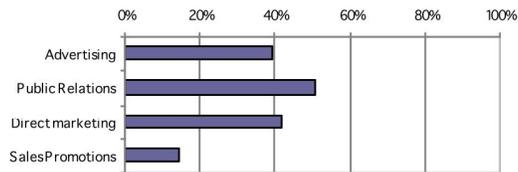


Figure 8 Intentions for future promotion (the figures for results of promotional effort are the architects own estimations).

5.8. FIRM TYPE AS BASIS FOR PROMOTION

In order to determine whether firm type was helpful in understanding how firms promote themselves, firm characteristics were compared to use of available promotional techniques. The researchers attempted to determine if different types of firms put more effort into promotion or employed different promotional mixes.

No pattern of promotional mix was found. There was a pattern of intensity of promotional effort.

Firm characteristics shared by firms making a greater than average promotional effort:

- Firms of over 6 fte in size
- Firms with work in several geographical regions.
- Sector: Urbanism
- Clients: Housing corporations, project developers, public sector
- Architects seeking work outside their geographic region.

Firm characteristics shared by firms making a less than average promotional effort:

- Sector: Housing
- Clients: Individuals

6. LITERATURE

6.1. STRATEGY

The literature commonly recommends that firms must have a long-term vision and strategy around which to structure their promotion efforts. Successful acquisition is based on a systematic approach (Haupt and Kubitzka, 2002). Architects should, it is held, analyze the current market, formulate goals, develop a general strategy and then specific acquisition and communication strategies. Coxe (1983) concurs and goes so far as to recommend doing market surveys. This analysis should lead to a well defined identity or philosophy that can be clearly communicated to potential clients. There should be clarity in the services offered and in the working approach taken by the firm. The literature (Coxe, 1983; Haupt and Kubitzka, 2002; Koren, 2005) also commonly recommends collaboration with clients and occasionally other parties in communicating the firm's message. Such collaboration can provide access to communication channels not otherwise affordable. The literature also recommends that there be specific partners and staff within the firm assigned to promotion, when possible these should include specialists.

Haupt & Kubitzka (2002) state that the definition and communication of the identity and expertise of a firm is the basis of all positioning and acquisition strategy. Coxe et al (1983) indicate that architects must project their philosophy and vision in order to distinguish themselves. They suggest that potential clients choose the firm that makes their service offer most clearly. Coxe et al are also of the opinion that architects can profit through doing opinion research in order to establish what potential clients in their market. They can then build their communication and promotional strategies upon this knowledge.

6.2. ADVERTISING

Koren (2005) discourages architects from making any use of paid advertising. It is expensive and fails to lead to any increase in market share. It may be useful for large or leading firms in order to remind potential clients of their position. Coxe finds that advertising can be useful, but only if the target group is clear and there are appropriate media available to reach them. They note, however, that

advertising requires a great deal of preparation, and is not a good tool for the short term.

6.3. PUBLIC RELATIONS

In general publicity is the result of success rather than a cause of it, however, Haupt and Kubitzka (2002) see publicity as a way of increasing a firm's visibility. Koren suggests that for firms other than the most well known media relations are more important than public relations. The press is as important an element of an architect's network as clients or contractors. Both publications and brochures have a role to play. Coxe (1983) sees brochures as short-term instruments. These are more often scanned than read. The firm's experience, expertise and reliability must therefore stand out. Two versions are required, one brochure for general inquiries and custom made brochures for individual clients addressing their particular concerns.

6.4. SALES PROMOTIONS

In general sales promotion plays little role in the architectural sector. Kotler (2005) warns that most sales promotions have a negative impact on image. Sales promotions suggest inferior quality and are inappropriate to a sector based on expertise and reliability.

6.5. PERSONAL SELLING

Identifying and analyzing the target group is the key to strategic promotion (Haupt and Kubitzka, 2002). Because architects supply a service it is important to create confidence among potential clients. This confidence can be fostered by making clear to a prospective client exactly what services and performance a firm can offer them. Claiming to be able to design anything rarely instils confidence in a potential client.

Business to business marketing is primarily about building relationships, even when promoting technical or complex products and services. It is small scale and intimate, independent of the size of the purchase in question. There is a large degree of uncertainty over new developments and possibilities particularly in

project oriented sectors. Clients therefore have a strong desire for information. Such relationships are built up over time and frequent contact, through which various aspects of inter-personal relationships play an important role, and business clients seek service providers they can trust. Typically the relationship is built up over a long series of transactions. In architecture there is rarely a long series of transactions, and such a series is even more rarely perceived as such. Yet it is also clear that repeat clients are the easiest to sell additional services to. When addressing new clients, architects must try to build a relationship with a client over an extremely brief exposure. They must give the potential client confidence in the quality of relationship that is to follow the selection process.

6.6. DIRECT MARKETING

Coxe (1983) recommends the mailing list as a good means of contacting potential clients as the sender has control over exactly what is received and to some extent by whom. It is the most cost effective method of maintaining contact. They also find that regular mailings to potential clients can facilitate better recognition and confidence when the time comes to start a new project. Both Coxe and Koren (2005) state that personally targeted newsletters are best. Both in order to avoid being seen as 'spam', and in shaping the message to the services each particular client would be likely to need.

7. CONCLUSIONS

From the study it would seem that at least Dutch architects are more actively promoting their firms than either the literature (which admittedly was not based on research in the Netherlands) or the consultants would suggest. Websites, newsletters are very common. Cold calls are also commonly used. And half of architects have some regular exposure in the press. Most architects strive to maintain a specific image among their client base. Unsurprisingly, the most active firms are the largest. And these also make use of the widest range of promotion tools. For all firms relationship marketing was a very important tool. These findings support and expand upon those of Kioussi and Smyth (2009) where it was found that among design-led firms in the design-construction-development

relationship marketing was the primary means of promotion, and that a greater consideration to brand development.

Where there may be weaknesses is in the development of a promotion strategy and in the tailoring of the message to specific target groups or clients. Only half of the respondents that claim to have a long-term vision and strategy reported having a promotion strategy. Further, in most cases newsletters and brochures were produced for a generalized audience, and not tailored to the sectors or building types of the clients receiving them. It appears that while many architects are actively promoting their firms, they have not considered how their promotion activities correlate to overall firm strategy, to the market they are active in, or to the needs of their clients.

The reliance of potential clients on reputation and on the reported experience of other clients and project managers with particular architects represents a challenge to architects trying to build or maintain a specific image. Naturally, providing services, quality and performances consistent with the desired image is important, but if the word does not get out, this will do little to advance the firm's cause with new clients. In this respect one client's plea for promotional materials to focus on the match between client's expectations and the architect's quality of service in the presentation of completed projects may indicate a useful approach. Further, a greater use may be made of client statements of satisfaction, and of collaborative promotion may help to put across the views of satisfied clients.

Perhaps the greatest problem facing architects is how to sell into a building type or sector where they have not yet been active. Here the strong preference among clients for experience in a given building type represents a significant barrier to firms trying to enter a new sector. Architects will need to try out ways of describing their previous experience and expertise in terms relevant to the new building type.

The case studies show some of the range of development of marketing behaviour of Dutch architecture firms. As was suggested in the survey data, the degree of development of the marketing approach seems to follow the degree to which the firm has developed a clear idea of its own image. Interestingly the two larger firms follow different approaches. Fokkema's approach is relatively closely aimed at

their clients, reflecting perhaps the high degree of specialisation in the firm's portfolio. Cepezed, on the other hand, promotes primarily through architectural publications, which are not specifically addresses to potential clients. While it is difficult to attribute success to any particular promotional approach, all of the case study firms seem to depend a great deal on passive and word of mouth approaches to bring clients to them.

In summary it can be said that for Dutch architects at least promotion is part of normal business practice. What remains is the need to improve the design and implementation of promotional strategies to more closely match the desires of their clients.

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