

Firm on the map

EV studio's electronic magazine has found success through content, technical expertise and SEO.

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In 2008, **EVstudio** (Denver, CO) was a small architectural firm with five employees who wanted to make a name for themselves among the other small architectural firms that populate the industry.

"We were looking for a way to stand out in that crowded room," said firm principal Sean O'Hara.

They knew that one of the best ways to build name recognition is to attract viewers to their web site and one of the best ways to do that is to regularly update content and include lots of links to high-traffic sites. Rather than turn to outside web designers and SEO experts, 13-employee EVstudio adopted a simple platform used by millions and millions of online diarists and independent pundits. The results, however, have been anything but amateur.

The idea

EVstudio decided to create an online magazine simply titled *EVstudio* using the popular *WordPress* blog software. While the staff of EVstudio do share their professional perspectives on industry issues, their primary goal is to be informative and factual.

DETAILS

FIRM SIZE: 13 full-time and 10 part-time employees

MARKETING TACTIC: Online magazine (blog) targeted to clients and industry members.

DISTRIBUTION: Created and administered in-house with inexpensive blogging software.

COSTS: The costs are minimal and expense can be measured best in terms of time. Firm-wide, approximately 5-10 hours per week are spent on the magazine.

RESULTS: First place in the New Media category in Marketing Now's 2010 Marketing Excellence Awards. As a result of the magazine's success, firm principal Sean O'Hara was asked to speak on social media at a Society for Marketing Professionals Services event.



A screenshot of EVstudio online magazine.

Content is king and search engines certainly reward sites that regularly update their content, but the magazine's success isn't attributable simply to a tactical use of keywords. A great deal of care is given to producing quality articles so the site will be seen as a valuable source of expertise.

Everyone in the firm has access to the software and is encouraged to contribute an article to the magazine every couple of weeks. Articles typically cover practical aspects of what goes into completing projects— a structural engineer may discuss the pros and cons of different foundation systems or an architect might address occupancy codes.

"We have some that are truly comprehensive articles on topics like ADA. Some people in the office have sat down and written a tome on everything they know on a subject," O'Hara says.

In addition to the original content, they also use the magazine to help promote industry events. Occasionally someone from outside the firm will contribute a piece.

O'Hara acts as site administrator. He also edits each article and optimizes keywords before it is published. Having a firm principal with both the technical and editorial expertise to sustain such a marketing effort, not to mention the energy, is a key element in the magazine's success.

The results

Before the magazine was launched, a

person searching for "Denver architect" wouldn't find EVstudio until around the 50th page of results, a ranking that has dramatically improved in the past two years.

"Before you could dig and dig and dig and you wouldn't find it. Now we're on the top of page two, sometimes on page one," O'Hara says.

The firm's corporate web site, which is hosted on a different URL from the magazine, is updated periodically and has some automated functions, but it is largely static. The difference in traffic between the two sites is significant. While the corporate site averages around 4,000 hits per month, the magazine is at about 29,000 hits.

"We started out with a goal of 'if we can get 100 people a day to look at this, boy wouldn't that be spectacular.' And now we average 1,000 people a day," he says.

Some of those people looking at the magazine went on to become clients.

"Most of our bigger projects are still relationship-based. But we've won some great clients we never would have met if it weren't for our presence on the web," O'Hara says.

Want to try it

In terms of cost, an online magazine on a blogging platform is about as economical a marketing solution as you'll find. The *WordPress* software is free and can be hosted on a firm's existing server with a dedicated domain address. EVstudio estimates their expenses at about \$6 per month.

To reap the full benefits, however, an ongoing commitment to updating the site with original content is essential. The obvious downside to such a venture is that it can take away from billable time. The upside is that it gets the entire firm involved in marketing, which if all goes well, will help build a backlog of billable hours.

For these reasons, O'Hara believes that they've found a niche in the marketing mix that probably isn't for everyone, but suits EVstudio perfectly.

"We think that it will go with us for the next how-many years until the blogging technology is old and nobody is interested in the Internet anymore. Until something better comes along," he says. ▀▀