

# The A/E Firm Website of 2015:

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## **Reinventing the Web for the Knowledge-Based Practice**



# Client Expectations and Firm Web Experiences

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## A Widening Gap

*It's easy to forget how quickly the web (and the world) has changed since its inception. Rather rapidly, it became incredibly easy to literally find a needle in the world's largest collection of haystacks. The result -- an explosion of content unlike anything the world's ever seen. The new expectation -- educate me, inform me, let me learn and explore. I'll engage when I'm ready.*



*Suddenly, clients expect a whole lot more from the A/E firm's website. Often, they're looking for answers to a whole lot of questions that stretch beyond a simple slideshow of compelling past projects.*



## ***What business, facility and infrastructure challenges are you seeing in companies like mine?***

*How do you suggest we solve them? What can you teach me?  
How can you help me before I hire you?*

## ***Who leads this firm?***

*What do they know? What do they believe?  
What have they done? What have they written?  
Where have they spoken? What is their perspective?  
How does it apply to my business?*

## ***What notable projects has this firm done?***

*What projects has it done similar to mine? Who leads those projects? What projects is it working on right now? What do they know? What else have they done? What is their perspective?*

## ***What are the people like?***

*What is the culture like? What would it be like to work there?  
What would it be like to hire them?*

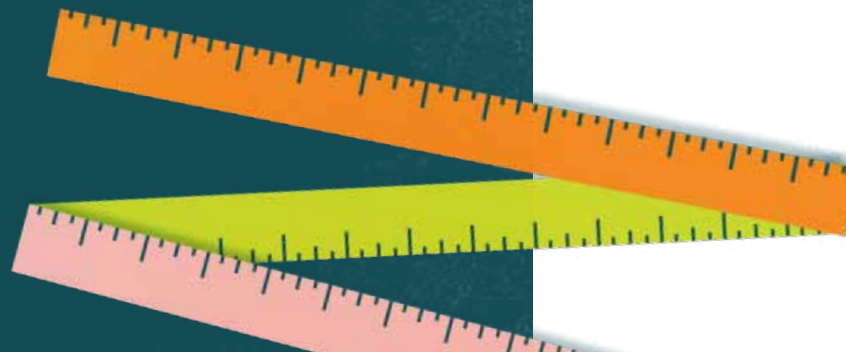
# A Guide For Your Next Website

A typical website redesign for a mid-sized A/E firm takes 6-8 months to complete. Like any capital investment, a new website has an expected useful life – in this case it's 3-5 years.

So, if you're starting a redesign today, you're designing your site to operate from 2015-2020. That said, most of the site requirements we see focus on little more than bringing a firm's current site up-to-date for 2014. This eBook book provides a roadmap to guide your next website redesign so your site can be as valuable as possible throughout its useful life.

## Topics Discussed

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# Thought Leadership Leads The Way

For most A/E firms, thought leadership is hardly on their radar as an issue worthy of marketing or leadership attention.

***While most large firms have a thought leadership effort in place, most mid-tier firms (2-300 employees) do not.***

That said, a small subset of firms are recognizing that competing on knowledge, demonstrated as thought leadership, can be more rewarding both personally and financially. By 2015, thought leadership will be THE central aspect of the site.

## Thought Leadership in the Website of 2015

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- » Thought leadership takes precedence over the firm's portfolio of past work.
- » It ceases being isolated on a subdomain, which disconnects the user's act of conceptual learning and idea exchange from their activity of connecting those learnings to how the firm can solve his or her business and design problems.
- » All thought leadership (articles, blogs and research) are seamlessly integrated with portfolio items so users can easily connect a firm's ideas and opinions to seeing those ideas in action (both in conceptual designs and in the built environment).
- » It's intuitively browsable and searchable -- users easily search in real-time, browse by topic, browse by discipline, browse by author, and browse by market -- all without being overwhelmed.

An illustration on the left side of the slide features a green brain with white neural pathways, positioned inside a large, light-yellow thought bubble. Below this main bubble are two smaller, lighter-yellow bubbles, one medium-sized and one small, all set against a dark teal background.

# Knowledge Management is Central and Connected

Just like thought leadership, in a lot of firms the concept of knowledge management is a relatively new one. A lot of firms struggle mightily to simply communicate between offices and make service delivery consistent, let alone collaborate across disciplines and share knowledge wherever it resides.

***While most firms have some type of intranet in-place today, for many it's little more than a confusing mess of file shares.***

That said, forward-thinking firms are investing in social intranets, like those pioneered by software company, Knowledge Architecture.



## Knowledge Management and the Website of 2015

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- » More firms utilize social intranets to share, collaborate and innovate.
- » These platforms become the backbone of the firm's intellectual property and most marketable asset --its expertise and unique perspective.
- » Intranets are seamlessly connected to the public-facing site through the use of editorial software.
- » Knowledge becomes the basis for thought leadership and is easily assigned to an editorial calendar and an internal or external content producer. It is reviewed through the editorial cycle, and is published directly to the site.

See also:

*Combining Knowledge Management with Client Research to Build Your Content Strategy »*





# Websites Become Personalized Experiences

The vast majority of A/E firm sites provide a one-size-fits-all experience.

***Regardless of who you are or what you're interested in, you see the same thing.***

Sometimes, you see the same things over and over, even though they don't apply to you at all. The site of 2015 provides a much more personal experience.



## Personalization in the Website of 2015

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- » All thought leadership is authored. All partner and employee profiles connect back to not only the thought leadership they've contributed to, but the projects and programs they have been a part of in the past and are currently a part of right now.
- » Through the use of smart calls-to-action, visitors will never see the same offer twice. The site leads the user through their buying journey -- sequentially sharing useful content and guiding them towards a conversation with the firm when the time is appropriate.
- » Leading edge firms utilize dynamic content to literally change the content a user sees based on who they are and what's interested them most in the past.



# A Compelling Web Experience on all Devices

Since 2011, the sale of smartphones and tablets have exceeded the sale of desktop and notebook computers. That said, if you look at your web analytics today, I'm willing to guess that only 10-15% of your web traffic is coming from one of these devices.

***By 2015, this number will rise significantly -- as much as 30-40% of your web traffic will be coming from a mobile device.***

As of 2014, Google will prioritize responsive sites in search results from mobile devices.



## Engaging Devices with the Website of 2015

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- » Driven by responsive design, the site enables users to easily access both thought leadership and portfolio items with an experience tailored to the screen size and functionality of the device they're using.
- » The site serves up different experiences based on what it knows of my site behavior and the device I'm using. If I regularly access thought leadership on a mobile device, it prioritizes that type of content for me when I return.



# Manageable and Informative Portfolios

If there's one thing that most firms do pretty well on their sites today, it's sharing their past portfolio of work.

***That said, there are many ways to improve portfolio management, to improve the user's experience and make the firm's past work much more valuable from a marketing perspective.***





## Your Portfolio of Work in 2015

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- » Digital Asset Management systems connect seamlessly with front-side content so project profiles only get managed once.
- » Portfolio items connect users back to relevant thought leadership so they can relate the firm's work to its unique perspective.
- » Words abound. Project profiles become short stories (anywhere from over 1k - 2k words) that shed light on both the client's and firm's objectives, the design thinking and tangible outcomes of the work. Included are client and employee perspectives from all levels to humanize the work and the client experience.
- » Video. Increasingly, firms will rely on high quality multimedia content to tell each story with simplicity, relevancy and impact.



# The Integrated Lead Development System

Right now, most sites operate in near complete isolation from critical systems the firm uses every day to be successful in marketing and business development.

***By 2015, a larger number of firms will view their site as one leg in an integrated system that combines CMS, CRM and marketing automation -- to attract, engage and nurture potential clients.***



## The 2015 Website: A System to Attract, Engage and Nurture

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- » Valuable content attracts potential clients you don't even know
- » Marketing automation serves up personalized web experiences to the very specific clients you'd really like to do business with -- the site literally guides your ideal clients from researching solutions to their business problems through your thought leadership, to being inspired through your portfolio, to initiating a dialogue when the time is right.
- » Information finally drives decisions. Marketers use analytics to understand fundamental client problems and drive both content and marketing strategy.
- » Information drives business development. With user tracking and analytics, the system literally prioritizes leads for business development to proactively pursue.

See also:

*Your Website as an Integrated Lead Development System »*



# From Marketing Expense to Revenue-Driving Asset

In most firms, the web plays an entirely passive role in business development. It does little more than showcase what the firm has done. With little or no useful content, the site cannot engage with early stage buyers in a meaningful way.

***By 2015, more and more firms will find their site to be a tangible revenue producing asset.***



## The 2015 Website: A Valuable and Transferable Asset

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- » Valuable content becomes core to the site's functionality, generating leads, sometimes long after the content was produced.
- » The site is the definitive source of the firm's collective expertise and experience -- making it a critical hub of all marketing and business development activities.
- » With thought leadership taking precedence over portfolio, the site connects the firm with potential clients it does not know -- making it a meaningful source of both leads and annual revenue.



# Looking Ahead



## **About the Author:**

Jason Mlicki is Principal of Rattleback, the marketing agency for professional services firms. His agency designs lead generating websites and content marketing programs that help A/E firms attract the right clients. Connect with Jason on LinkedIn or by email.

*Over the next 5 years, your firm's website will become a critical, and proactive participant in your firm's business development efforts. It will be used to attract potential clients you don't know, nurture them over time, and guide them towards a conversation with your business development folks when the time is right.*

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## **Other Useful Resources**

[\*Your Website as an Integrated Lead Development System »\*](#)

[\*12 Ways Your A/E Firm Website Can Reduce Buyers' Perceived Risk »\*](#)

[\*Planning to Redesign Your Professional Service Firm's Website »\*](#)

[\*Selecting the Right Web Design Partner for Your A/E Firm »\*](#)