

## Portfolio

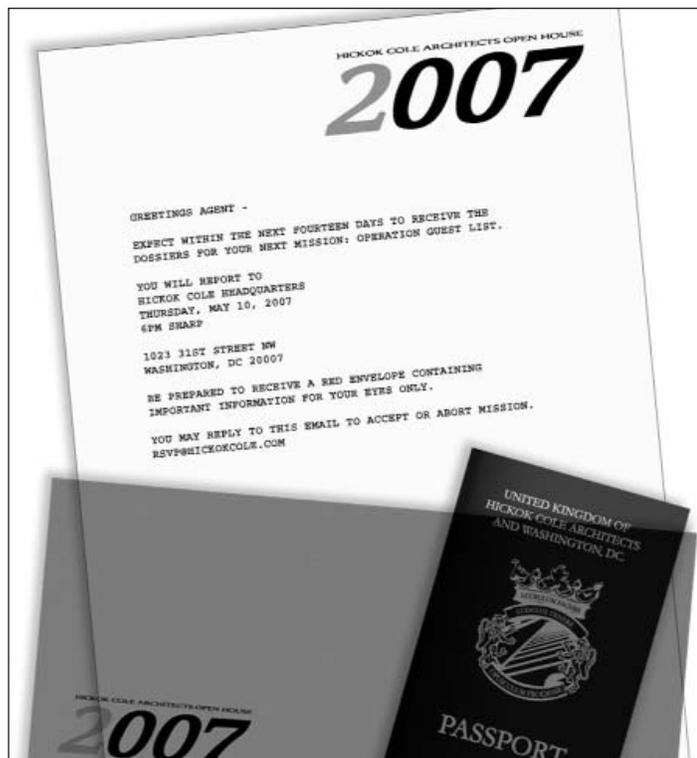
### Hickok Cole Architects throws James Bond-worthy bash

Find out how this 80-person architecture firm developed a fun and simple piece to invite clients and business leaders to its 2007 open house.

A/E firms are constantly competing for the best parties to attract business and show current clients a good time. Though clients can be hesitant to attend events where they may be hit up for business, **Hickok Cole Architects** (Washington, DC), an 80-person architecture firm, found a way to throw a good party without all the shop talk.

The firm hosted the Hickok Cole Architects Open House 2007 in May. The event, held at the firm's main office in Washington, D.C., was a spy-themed party, down to the last detail.

Guests received their dossiers in the mail which featured a monarch-sized letter— measuring 7¼-by-10½ inches— with secret mission instructions, a map of the vicinity with a floor plan of the building, and a passport featuring one of the associate principals— the recipient's secret identity. The materials were bound with a red translucent decoder band and inserted into a red translucent envelope. If the recipient moved the decoder band over the map, a dotted line with directions would appear. To the naked eye, without the use of the decoder band, the directions were camouflaged. The picture on the stamp even



The open house invitations included secret mission instructions, a map of the vicinity with a floor plan of the building, and a passport featuring one of the associate principals.

#### The Details

**Firm size:** 80

**Marketing tactic:** A three-piece mailout announcing the 2007 Hickok Cole Architects Open House.

**Distribution:** The invitations were sent to 2,300 people, including clients, developers, brokers, and heads of the top legal firms and associations in the city.

**Cost:** Printing the piece cost roughly \$4,200, plus \$1,710 for postage, and \$700 for fulfillment. The total cost was \$6,610. The \$7,965 budget included \$5,500 for the invite, \$1,765 for postage, and \$700 for fulfillment.

**Results:** The James Bond-style invitations received positive feedback and thank-you notes from party attendees.

kept with the secret agent theme, featuring a bow-and-arrow-wielding Robin Hood caricature. The invitations read:

“Greetings, Agent. There has been a breach at Hickok Cole Headquarters. Design secrets have been stolen and we believe it is an inside job.

“Your mission: Operation Guest List. Report to Hickok Cole headquarters on Thursday, May 10, 2007.

“We are hosting this event as a way to secure the intelligence needed to complete your next profitable mission. Please look around, mingle, exchange market intelligence, but remember— nothing to draw suspicion. Keep your eyes open and your wits about you, but have a good time. There will be a martini bar as well. It is a party after all.”

The martini bar, in keeping with the “Shaken, not stirred” James Bond theme, was a better choice than building the event around the casino of the latest James Bond movie, *Casino Royale*.

“We chose the martini bar instead of gambling so our clients did not, for one minute, think that we were gambling with their buildings’ design,” Director of Marketing and Corporate Communications Marilynn Mendell says.

One of the big surprises of the night for the guests was an Aston Martin DB9 Volante, James Bond’s official wheels. The car salesman from a local Aston Martin dealership stayed by the car all night and explained the details of the car to interested guests.

The lounge area featured a piano player, comfortable leather chairs, and soft candlelight. Party flowers were exotic orchids and tropical foliage and a screen played a continuous loop of 007 movies. Client giveaways included an invisible ink decoder pen and a drawing to win a trip to the International Spy Museum in Washington, D.C.



Planning for the soiree began in November 2006. The entire marketing department contributed to the idea. Mendell interviewed and hired the caterer, set up the evening's press coverage, and orchestrated the event. Principals Michael Hickok and Yolanda Cole developed the party's theme. Jennifer Oh, marketing manager, found the Aston Martin dealer and convinced him to loan the car. Joanna Hoffschneider, director of business development, assisted with the passport text and design. Katie Preston, senior communications manager, compiled the mailing lists; got Hickok Cole Architects employees to review the invitation list of 2,000 names; collected business cards from architects, and had the administrative staff update records and other details, like securing the caterer and the liquor order; and sent the photographs and releases to the press. The entire office contributed to cleanup and archiving, and Sarah Barr, senior graphic designer, created the invite design.

"The subliminal message that I believe is key to these invitations is that they are so creatively conceived and carried out," Mendell says. "Our customers relate great design of architecture to our great and innovative invitation designs and party themes along with our other marketing efforts."

Printing the piece cost roughly \$4,200, plus \$1,710 for postage and \$700 for fulfillment. The total cost was \$6,610. The \$7,965 budget included \$5,500 for the invite, \$1,765 for postage, and \$700 for fulfillment. Mendell and the marketing team came in \$1,355 under budget. The pieces, when taken separately, were simple, but it was how they were packaged together that made the campaign effective. The passports show only the associate principals and principals in the firm, not all employees. This small detail kept printing costs down.

The envelope also did not have a large amount of printing but included only a few simple words and the Hickok Cole Architects logo. The red bands that held all of the pieces together were just another piece of red, translucent paper held together with double-sided tape.

## Tactical Toolbox

Learn from Hickok Cole Architects and do the following when holding an open house:

**Plan early.** Start brainstorming as early as possible in order to be able to carry out your plans for the event.

**Think creatively.** A firm event does not have to be traditional. Guests will appreciate a unique, creative approach that includes giveaways, activities at the event, and a fun invitation.

**Don't limit yourself.** Encourage your marketing team to think big. Instead of a rework of last year's open house, try to make this year's open house more exciting and guest-oriented. Always try to achieve the goals that seem impossible. You will surprise yourself.

For firms looking to put together a cost-effective invitation package, Preston suggests that organizations make each piece simple but focus on the overall impact of the package.



Partygoers check out an Aston Martin DB9 Volante, James Bond's official wheels.

The Hickok Cole marketing team received positive feedback from the event. Andrew Peck, account executive at the *Washington Business Journal*, wrote a letter to the firm:

"I attended the (Hickok Cole Architects) party, at which I met (Aston Martin salesman) Eric Stephans who showed me the Aston Martin... so graciously supplied by Aston Martin of Tysons Corner in Vienna, Virginia. In the days following the party, I followed up with Phillip Jones, brand manager at Aston Martin Tysons.

"Phillip explained how events like the (Hickok Cole Architects) party... fit Aston Martin's targeted, event-based marketing plan, as well as the more-specific goal of putting qualified prospects behind the wheel of their rare, exotic hand-built luxury sports car— often for the first time in the prospect's life.

"Such a tailor-made 'win/win' relationship came about as a direct result of (Hickok Cole Architects') expert party-throwing— which offered lucky attendees like me a room full of synergy and opportunity in the form of smart, successful professionals all working in complementary fields. I can't thank (Hickok Cole Architects) enough for doing what they do, and I'm delighted to be in business with them!"

Although Hickok Cole Architects won't use the *007* theme again, the spy motif worked perfectly with the year of the party, 2007, and the release of the latest James Bond movie. The invitations and "save-the-date" cards captured guests' attention and provided a fun way to spend the evening with 400 clients, developers, brokers, and heads of the top legal firms and associations in the city. The Hickok Cole Architects open house proved that you don't have to plan a stuffy business dinner to introduce clients and city business leaders to one another.

"If asked, we'll respond about business, but fun is our primary objective," Mendell says. "What that, in turn, has achieved is the 'A' list of Washington, D.C., parties with top-flight developers clamoring to get an invitation, and a world of goodwill and corporate recognition."— **RACHEL TELEHANY**

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## Portfolio

### Little creates an eye-catching newsletter

Find out how this 300-person architecture and design firm redesigned its internal newsletter into a fun and entertaining read that helped unify employees across offices.

Following a branding effort completed in 2002, 300-person architecture and design firm Little (Charlotte, NC) needed a redesigned internal newsletter to complement its updated look and feel.

“Everyone agreed that we needed something to better communicate and weave in the new brand,” says Kelly Thompson, marketing communications manager. The firm’s previous newsletter, *Scoop*, was designed for a smaller organization. With eight locations throughout the U.S., Little needed an internal newsletter that reinforced a sense of unity.

“The old newsletter was very unique, but it was longer and more expensive,” Thompson says. The old newsletter was being produced outside of the firm, while the redesigned quarterly newsletter, *The Red Wall Journal*, is done in-house.

The name for the newsletter resulted from a variety of ideas that came out of a brainstorming session, Thompson says. For example, Pantone 179 (which is red) is the firm’s brand color, and the title is a takeoff of *The Wall Street Journal*.

The only costs of the newsletter are the price of paper and mailing it throughout the firm, Thompson says. “We roughly estimate the cost to be 25 cents for each copy of the newsletter—a total of \$75 for each quarterly distribution to 300 employees.”

Little wanted to keep *The Red Wall Journal* fun and entertaining while also increasing readership, Thompson says. “We wanted to change the length of the newsletter. We wanted it broken into different areas of interest. We also wanted (our employees) to take it home and share it.”

*The Red Wall Journal* is distributed to all employees throughout the different offices and is posted on the firm’s intranet.

To reinforce that sense of unity, Thompson says, the firm sends the newsletters to regional offices a day before they are distributed within the Charlotte office. That way, everyone in the firm is getting the information at the same time.

Unlike a typical newsletter, *The Red Wall Journal* is an 11-by-17-inch single piece of paper that’s visually appealing and informative. For example, the third quarter 2006 issue of *The Red Wall Journal*’s front cover includes photos and graphics of different projects as well as industry- or firm-related news, including an employee spotlight section. One photo shows a library building with the words “Library News: Check it out!” at the

top while a graphic shows three stick figures with the text “New Projects = New Talent.”

On the back of the newsletter, there are briefs correlating to the photos and graphics on the front cover. For example, the photo of the library building is actually highlighting the Transylvania County Library. The text describes how the library was designed to complement the older stone structures in the area and how it has become a gathering place for the county.

For the graphic on “New Projects = New Talent,” there’s a brief about Little’s referral program that encourages employees to contact the HR department, since some of the firm’s “best and brightest” have been in-house referrals.

#### Results

*The Red Wall Journal* captured third place in the internal newsletter category in the Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS) (Alexandria, VA) 2006 Marketing Communications Awards.

Within the company, Thompson says, a recent readership survey highlighted the popularity of the newsletter. Survey respondents noted that the employee spotlight was the most-read section.

Additionally, Little gauges the success of its internal newsletter with the increase of information that the firm receives from employees. “We regularly receive requests from internal groups to feature projects that they are working on or success stories with a client,” Thompson says.

During the last year-and-a-half, Thompson says, the HR department has been including the internal newsletter in its recruiting packages—another indicator of its effectiveness in communicating the values and brand of the firm.—

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#### Tactical Toolbox

Learn from Little and do the following with your internal newsletter:

**Make it informative, yet fun.** By including colorful graphics and photos with informational briefs, Little created a newsletter that is fun to read.

**Reinforce unity.** If the goal of the newsletter is to help build unity among offices, then remember that when distributing the piece. Having the newsletter arrive at each office on the same day reinforces a sense of unity firm-wide.

