

marketing achievement award

Howard J. Wolff, FSMPS

INTERVIEWED BY BETTY S. HEARN, FSMPS

In 1999, Howard Wolff was honored with the prestigious SMPS Marketing Achievement Award, which recognizes individuals who demonstrate exemplary achievements in marketing professional services in the design and building industry. This is the third in a series profiling previous recipients.

Betty Hearn (BH): How has marketing strategy evolved in the built environment?

Howard Wolff (HW): In the 25 years I've been in the business, the emphasis has moved from project pursuit strategies (how are we going to win this job?) to encompass

'Technology has made our tasks easier but our jobs harder.'

general business strategies (how can we define our unique strategic position in the marketplace?).

I think it's a mistake to try to be all things to all people, but there is also a danger in defining your distinctiveness too narrowly. Wimberly Allison Tong & Goo (WATG) is a niche firm, but I've been attempting to carve that niche with a bulldozer.

Name: Howard J. Wolff, FSMPS
Title: Senior Vice President and Worldwide Director of Marketing
Firm: Wimberly Allison Tong & Goo (WATG)
Joined WATG: 1989
Based: Honolulu, HI
Web site: www.watg.com
Joined SMPS: 1980



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BH: How has technology changed our jobs?

HW: Technology has made our tasks easier but our jobs harder. Being able to create products quickly has created expectations from colleagues and clients that we'll produce at warp speed and be available 24/7. Because WATG is working in 150 countries across all time zones, there is no point in the day, night, or week that some of our clients don't want to conduct business.

I find myself responding to e-mails and inquiries to our web site during "non-work" hours, if there is such a thing. Luckily, I love my job, but maintaining that work/life balance has been a challenge—thanks (or no thanks) to technology.

BH: What will be our greatest marketing challenge in the next 5–10 years?

HW: Internally, I see two challenges: attracting and retaining the best talent by creating and sustaining a culture that rewards excellence, and making marketing measurable (so its value is clear to all).

Externally, the greatest challenge is breaking through the clutter. We need to do things that are remarkable enough to earn attention. In this age where internet traffic is doubling

every 100 days, attention is the new currency of business. (See *The Attention Economy*, a new book on the subject by Tom Davenport and John Beck.)

BH: How can marketers get more recognition within their firms?

HW: First, just do your job well: Produce results and recognition will follow. If others are a bit slow to recognize your achievements, then a little subtle, shameless self-promotion may be in order.

BH: What do you believe are the most important traits, abilities, and skills necessary for success in marketing professional services?

HW: Four things:

1. empathy (a sincere interest in helping others succeed)
2. drive (ego strength and ambition)
3. superior skills (accompanied by a desire for continuous improvement)
4. market knowledge (which increases credibility and influence).

BH: Does our profession provide enough mentoring to young professionals? Did you have a mentor?

HW: Young or less young, we can all benefit from the advice and counsel of those who are smarter than we are. I had the benefit of attending “kindergarten” (the Coxe Clinic for Marketing Coordinators) when I started in this profession. The two instructors—Diane Creel and Janet Goodman Aubry—became mentors and friends, as did Weld Coxe himself. I also had the benefit of working with a very driven, entrepreneurial, marketing-oriented CEO at my first firm: Steve Einhorn at EYP. From Steve, I learned that the glass is always three-quarters full. My other mentor (for the past 255 months and counting) is my wife, Jana, whom I met at an SMPS national convention. She’s my closest friend, best editor, harshest critic, and biggest fan.

BH: Will the Chief Marketing Officer position find a place in A/E/C firms?

HW: It already has. When I was recruited to join WATG 17 years ago, I was told that they envisioned my position as the third leg of a leadership stool, along with the CEO and CFO. No one called it a CMO back then, but they realized that marketing is key to a firm’s strategic positioning and long-term success.



Howard virtually pursues one of his hobbies and longtime dreams.

Others who aspire to even greater heights might find it encouraging to learn that, according to a recent study, 29% of firms surveyed said a marketing background is the most suitable for the position of CEO. And research conducted in the United Kingdom revealed that companies whose CEO had a marketing background had a total shareholder return 5.3% higher than the average of the top 100 companies on the *Financial Times* Stock Exchange.

BH: What one thing in your career made you stand apart from other marketers?

HW: I have a simple belief that guides me professionally: Be first or be different.

BH: Did receiving the Marketing Achievement Award change the course of your career in any way?

HW: No, but accepting the award to a standing ovation was certainly a personal highlight of a career that continues to be both rewarding and challenging. 



ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER

Betty S. Hearn, FSMPS, is President of Hearn Associates, Inc. (consulting firm for the A/E/C industry) and Projects in Print Inc. (24/7 marketing intelligence resources firm, www.projectsinprint.com), both Atlanta, GA-based firms covering the Southeast. Betty currently serves as President of the SE Chapter of the Design-Build Institute of America and is an SMPS Past National President. She can be reach at 770.640.9777 or bshearn@charter.net.