

Marketing the Profession – Some Strategies that Work

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Key words:

SUMMARY

The surveying profession, like several other professional endeavors have seen aging demographics and a shortage of young graduates in recent years. Geomatics offers exciting and challenging opportunities for young people but the problem is to cut through the technical smokescreen and entice new students based on simple concepts that they can easily understand.

This presentation will review some of the successful marketing strategies that the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association has used to attract young students into what some say is a dying profession. The paper will also address the broader area of marketing the profession to the public.

The Alberta Land Surveyors' Association (ALSA), established in 1910, is a self-governing professional association legislated under the Land Surveyors Act of Alberta, Canada. The Association regulates the practice of land surveying for the protection of the public and administration of the profession.

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1. MARKETING

Marketing of a professional association plays two roles, firstly to make the public aware of the services offered by members of the organization and secondly to ensure a steady stream of qualified practitioners to provide those services.

Marketing is often looked at with some trepidation as being perhaps unprofessional and undignified. Marketing is however essential to the long-term sustainability and advancement of the surveying profession. It is useful to look at marketing more from the perspective of educating the public about what services and tools are available to assist them in enhancing their property. Robert Daniels comments that:

“many of the people who need survey services . . . have no idea what we do or how we do it. All they know is they need it. . . . clients of land surveyors usually have the most valuable asset of all - land” [Daniels 2001].¹

Accurate positional data is essential for anything to do with land, whether it be constructing a railway or landscaping ones backyard. Unless the general public understands what is available and what might be important to them it is difficult for them to plan effectively. In the same way that knowledge of stocks, bonds and other investments is necessary for one to plan for their long term financial needs, an understanding of what is located where - both on the surface and underground is necessary to properly develop ones property to its optimum use.

A professional association needs to market the profession for a number of key objectives.

Firstly, it is important that the profession is sustainable into the future. This requires new entrants into the profession, advancement of the body of knowledge and general education of the public as to what services are available.

It also involves keeping abreast of current issues and advising organizations such as government on issues that may be of concern to the general public. As a professional association responsible for the provision of surveying services in the Province of Alberta it is part of the mandate to be concerned about issues that affect public safety and protection of property rights and to bring those concerns to the attention of the appropriate public body. This must not however take the form of promoting professional services but rather be based on an informational, advisory, and factual approach.

A professional association can also provide general marketing of professional services, informing and educating the public on what concerns they need to be aware of when purchasing property or when excavating in the vicinity of buried facilities. A professional survey association also needs to make the public aware of the importance of legal boundary

markers and the need to preserve them. The general public is often not mindful of the importance of boundary monuments and the fact that there is a penalty for removal of monuments even though a private owner may have paid to have them placed on their lot.

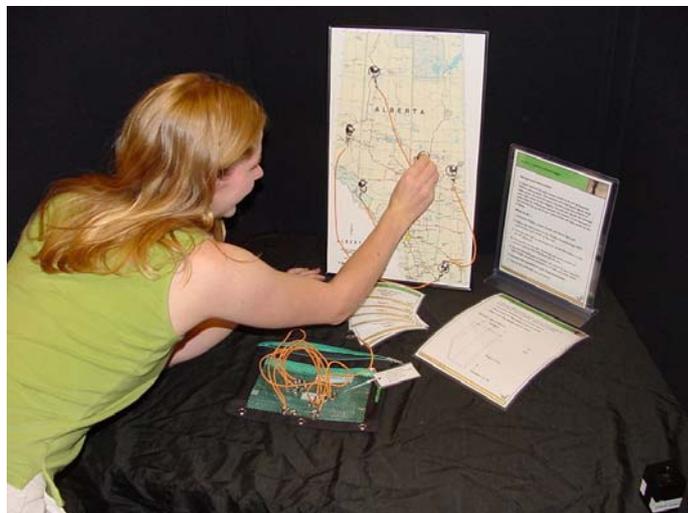
The Alberta Land Surveyors' Association has had an active, multi-faceted marketing program for several decades and has achieved considerable success in several areas. Some of the highlights of the program are:

- A focus on promoting the surveying profession in junior and senior high schools
- Promotion of a career in land surveying at the university level
- Liaison with governments on land related matters
- General promotion of the land surveying profession
- Promotion of the role of the surveyor in modern society through historical events
- Promotion of surveying services in the real estate marketplace

2. PROMOTION AT THE GRADE SCHOOL LEVEL

For several decades the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association participated in Career Fairs and other activities of schools with limited success due to the proliferation of so many new, interesting and challenging careers. More recently they have become involved in a project with Science Alberta, which has developed a program entitled Science-In-A-Crateⁱⁱ. The Science in a Crate program involves creating a series of resource materials that students can actually perform on their own under the guidance of an instructor with little or no technical background.

With over 50 crates available, one of the more successful crates produced is the Made to Measure project which contains seven different hands on exhibits involving measurement functions that all relate to surveying. Made to Measure is designed to complement the Grade 8 mathematics curriculum which includes shape and space measurement, two and three dimensional objects, etc. The seven activities contained in the Made to Measure crate are:



- “Digital Connections” - creation and analysis of a digital network using land survey descriptions of vertex locations
- “Looking for Black Gold” - 3-D modeling of a potential oil well site by mapping data collected by land surveyors
- “Orange” You Glad You’re a Surveyor? - Data collection and Pythagorean application in a land survey crew fieldwork experience
- “That was Then, This is Now” – composite area estimation using photos and maps of property boundaries
- The Big Leak - Volume relationship of oil tank to surrounding ditch
 - “The Lost Lemon Mine” - Quadrilateral classification as clues to create a treasure map to a lost mine in Alberta
 - “World Survey” - application of map scale to visit some international work locales of land surveyors

All seven activities use simple measuring techniques to solve various fun-type projects while at the same time challenging the students to think spatially and to apply fundamental mathematical and mapping skills to problem solving. Students learn about property boundaries, measuring techniques, coordinates, the survey system, and calculation of areas and volumes. A crate is about the size of a small travel suitcase so it is easily transportable and each activity item is made of durable material so it can be reused many times. Both students and teachers are very enthusiastic about the activities. The program is so successful that an additional 8 crates have been requisitioned to complement the two, which are currently booked a year in advance.

Hopefully these efforts at the grade school level will interest students in pursuing a geomatics career. However, even if the students do not pursue a career in geomatics they will have learned to appreciate the role the surveying profession plays in society and develop a basic understanding of surveying techniques and boundary principles.

3. PROMOTION AT THE POST SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

Alberta is blessed with two very successful technical school programs in Geomatics technology and the University of Calgary program in Geomatics Engineering. There are also programs related to geographic information systems at both the college and university levels. The Alberta Land Surveyors’ Association has been an active participant on advisory committees and in providing guest lectures at all of these programs at every available opportunity.

The involvement with the University of Calgary has however, been special, since the Association was instrumental in the initiation of the original Surveying Engineering program in 1979. Since the outset, the Alberta Land Surveyors’ Association has attempted to encourage students to enroll in the cadastral stream and join the ranks of the cadastral surveying community. In order to attract students, a special professional lecture series has been sponsored during the annual survey camp to bring in a number of practitioners to introduce students to some of the projects that Canadian surveyors are participating in both

locally and internationally. This lecture series has been particularly successful in convincing students that land surveying is an exciting and rewarding career that involves solving real problems in society. The association and the faculty have also been somewhat successful in attracting first and second year engineering students to choose Geomatics over some of the other engineering fields. This has been accomplished by hosting barbeques and other social functions for the students as well as participating in career and industry days on campus.

A related industry the Calgary Geomatics Clusterⁱⁱⁱ was established to promote excellence, innovation and collaboration in the geomatics industry. The cluster has prepared a number of unique posters that depict the relationship of geomatics to other endeavors such as health, agriculture, environment, natural resources



and government/municipalities. These posters can be viewed at www.discovergeomatics.com. They are an excellent promotional device to promote the broader field of geomatics at the school, university and business level. The term geomatics is new and somewhat catchy, and hence most people are interested in learning about it and how it affects their particular line of endeavor.

4. ADVISORY ROLE TO GOVERNMENT

In Canada, provincial legislatures are responsible for real property and professional legislation, among other jurisdictional areas. The Alberta Land Surveyors' Association is actually a creature of the Alberta Legislature through the auspices of the Land Surveyors Act. With a mandate to ensure that there is a body of professionals to provide a land surveying service to the citizenry and to govern the affairs of the profession, the Association believes that it also has a mandate to be proactive or reactive to issues that the political establishment is or should be concerned about. The Association sponsors a biannual MLA night where all government Members of the Legislative Assembly are invited to an informal dinner and reception to meet with land surveyors. The purpose of the dinner is normally a public relations and educational function to acquaint legislators with issues that are of concern. It is not intended as a lobbying session, although it can very well lay the groundwork if it becomes necessary to lobby for new legislation or to oppose a government policy. The Association has found that it pays off to be as non-political and as proactive as possible. The soft approach

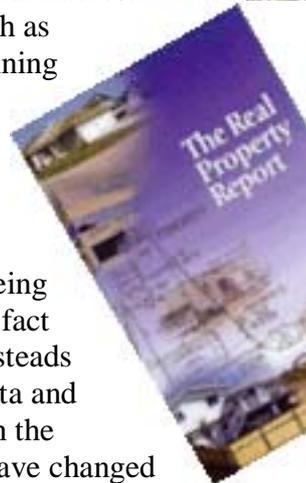
pays off when it becomes necessary to request assistance from the political level or to obtain approval of a difficult proposal.

Members of the association are encouraged to maintain connections with local political representatives. Surveyors often get an opportunity to meet with municipal governments on common issues pertaining to town planning and land development. By the very nature of their training, surveyors can provide valuable insight into municipal and other land related problems.

5. MARKETING TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Marketing of the surveying profession to the general public is often difficult because the target audience is very broad but the consumer of surveying services may only need the service of the surveying profession once or twice in their lifetime. Unless you happen to attract their interest when they are interested in listening, marketing efforts are largely a waste of time and energy.

Marketing of the surveying profession therefore has to be very subtle and address general issues that may be relevant to the general populace. Some of the issues that the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association has found to be of general interest relate to general property issues such as easements, the subdivision and planning process and local history. It seems that everyone has at least a passing interest in local history and surveyors were very involved in creating the settlement patterns that everyone can relate to. Surveyors being the pathfinders that they are, and in fact were involved in creating the homesteads that attracted many settlers to Alberta and western Canada, were key figures in the development of the nation. Times have changed and much of what the surveyor did in the early days is history and is now taken for granted. The surveyor only becomes involved with the general public on specific occasions when boundaries are called into question or when land is being sold or subdivided. It is still important to make members of the general public aware of boundaries and boundary monuments and the need to preserve them.



The Alberta Land Surveyors' Association has received approval from the Government of Alberta to erect displays in several stopping houses located along Alberta's main highways. The stopping houses attract a variety of travelers including tourists and members of the general public. The displays will be a general description of land settlement patterns and the Dominion Land Survey system. They will be informative, educational and will portray the

role of the land surveyor in society. These stopping houses contain the usual washroom and rest stop facilities but they also have a fair sized open area with travel information such as maps, etc. These open areas make great places for displays showing how the survey system relates to the transportation network and settlement in general.

Another unique opportunity for marketing the surveying profession is through the new activity of geo-caching. Surveyors have the tools and the expertise to assist in coordinating geo-cache sites accurately and in doing so can select sites that have a survey connection and can leave items at the geo-cache which publicize or educate the finder about the surveying profession. Alberta Land Surveyors have actively worked with the Boy Scouts of Canada to organize geo-caching events at local scout jamborees.

6. HISTORICAL EVENTS

In 1967 – Canada’s centennial year, survey associations across Canada, participated in a program to establish monuments commemorating the activities of their predecessors in the development of the nation. Each of the ten provinces established a survey monument in the provincial capital with geographical coordinates and an azimuth to the neighbouring capital city monument. Some of the monuments were very unique in their design and provide a public focus on the survey profession.



Similarly in many communities, historical parks are developed. Surveyors have played an integral role in development and should be active in recording their history in these theme parks. The Alberta Land Surveyors’ Association played a role in developing the Dominion Lands Office as part of Fort Edmonton and McVittie’s Cabin in Heritage Park in Calgary. In both parks an early survey monument was established to preserve that part of our history.

Since surveyors played such an important part in history, they are often the focus of historical ceremonies. David Thompson, an early Canadian surveyor, explorer and fur trader prepared the first accurate map of Western Canada. In recognition of his efforts in discovering and charting a major portion of our country, historical groups have erected sculptured monuments to commemorate the bicentennial of his early expeditions. By getting involved in these dedications the surveying profession was able to build on the reputation of our predecessors and at the same time to make the public aware of the modern role of the surveying profession.

7. THE REAL ESTATE MARKET

Promotion of the land surveying profession amongst fellow real property practitioners is somewhat more focused than marketing to the general public, in that the target audience is aware of the issues in general and are dealing with survey and boundary issues on a day-to-day basis. Seminars, conferences and brochures on land related topics are good marketing techniques to disseminate information to groups of lawyers, realtors, and municipal officials. These groups of practitioners are usually eager to dialogue if the information will be useful to them in their day-to-day activities. Joint seminars with other professionals often form a valuable learning experience to everyone involved and often result in an ongoing liaison that can have the effect of building strong ongoing relationships between professional organizations.

One interesting thing that we have found is that related professionals can also be used as ‘messenger groups’^{iv} to disseminate association brochures to their clientele. By placing quantities of brochures on relevant subjects with lawyers and realtors they are pleased to pass them along to their clients for information when entering into a real estate transaction because the brochure helps them with client relations and makes their job easier. This is a cost effective means of ensuring that the message gets to the ultimate client – the landowner; and at the same time has the effect of educating associated professionals about the importance of a survey in the real estate transaction.

Timely press releases and articles related to real estate development from a survey perspective are also provided to real estate magazines and industry newsletters.

8. THE MARKETING CHALLENGE

The biggest challenge an association has is to obtain and utilize, what are often limited resources, effectively in marketing. The opportunities for marketing are boundless. It does however take financial and human resources to carry out an effective marketing strategy. An organization must be focused on what it wishes to achieve, who the target market is, and who are potential partners. Possibilities must be researched, prioritized and executed. In many instances timing is of the essence – when an opportunity strikes you must be prepared to act. Often by acting in a timely fashion resources can be pooled with other organizations to capitalize on the synergies of a joint project. Marketing is not a one shot effort – it must take place in good times and bad. By developing an ongoing marketing plan an organization can build on past successes and create an ongoing audience and growing interest of that audience.

9. CONCLUSION

Marketing is essential in this day and age when society is expanding at such a rapid rate. The number of career opportunities available to young persons has grown exponentially such that students have difficult choices. Unless they have a friend or relative that is engaged in a surveying career they likely don’t even understand what surveying is all about. Similarly in the commercial world, there are consultants and specialists in every field and unless someone

has had direct contact with a surveyor, they likely have no idea what role a land surveyor plays in society. Survey practitioners have a responsibility to assist the public in understanding how the surveying profession interacts with other real property professionals in society. By playing an active role in marketing the profession we also help students with their career choices and make the public aware of the type of services that the surveying profession can offer to assist in solving societies problems.

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ⁱⁱⁱ The Calgary Geomatics Cluster in association with GeoConnections of the Government of Canada and the Geomatics Engineering department of the University of Calgary created six posters as part of an awareness program to increase understanding of Geomatics.

<www.discovergeomatics.com>

^{iv} Rose Country Communications Ltd., (1999), *Public Relations and Marketing Recommendations for the Alberta Land Surveyors Association – 1999 to 2004*, Edmonton, Canada

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

G. K. (Ken) Allred is a past president of the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association. He is also a Vice President of FIG. He was chair of Commission 1 – Professional Practice from 1994-98.

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