

TAKE-HOME TOOLKIT:

Humanizing AEC Marketing

From the SMPS NERC 2026 session

“Beyond Bots: Humanizing AEC Firms in the Age of AI” by Steven Gallo

AI can generate content. But trust is built through people, perspective and visible expertise.

Use the prompts below to identify the human expertise already inside your firm – and begin surfacing it in your marketing.

1. Quick Self-Assessment

Before creating new content, take a moment to assess your firm’s current visibility.

Rate each statement from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very true).

- 1. Our firm’s leaders regularly share insights publicly (LinkedIn, speaking, media).
1 2 3 4 5
- 2. Our subject matter experts appear in marketing beyond project lists.
1 2 3 4 5
- 3. Our website bios reveal how people think—not just what they’ve done.
1 2 3 4 5
- 4. Our marketing regularly highlights the people behind our projects.
1 2 3 4 5
- 5. Our firm has recognizable voices in our industry.
1 2 3 4 5

Reflection:

Which area above presents the biggest opportunity for improvement?

2. Identify Your Hidden Experts

Every firm has professionals with deep expertise who rarely appear in marketing.

Identify three people in your organization whose insights could strengthen your firm’s visibility and credibility.

When selecting subject matter experts, consider how their knowledge aligns with **current business priorities** such as target markets, service lines or strategic growth areas.

Person	Role	Expertise That Should Be More Visible	Strategic Business Alignment

Examples of strategic alignment might include:

- Healthcare design expertise aligned with a healthcare market growth strategy
- Infrastructure resilience insights tied to climate adaptation projects
- Construction risk mitigation tied to complex public-sector pursuits

Goal: surface expertise that reinforces firm’s strategic positioning, not just individual talent.

Reflect: Why These Experts?

Before moving forward, ask yourself:

- What complex problems does this person consistently help solve?
- What types of clients rely on their judgment most often?
- What business priorities or markets does their expertise support?
- Where could their voice strengthen our firm’s credibility?

3. Extract the Expertise

Use the prompts below in a 20-minute conversation with your SME. Capture responses and highlight any insights, decisions or lessons that could inform marketing content.

Client Insights

- What questions are clients asking you repeatedly right now?
- What problems are clients struggling with before they hire a firm like yours?
- What question do you wish clients asked earlier in the project process?

Patterns & Industry Trends

- What patterns or recurring challenges are you seeing across projects?
- What industry misconception do you find yourself correcting most often?

Project Decisions

- What was the toughest decision you made on a recent project?
- What constraint forced the team to rethink its approach?

Lessons & Perspective

- What mistake or challenge taught your team the most?
- What advice would you give a client starting a project like this today?
- What do people outside your discipline misunderstand about the work you do?

Human Impact & Outcomes

- When did you see your work make a meaningful difference for people using the space or infrastructure?
- Was there a moment when you saw how people actually used the space or infrastructure that changed how you thought about the project?

These conversations often reveal insights that are far more compelling than traditional marketing copy.

4. Where Humanized Marketing Shows Up

Humanizing marketing isn't limited to social media. Look at the materials your team already produces, and consider how expertise could be surfaced more clearly in each.

Marketing Asset	Opportunity to Humanize
Case studies	Highlight the decisions and challenges behind the project
Proposals	Frame the client's journey, not just firm qualifications
Award submissions	Focus on impact, judgment, and problem-solving
Leadership bios	Show perspective and philosophy – not just credentials
Website content	Elevate expert voices and insights

5. Make Expertise Visible

The **HUMAN** framework from the presentation offers five ways to surface expertise.

H – Highlight Leaders

Position firm leaders as visible thinkers and advisors.

U – Uncover Expertise

Extract insights from subject matter experts.

M – Make Bios Strategic

Turn bios into credibility narratives.

A – Activate Platforms

Put expert voices where audiences can see them.

N – Normalize People-First Content

Regularly feature the people behind your work.

5. A Simple Starting Plan

You don't need a full marketing overhaul to begin.

Try this simple approach.

Step 1 - Identify

Choose 2-3 experts whose insights deserve visibility.

Step 2 - Capture

Interview them about recent project decisions or lessons learned.

Step 3 - Share

Turn those insights into marketing content:

- case studies
- proposal narratives
- LinkedIn posts
- speaking opportunities
- award submissions

Over time, these signals build **familiarity** → **trust** → **opportunity**.

Final Thought

In an AI-driven world, content is abundant. But recognizable expertise is rare.

The firms that stand out won't simply produce more content.

They'll make their **people and expertise visible**.

Download more resources

If you downloaded this worksheet from the session QR code, you'll also receive the **INKsights newsletter**, a bi-monthly roundup of AEC awards, rankings, editorial opportunities and practical marketing insights. You can unsubscribe anytime – but we bet you won't want to.