

Jobs In Flux

BY PAUL POMPEO

In *LD+A*, January, we began a multi-part series looking at today's job candidates and how their skills may need to change in the future. This month, we take a more focused look at lighting designers and sales people.

DESIGNERS

Designers should not underestimate the role of simple salesmanship, says Howard Brandston, founder and senior partner of the Brandston Partnership. "The lighting designer of 2010 will have to be a better *salesman* or saleswoman than the designer of 1990. There is so much more competition and more awareness of light and lighting. You will have to be a better salesman/woman because you're selling a product that the client has a hard time seeing. How many people can define *light*? A chair is something you can see—lighting is invisible," he says. "There will be a greater degree of accountability for the lighting designer of the future. Clients are becoming more sophisticated. If you have a great idea, it's going to take salesmanship; you're not going to be able to pull a lampshade over their eyes. If you don't like being a salesman, you should be plumber."

Furthermore, Brandston notes that energy issues will continue to drive the work of designers. "The big

change in this industry that impacted everything was the energy crisis [in the 1970s]. The energy crisis showed that most [lighting] recommendations were inflated. It impacts designers significantly. You're now designing for much lower lighting levels for tasks. That has ramifications in the apparent brightness of a room. If you reduce that task level, you might end up with gloomy rooms, so designers had to be more aware of that than they had been previously."

Meanwhile, Nancy Clanton, president of Clanton & Associates, puts a premium on communication skills, pointing out that "95 percent of what we do is directly related to communications—verbal, written and non-verbal. Clients want constant and truthful communication, even if things are not going well. Listening is the most important skill. This includes asking questions, especially about the client's expectations. Written communication is important; following up with a phone message, memo, action item list and meeting minutes will show your understanding of what you heard."

John Morgan, president and CEO, Acuity Brands Lighting, believes that in the future, lighting designers may have a greater voice in the construction process. "As the training, education and certification processes of the design community continue to take hold, it will add a level of decisiveness, confidence and boldness to the design community, which will lead to more influence over the design of buildings and infrastructure."

Finally, one designer feels changes in technology will also continue

to affect the decision-making process of lighting decisions. Speed requires speed...and that's not necessarily a good thing. "Gone are the days when architectural changes had to wait for the next submittal to show the changes in the lighting design," says David Orgish, of Peters & Myer, The Lighting Design Studio of O'Mahony & Myer. "Nowadays, it's expected that since architectural changes can be sent to us with the 'click of a mouse,' we should be ready to respond with changes to the lighting design immediately. This leads to solutions that are less carefully or creatively considered and more reactionary in nature."

Designer Paresch Shah mentions another unintended consequence of automation. "Designers are being asked to perform peripheral roles like purchasing and manufacturing engineer besides doing their own work."

SALES PROFESSIONALS

The Internet and widespread access to product data will continue to shape the job description of the sales professional. "Product information is available to customers 24/7 now. Salespeople can spend less time carrying around heavy sample bags but will need more pure salesmanship," says Wolfgang Egger, president of Zumtobel Staff Lighting. "I strongly believe that the human factor will become more important than ever. Success will belong to those who have the best 'people skills.'"

With the industry continuing to reduce headcount, sales professionals will be expected to take on more tasks than ever before. "Regional sales managers will have to be up-

to-date with the latest technologies to satisfy current and future legislation around energy, environment and aesthetics," says David Feldman, president of Cooper Lighting. "In short, the successful sales leader of tomorrow needs to evolve with the times."

Chuck Campagna, president and CEO of Amerlux Lighting Solutions, points out that "there was a time when someone asked a salesperson a technical question, there was always the 'support group' that one could fall back on for help, whether it be in application or mechanics of a product. Today, that salesperson or project manager is required to know the technical and mechanical portion of their products inside and out. They are required to know what applications suit that product and also know how to measure the performance of that product via various computer programs. Today we all are part salesperson, engineer, designer, contractor, admin assistant and production employee."

Terry Clark, president of Finelite, adds that in the future, as today, a salesperson's network will be important. Some firms, "perhaps the majority, will attempt to leverage their existing infrastructure and relationships in a focused way to increase their productivity. These firms will tend to hire folks from within the industry. (It's all about relationships isn't it?) These folks will be hired for their network of connections and will have demonstrated that they work well in firms with strong central control. Even in mature to aging firms following this strategy there will be room for career advancement for a consider-

able period of time. However, as a whole, this segment will face consolidation and will hire fewer folks than exist in the industry today."

SOFTWARE/TECHNOLOGY

Technology will be one strand connecting all players in the lighting supply chain (not to mention the end user). "Our channel of distribution in lighting is inefficient and we must improve it and add more value" says Larry Powers, chairman, president and CEO of The Genlyte Group, says,

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"Good lighting is a great asset to all and we need to do a better job of educating the public on the benefits of good quality energy efficient lighting and not allow lighting to become commoditized. I believe that the Internet may be our best medium for this education."

Veda Ferlazzo Clark, president and CEO of Litecontrol, points out that "all industries need people who are much more technically adept than ever before. By that, I mean not only computer skills, but the ability to easily understand and assimilate new technologies, both in their jobs day-to-day, but also for new product development. The construction industry has lagged behind most industries in the use of technology to increase productivity and product sophistication. From project

software to tie teams together to hardware and software in manufacturing, to the general 'flattening of the world,' there is much to be accomplished. We complain in the lighting industry that our products and services are under-appreciated, yet most companies are not adding the value they should. In the next 10 years, I project that even our backwards lighting industry will take many strides forward in this arena."

Terry Fraser, general manager with Thomas Lighting, describes this evo-

lution as follows: "Computer literacy has been replaced by computer competency, which will be replaced by computer savvy."

So, while lighting may not be known as the most cutting-edge industry, progress is being made, and the pace should accelerate in the months and years to come. Exciting times, indeed.



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