

Architect by training, marketer by profession

When nobody was hiring young architects, Tracy Black figured she would follow the market. She has never looked back since.

With roots in architecture and planning, 41-year-old Tracy Black is now the vice president of corporate marketing at **HMC Architects** (Ontario, CA), a 450-person education, health care, and government facilities architecture firm. Find out what made her pursue a career in marketing and learn from her insights.

Marketing Now: How and why did you get into this profession?



Tracy Black,
Vice President
of Corporate
Marketing,
HMC Architects

Tracy Black: “I graduated with a degree in architecture (from the University of Washington, Seattle, Washington) in 1990 and went to work for a very small firm, so I was involved in all aspects of the practice. The economy was down, so all of my non-billable time was spent pursuing work. I had no idea what I was doing back

then, but found the marketing process to be creative and challenging— and I liked the fast pace.

“When the owner of the firm decided to retire two years later and close his doors, there weren’t any firms with openings for architects and planners, but plenty for marketing professionals. I found a firm that allowed me to grow as a marketing professional and still have a hand in architecture and planning work along the way. Early on, I joined the **Society for Marketing Professional Services (SMPS)** (Alexandria, VA) and became very active in my local chapter, learning everything I could about marketing A/E services. My volunteer work with SMPS also taught me about leadership and collaboration.”

Marketing Now: Why did you choose this market?

T.B.: “Because of my architectural roots, the market really chose me. I can’t imagine marketing anything other than A/E services.”

Marketing Now: What are you most proud of?

T.B.: “I have collaborated on several milestone ‘wins’ in my career, but what really drives my job satisfaction is the growth and success of the people around me— seeing marketing professionals advance in their careers and having design and technical staff embrace strategic marketing processes to get work that they may not have thought they could win. Knowing that I am a small part of their success makes me feel successful.”

Marketing Now: What are you least proud of?

T.B.: “I’ve always struggled with finding a balance between work and family. I preach balance to those around me, but I don’t always practice it. Luckily, I have a fiancé who helps keep me in check!”

Marketing Now: What do you do to recharge your batteries?

T.B.: “We love to travel, and our families are scattered, so we find balance and recharge in great destinations like Ireland, Hawaii, the East Coast, the Midwest, and the Pacific Northwest. I also have an interest in the healing arts and design jewelry that combines the healing energy of natural elements and gemstones (www.tracy-blackart.com). Art is amazing therapy.”

Marketing Now: What does it take to make it in the marketing field in this industry?

T.B.: “Have commitment, be a strategic and creative thinker, build relationships (internal and external), and cultivate a passion for what you do. Develop a thick skin and learn how to weather the losses while celebrating the wins. Learn to be adaptable and navigate company politics. Know how to effectively manage change. Work closely with all departments of your firm to connect dots and leverage resources.

“Build a strong team that is organized to handle short-term deadlines while advancing longer-term strategic initiatives. Find a way to measure return on investment (ROI) on every marketing effort and keep raising the bar. Be a cheerleader and stay close to anyone on the front lines of bringing in the work or doing the work. Find good mentors and be a good mentor. There are so many things— and I’m still learning

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how to do all of them.”

Marketing Now: What should newcomers absolutely know about this job?

T.B.: “Marketing touches everything, so the range of responsibilities can become overwhelming. Developing clear priorities that align with the firm’s mission and external market trends— and then building consensus with leadership— is essential to success. Just be prepared to revisit and shift those priorities on a regular basis. And you can’t rely on a written job description to define your responsibilities. You have to do whatever it takes every day.”

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