



Toward The Future During The Pandemic

Circle of Excellence Firm Profile
Studio W Architects

PSMJ Resources, Inc. ®

TOWARD THE FUTURE DURING THE PANDEMIC

“An inch wide and a mile deep”—that’s how Brian Whitmore describes his firm’s expertise and experience in the education market. Whitmore is the president and CEO of Studio W Architects, the 35-person statewide firm that has made its name by providing architecture, interiors, planning, and program management services to public and private schools throughout California.

And while the firm also does work in other markets including civic and commercial/retail, it’s the education focus that has enabled it to thrive, even through a pandemic.

“California schools are staying true to their mission,” Whitmore says. “They want to build and modernize until we get back to normal,” with bonds continuing to be passed for new construction and renovation.

COE Member

He says the firm, a member of the PSMJ Circle of Excellence, has been focused on education since it was founded as BCA Architects in 1989. In part, that’s because the market is less vulnerable to economic challenges, as it’s funded by property taxes, insurance proceeds, and grants rather than following the ups and downs of the free market.

Whitmore joined the firm seven years ago with experience in education but developed a real passion for the work in his current role: “I’ve always found it rewarding to have an impact on education by creating the places in which our next generation will learn,” he says.

“Our slogan is ‘Well Beyond Design.’ We know where the funding comes from and how to add value for our clients through our creative design solutions. In small to mid-

sized markets especially, our clients may not even have a facilities manager on staff. We want people to know that we understand their business, how to manage the process, and save them costs.”

Time To Rebrand

After 30 years as BCA Architects, the firm rebranded itself in early 2021. Why the change?

“First, for practical reasons—the former owners who were represented in the original name have since retired,” Whitmore explains. “But more than that, we needed to refresh our branding and make it more contemporary. Rather than hunkering down during the pandemic, we wanted to show that we’re thriving and looking to the future.”

Their most important marketing task, Whitmore says, is to get the Studio W Architects focus on “value added” design in front of potential clients before a formal RFP process even begins. He says the firm is heavily involved in state-wide organizations such as the Coalition for Adequate School Housing and the Community College Facility Coalition, and works to build relationships with the financial and educational advisors involved in the selection process.

“When the time comes for a client to start a search for an architect, they ought to know who we are already, and that our reputation is strong,” he says. “Once the RFP goes out, it’s often too late. You know upfront relationship building is successful when you reach out to a prospective client and they say, ‘I was just about to reach out to you!’” ■

For more than a decade, PSMJ’s Circle of Excellence has set the standard for high-performing A/E/C organizations

PSMJ designed the exclusive Circle of Excellence to recognize firms that are successfully managed based on 13 key performance metrics that demonstrate outstanding achievements in profitability, staff growth, cash flow, productivity, business development, overhead management, and turnover. The Circle of Excellence represents the top 20 percent of participants (on these key metrics) in PSMJ’s annual A/E Financial Performance Benchmark Survey.

In today’s ever-competitive business climate, this is a distinction that can give any firm an edge in areas such as M&A, recruiting, and more. The Circle of Excellence badge is a recognized indicator of proven success and management. On the recruiting front, touting that your firm has made it into the Circle of Excellence is hard evidence that the firm “walks the walk” when it comes to being a well-managed organization.