

Interior Designers & Social Media

Help or Hype?

by Pamela Danziger, Unity Marketing

What the Most Prominent Designers Know that Others Might Not?

Social media marketing may not be the ticket to fame and glory or even new clients that people would have you believe. Quite the opposite, since too much marketing may signal that you are trying “too hard.”

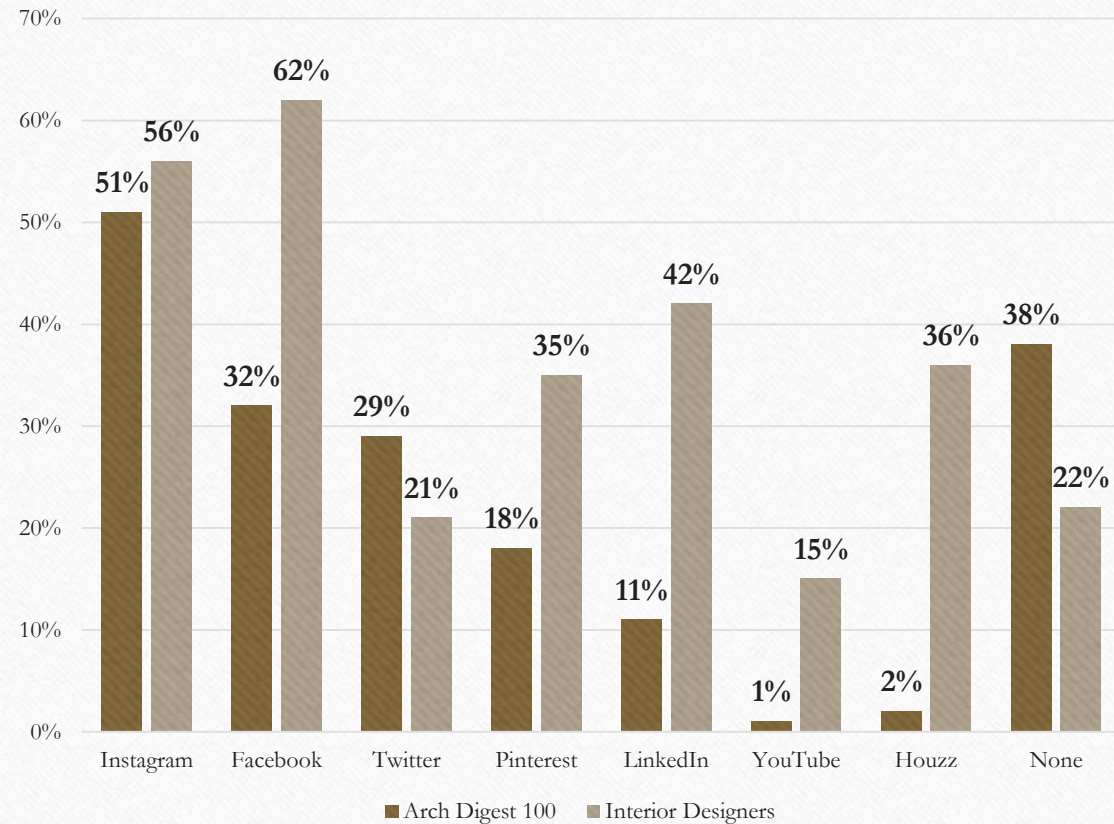
That may be the most prominent take away from comparing the social media presence of the Architectural Digest Top 100 list of architects and designers in 2018 with that of a recent survey conducted by Unity Marketing with some 200 professional interior designers and architects.

The AD100 are far less active on social media than the other interior designers surveyed. Whereas some 75% of other interior designers are active there, fewer than 40% of the AD100 maintain a social media presence.

Even more interesting is the social media platforms chosen by the two groups. The other 200 interior designers favor Facebook, while the AD100 are much less so. Other designers are nearly twice as likely to use Facebook as the AD 100. Further, the other designers are also nearly twice as likely to post to Pinterest as the AD 100.

The chart to the right clearly shows the differences between the social media strategies of the nation’s most prominent and popular designers, the AD 100, as compared with everybody else.

Social Media Platforms
Architectural Digest 100 Top Designers compared with sample of Interior Designers



“All social media is too dangerous to my growth. I learned this after a client who was very happy with the results of his first home didn't hire me for his Aspen home. They told me they loved me. But I was too 'out there.' They explained they lived private lives and after a Google search found me everywhere, they felt I was not who they wanted to associate with,” said an interior designer in the survey.”

For wealthy clients, perception is reality

Designers that are too 'out there' may turn-off, rather than attract the best clients.

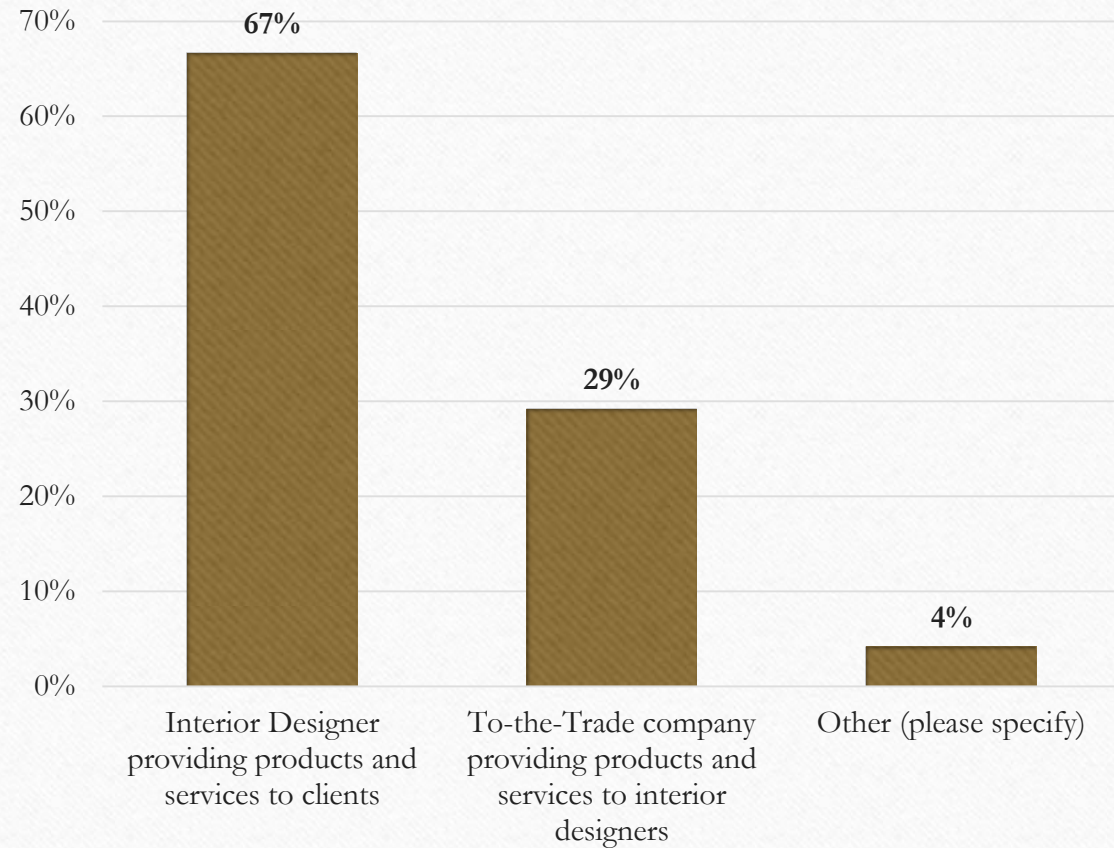
Research to Guide Social Media Strategies

Unity Marketing, in association with The Home Trust International, conducted a survey among 200 professional interior designers and to-the-trade suppliers of products to the interior design trade to understand how they use social media and where it fits into their overall marketing and branding strategies.

Over two-thirds of the survey sample were interior designers, with about one-third to-the-trade product suppliers. Others included primarily home furnishings retailers that offer design services.

The research results provide a foundation for designers and to-the-trade companies to make more effective use of social media.

What is your role in the interior design industry?



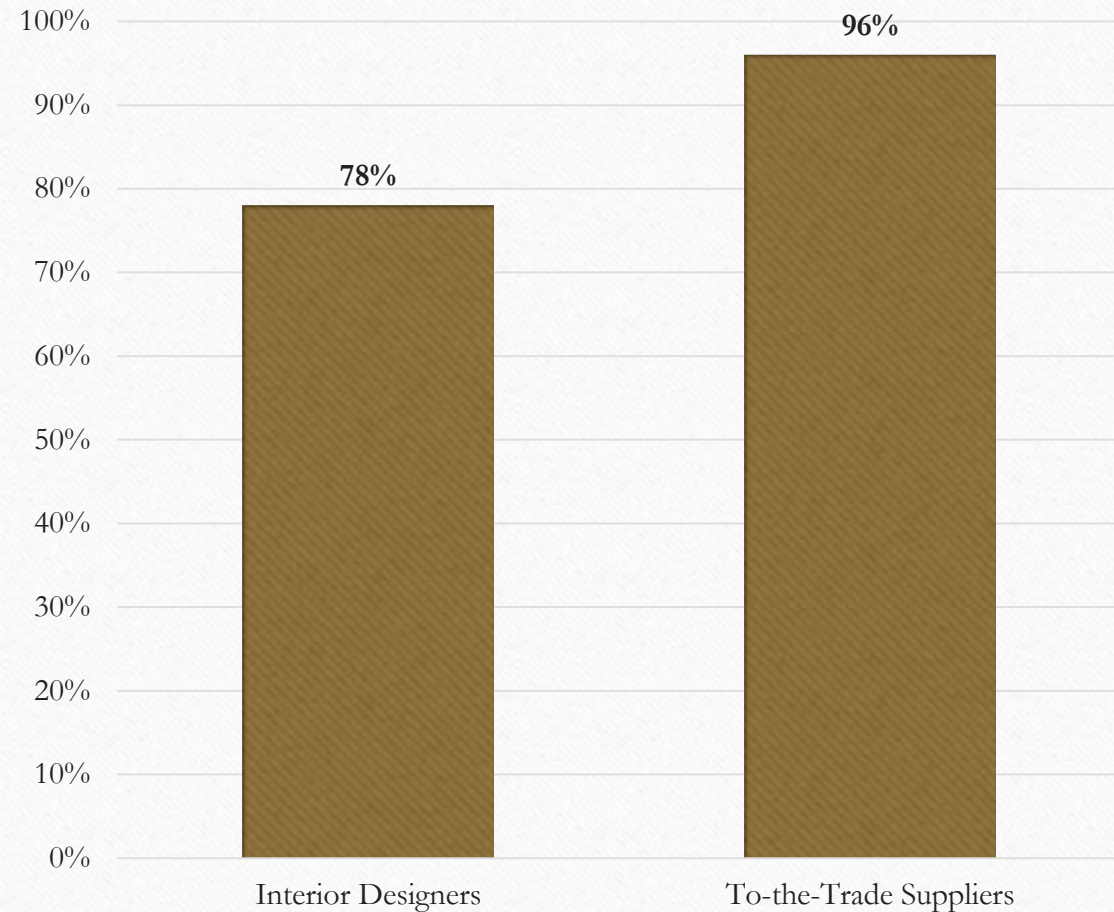
To-the-Trade Suppliers Are More Vested in Social Media

While a majority of both professional interior designers and to-the-trade product suppliers use social media strategies, to-the-trade companies are far more invested in and present on social media.

Nearly all to-the-trade companies have some kind of social media presence, whereas about 8 out of every 10 interior designers are using social media. By comparison, the AD100 designers are even less engaged on social media, with only 6 out of every 10 active there.

The majority of designers believe social media is an important strategy to market their business. But the question is how to use it most effectively to attract the high-net-worth customers on which the success of their practice depends.

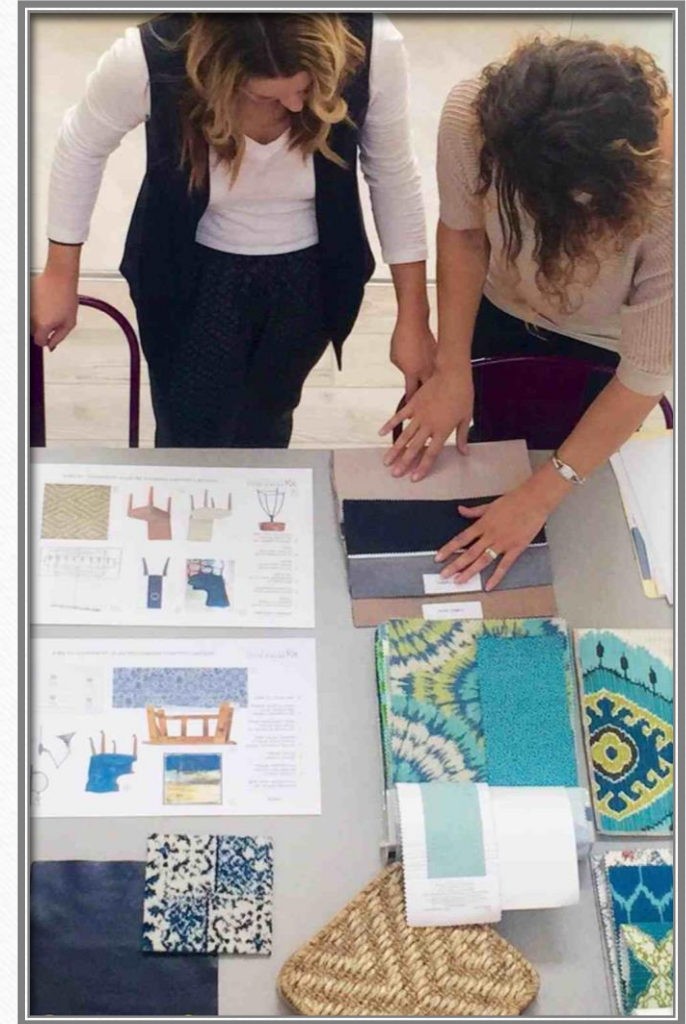
Use Social Media by Role in Industry



Our Focus Is on Interior Designers & their Social Media Strategies

This report will focus specifically on the survey results of interior designers.

Insights from the sample of to-the-trade product companies and their use of social media is available upon request to Unity Marketing.



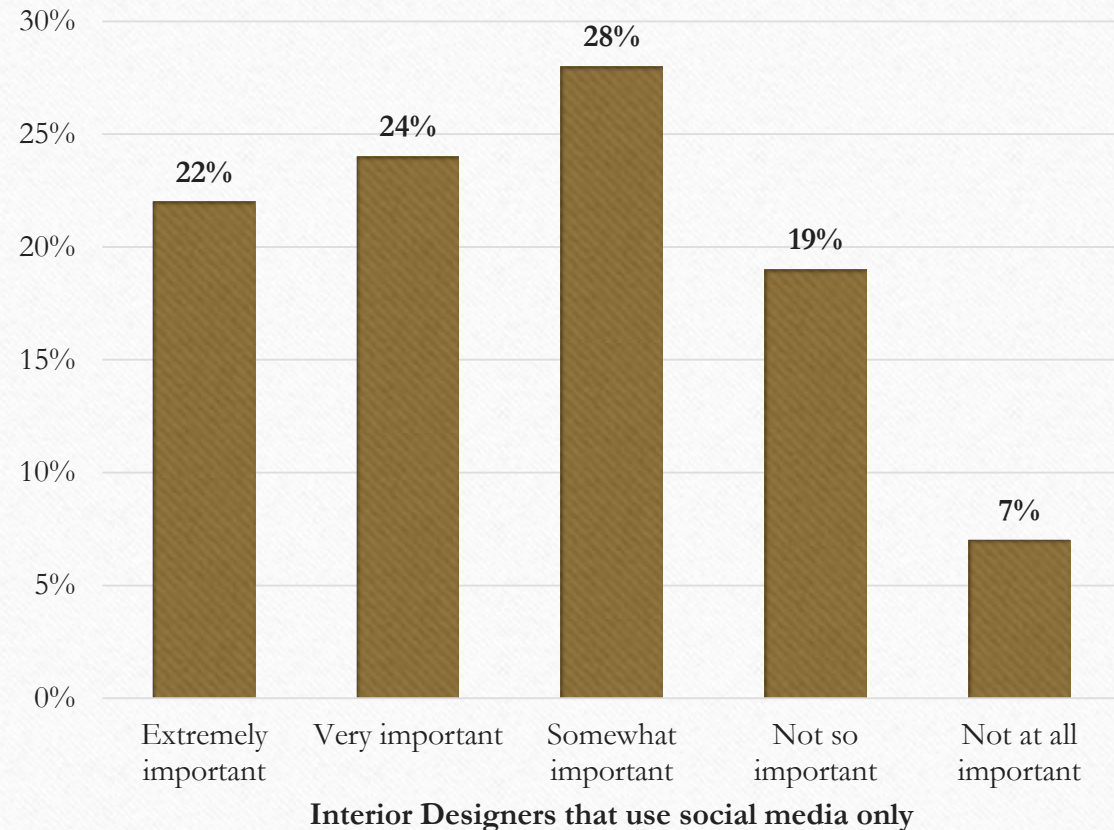
Social Media's Importance

Among those nearly 80% of interior designers that use social media, about 20% say it isn't that important to their business. In other words, about 4 out of 10 interior designers, i.e. the 20% that aren't currently using social media and the other 20% who say it isn't that important, find little use or need for social media, whether they actually use social media or not.

Less than half (46%) of social-media using designers feel social media is extremely or very important to their business. And another 28% say it is only somewhat important to their business.

Net/Net: Social media is over-promised, but under-performing for many interior designers.

How important is social media marketing to your business?



Over-Promised, Under-Performing

Yes, social media is extremely or very important to about half of the interior designers that use it. But there is a gap in performance for the other half, along with the 2 out of 10 designers that forego social media marketing altogether.

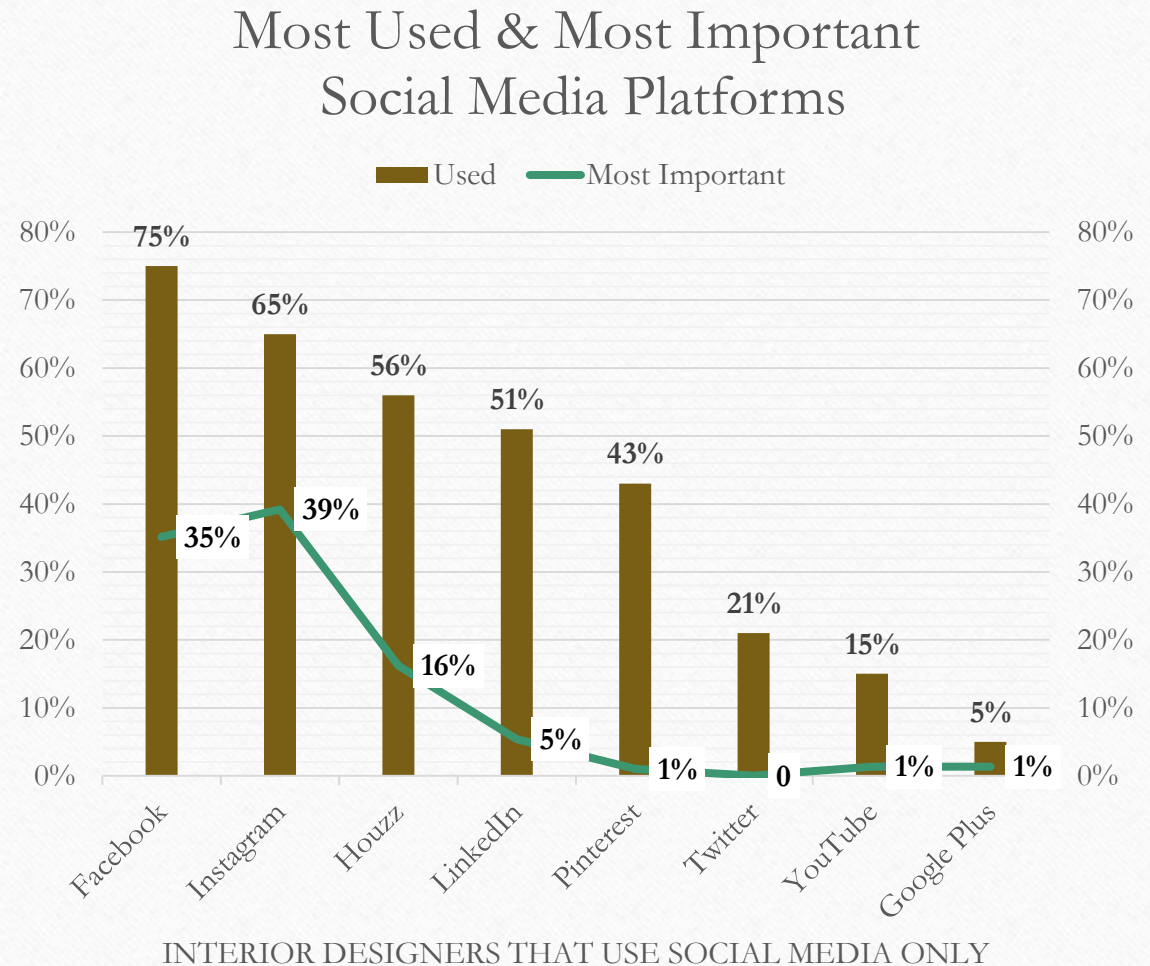
In evaluating the usefulness of social media in promoting and building designers' businesses, it is critical to focus not just on "being there," but being there in the right places that attract the kind of customers that the business depends upon. In social media, all platforms are not created equal.



Most Used & Most Important Platforms

Among social-media using interior designers Facebook (75%) is by far the most used platform, followed by Instagram (65%), Houzz (56%), LinkedIn (51%) and Pinterest (43%).

On the other hand, when asked which is their most important social media platform, interior designers rate Instagram (39%) above Facebook (35%), and all the others trail far behind.



“ Designers are wasting their time [on social media]. It makes them feel good while they are going broke, said an interior designer in the survey.

Social media is for decorators looking for other decorators to cry with,
said another. ”

Focus on the best, and forget the rest

Interior designers need to evaluate closely which social media platform/s is actually working for them, i.e. attracting the right clients, and focus efforts there. Each designers' best platform may not be the same as found in this study – Instagram and Facebook – so evaluating how each individual platform used actually delivers results is critical. Once the best platform is known, forget the rest and focus on what works now and learn how to make it work even better in the future.

Why Is This Platform Best?

When asked why that platform was best, designers tended to measure success in how it helps build their reputation. They also feel their best platform helps generate leads and encourages and supports engagement on the site.

For others their favorite social media platform is the one that is easiest to use and/or least expensive. Finally some designers don't really know which is best, but they simply believe it to be so.

- **Reputation Builder**
 - “Highly visible, but effectiveness is unclear”
 - “I can show my work and build my story”
 - “Reminding past, current and future clients of what my business is about”
- **Lead Generator**
 - “Leads to actual leads”
 - “It’s where people look for the services I offer”
 - “We get the most traffic to our website from FB”
- **Engagement**
 - “Everyone uses FB. It engages my clients and my want-to-be clients”
 - “Largest number of followers”
 - “We get the most feedback from this platform”
- **Easy, Efficient, Inexpensive**
 - “Easiest one to manage”
 - “Least expensive”
- **“I don’t know, but I believe”**
 - “It just seems to get the most interest from posts”
 - “No business yet, but people can keep up to date as to what I actually do”
 - “So far it seems to be the best and at least you get a response and statistics”
 - “It’s the least worse”

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I don't know how to make use of it in a meaningful way and am not sure if throwing money at any of them will make a difference.

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Social media must deliver

For too many interior designers, social media is a black hole that sucks up their time and money but delivers next to nothing. Designers must hold social media accountable, measure success in a meaningful way and change strategies if it doesn't deliver in a reasonable amount of time.

How Success Is Measured

In order to drill down further into designers' social media strategies, they were asked how specifically they measure success. Mainly success is measured in likes and shares. But likes and shares don't pay the bills and when it comes to bringing in actual clients and sales and revenues, most designers can't really quantify its contribution.

Rather, they are mainly going on faith. They are making the effort – they see likes and shares – therefore, it must be doing something.

To the right are comments about how success, or lack thereof, is measured on social media.

- “There is no success on social media. It's a bunch of unimportant decorators screaming to other unimportant decorators for attention because they have no work”
- “Hard to measure. Not just in direct dollars. It is a means to get another ‘touch point’ out there for potential clients”
- “We have a [social media] agency for a few hours a week. This being said - have not yet found a sale from it, but it ties very closely to others in the business”
- “Not so great as I hoped because of Facebook and Instagram kept changing their systems which made it difficult for me to keep up with latest marketing trends”
- “Most social media is for desperate decorators. What they measure is meaningless. The designers I see on Facebook are not impressive”
- “It's difficult to measure success on social media however followers who interact is a good beginning”
- “By interaction and response. I believe Facebook and Instagram help build brand awareness and allow me to communicate with peers and people interested in interior design. Best tangible results come from Houzz and LinkedIn”

“ Right now social media for us is just one outlet for PR. I measure the success in simply getting our word out, though it is not necessarily bringing projects in. Currently the demographic of our clientele tend not to find their designer via social media, but we believe that will change in the coming years, and we will start to measure success by actual clients gained from this method. It’s ”
hopefully an investment towards the future.

Hope is not a strategy

Conspicuously absent from the question about how designers measure success in social media is data – quantification that it is actually bringing in clients and growing revenue. While for some it is helping them gain attention, followers and people to engage via social media, for most that attention and engagement isn’t translating into measurable results through new clients gained and profits to the bottom line.

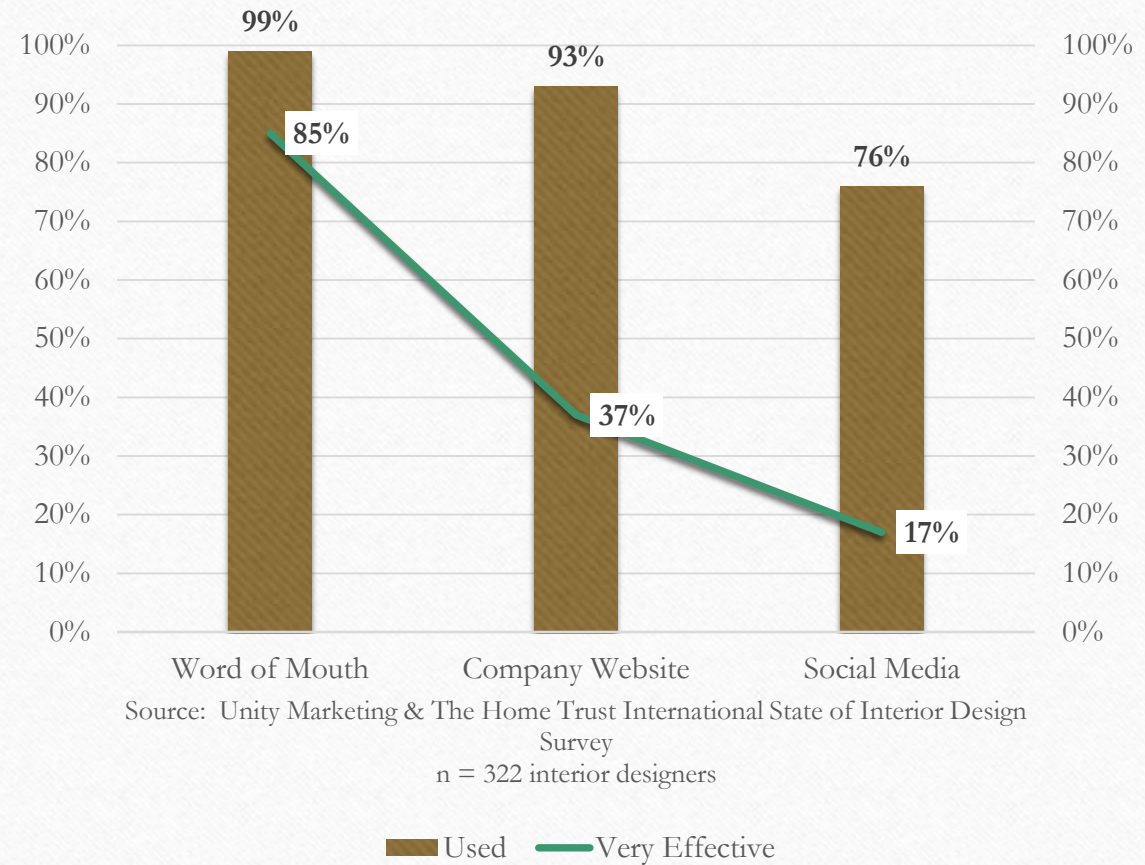
Social Media Over-Promises but Under-Performs

In a separate survey conducted by Unity Marketing & The Home Trust International, including 300+ interior designers and 200+ to-the-trade companies, interior designers were asked to rate nearly 20 different advertising mediums used as to its effectiveness.

In that study some 76% of interior designers reported using social media marketing, which is virtually the same percentage as uncovered in this more detailed look at social media strategies, but only 17% of those social-media using designers rated it as very effective.

Rated much more effective for interior designers was their company website (37% said it was very effective). And blowing both of these out of the water was word of mouth marketing, used by 99% of interior designers and rated very effective by 85%.

Advertising Used & Rated Very Effective



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We have never gained a new client strictly because of social media (in any form), but FB has helped raise our profile and brand awareness with a broad scope of our local community. It also helps broadcast our accolades to individuals and companies we already work with. The worst platform is Houzz – way over hyped and poor ROI over the 3 years we gave it.

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Know your goals and what you want to achieve on social media, then hold each platform accountable for achieving it

For any professional – most especially for an interior designer – time is money. Don't throw good money – or time – after bad. If a social media platform is not measuring up to your specific business goals, then cut the cord and move on to some other strategy or platform that will produce better results. Followers and click-thru's are good, but if those followers and click-thru's aren't bringing business in, then it is only making you feel good, not building your business.

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Our website provides 10% of our projects and clients,
with 90% of our work comes from personal referrals.

”

Question for designers: Are you putting 80-to-90% of your marketing efforts into the marketing method that brings you 80-to-90% of your business?

If 90% of your new business comes through personal referrals, then consider investing 90% of your marketing efforts to building referrals. Often called word-of-mouth marketing, when people say “word-of-mouth marketing,” designers tend to hear “social media.” And while social media marketing is one way to activate word-of-mouth, it is far less effective than good old-fashioned people talking.

Citing face-to-face word of mouth in consumer purchase decision-making, Engagement Labs says, “It is perennially cited as the most trusted source of information by consumers,” this from a research firm that purports to be the world’s only offline word-of-mouth tracking system for brands.

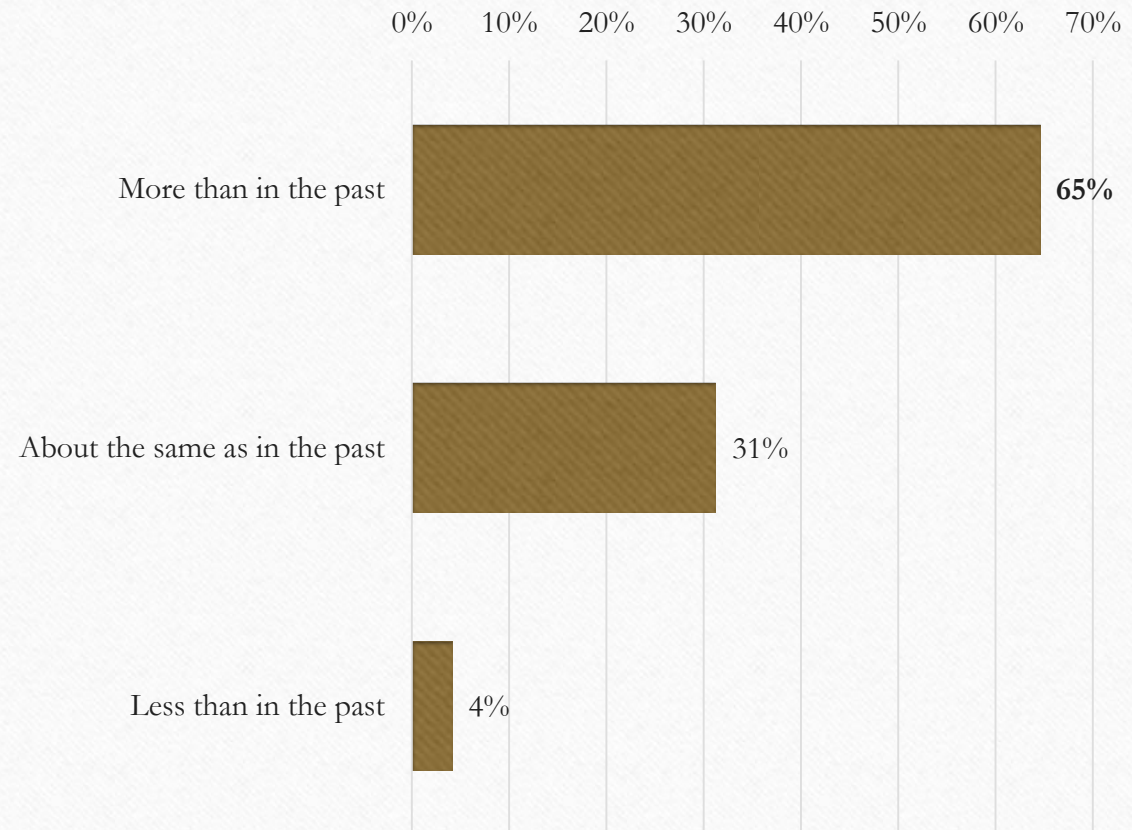
The Word of Mouth Marketing Association quantifies this claim, finding that two-thirds of WOM’s impact is from offline communications, and only one-third from online. What’s more, it finds “an offline WOM impression drives at least 5 times more sales than a paid advertising impression, and much more (as much as 200 times more) for higher-consideration categories.”

Social Media Plans for the Coming Year

In a question about their plans to use social media in the coming year, an overwhelming two-thirds of interior designers say they will focus more on social media in marketing their businesses. Fewer than one-third will keep their social media activities on par with the past and only 4% will pull back.

That so few interior designers are holding social media accountable and maintaining at least a steady pace or even pulling back is surprising, given that so few social-media active designers can measure real success in social media generating new business.

In the coming year, do you plan to use social media...



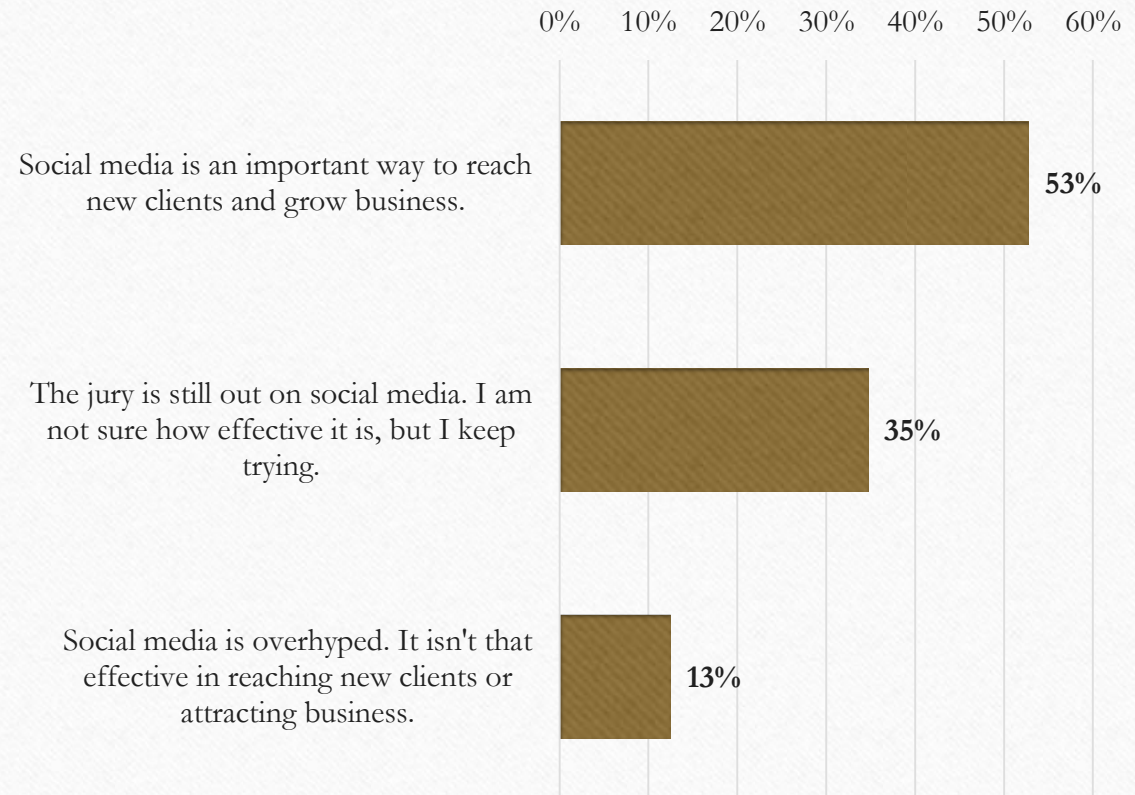
Interior Designers' Opinions on Social Media

In a final question in this survey, interior designers were asked which of the following statements most closely matched their opinion of social media. This won with a slight majority (53%):

“Social media is an important way to reach new clients and grow business”

Just over 1/3 believe the jury is still out but they will keep on trying. And a remaining 13% feel social media is overhyped and not effective in reaching new clients or attracting business.

Which of the following statements most closely matches your opinion about social media?



Are You Going Down the Rabbit Hole with Social Media?

Interior designers need to answer this question honestly!

Full Disclosure & Findings

In launching this study, I was inclined to agree with the “jury is still out” opinion on social media for designers. However, I fully intended through this research to uncover some key actionable strategies and research-based take aways to help designers be more successful using social media marketing.

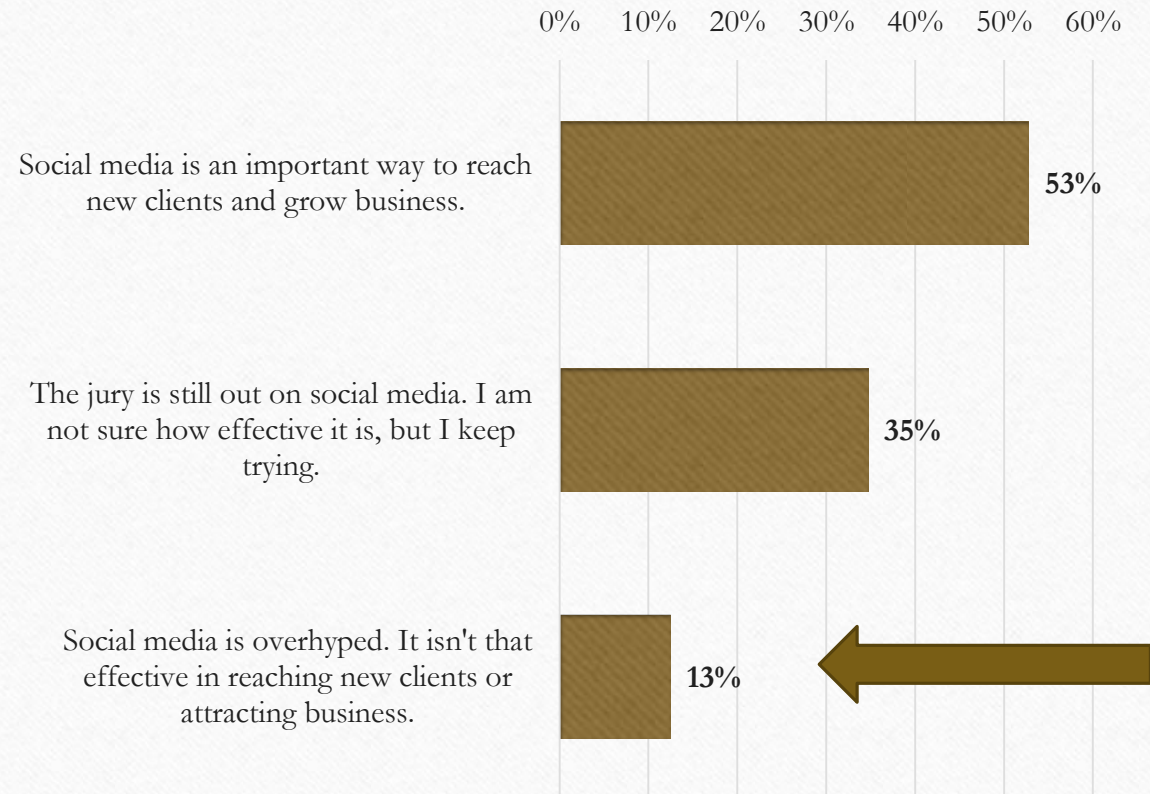
Sadly, this result wasn’t achieved. I have to follow the research where ever it leads. As a result, I am now firmly in the “social media is overhyped” column.

While many interior designers believe it is working, too few can point to real results. Rather they believe it is working and hope that it is producing results for the amount of effort and money invested in it. I however see little evidence to support this belief in the research.

The major finding of this research is that social media marketing may not be one of the strategies interior designers necessarily want to pursue.

Therefore, I conclude this report with some ideas from well-regarded and influential marketing authorities to help designers be more successful in marketing your interior design practice.

Which of the following statements most closely matches your opinion about social media?



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Because the purpose of business is to create a customer, the business enterprise has two--and only two--basic functions: marketing and innovation. Marketing and innovation produce results; all the rest are costs.

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Peter Drucker says,

“Marketing is the distinguishing, unique function of the business.”

In 2013 the American Marketing Association redefined marketing as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” The key word in that definition is creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have VALUE.

The VALUE of interior design services is a particular sticking point for interior designers, however. A recent ASID survey found that 64% of designers believe the public does not understand the true value of interior design services.

Designers Need Effective Marketing to Find New Clients Now

A recent survey conducted by YouGov among the wealthiest Americans (net worth of \$10 million or more and household income \$350k+) found that only 10% of them “regularly” work with an interior designer. Of course, interior design services aren’t necessarily a “regular” need, being driven by major home renovations or purchases. Yet the wealthiest Americans may well have more than one home, so there may be an on-going need for designer services.

Further, in that study one-third of the wealthiest reported making a high-end/luxury home furnishings purchase in the past year costing \$6,000 or more. By comparison only 19% of all American affluents (HHI \$150k+) made such a high-end home purchase.

The conclusion to draw from the YouGov survey is that while the wealthiest Americans, which number about 1 million U.S. households, are active purchasers of high-end/luxury home furnishings, only about 1 out of every 10 of them – some 100,000 in number – regularly seek the assistance and support of interior designers in making those purchases.



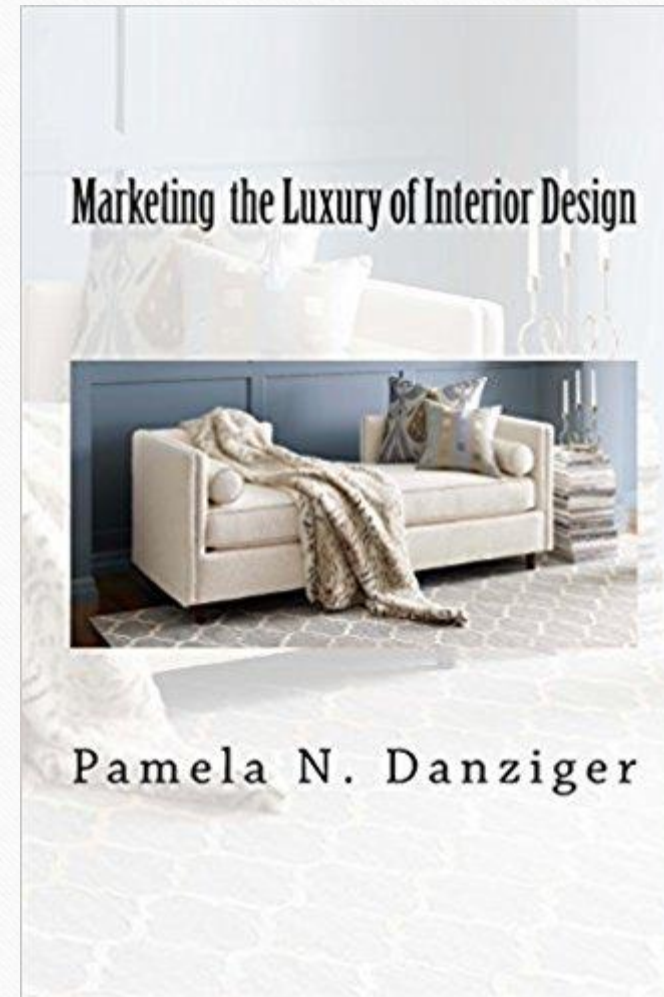
Help for Designers in Marketing Their Services

To win in this new marketplace, designers must be exceptional marketers as well as exceptional designers.

Designers dedicated to providing customized, professional interior design services need new marketing strategies to succeed in today's competitive and complex market. To win in this new marketplace, designers must be exceptional marketers as well as exceptional designers.

This book, *Marketing the Luxury of Interior Design*, is a designer's guide to marketing success. Based upon an in-depth research study with interior designers, this book identifies the best clients for interior designer services and reveals how to reach the target customer with branding and marketing that connects.

With a foreword by Cary Kravet, President and CEO of Kravet Inc., a leader in to-the-trade design resources, this book helps prepare interior designers to be more proficient and effective marketers as they confront today's changing market for professional interior design services.



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“The sole purpose of marketing is selling more stuff to more people more often for more money more efficiently.”

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Sergio Zyman says, “There is no other reason to do it.”

If creating, delivering and exchanging value is the goal of marketing, then the measure of its success is selling more stuff – or in the case of designers, more services – to more people more often for more money and doing it more efficiently. Designers need to be vigilant to hold their social media investment, both in terms of time and money, to these standards. If it isn't helping designers reach these goals, then it needs to be adapted to do so or ultimately abandoned if it can't deliver.

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The best advertising is done by satisfied customers.

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Philip Kolter says “Strategy is indeed about choosing what not to do as well as what to do.”

Without doubt, interior designers find that word-of-mouth marketing is what produces results, everything else barely measures up. Finding creative ways to get satisfied customers to talk about their success from the services delivered by an interior designer is what is needed, not more self promotion or talking amongst one's peers.

Satisfied Customers Love to Show Off

The wealthy are nothing less than house proud. A recent study of affluent consumers, conducted by YouGov, found that nearly 80% of them agree with the statement “I enjoy presenting my home to others.”

Driving their desire to create luxurious, well-designed homes is the competitive streak that is characteristic of those at the top. “The wealthy worked hard to get it. Their home is about positioning and making the point that you are at the top of your game,” Chandler Mount of YouGov says.

- The prime take away from the YouGov research is that while interior designers need to appeal to the left brain, rational justifications for the wealthy with talk about quality, style, longevity and investment value in the design recommendations for their home, it is equally, if not more important to appeal to the right-brain, emotional reasons why they should choose to work with an interior designer, specifically to make their dream home come to life.
- The primacy of emotions in consumer behavior is the message of psychologist G. Clotaire Rapaille in *The Global Code: How a New Culture of Universal Values Is Reshaping Business and Marketing*. He writes that the emotions, or the ‘reptilian brain’ as he calls it, is looking to the left-brain, logical cortex for a good excuse, or an ‘intellectual alibi,’ to give it what it wants.
- The emotional values the wealthy are seeking in their homes, according to YouGov’s research, are:
 - 1) To express artistry in the design of their living spaces;
 - 2) To feel the power and be personally empowered through the presentation and experience of a well designed home; and
 - 3) To reinforce their feelings of self-worth through the selection of the best of the best for their homes.
- The more interior designers can push the emotions in their current and prospective clients, with quantitative, left-brain oriented justifiers that make engaging with a designer a ‘smart decision,’ the more successful they will be in marketing.

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Insanity: Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

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Albert Einstein says, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used to create them.”

Doing something – in this case, social media – is not necessarily better than doing nothing. Since time is money for an interior designer, time wasted on ineffective social media is money lost.

Rather interior designers must work to make marketing work for them. It must be effective – deliver new business. It must be efficient and fit into the budget. In many cases, interior designers see social media as low or even no cost, since it doesn't necessarily require any monetary budget to launch a Facebook or Instagram page. But it can be extremely costly in terms of the time needed to learn how to use it and to maintain it. In many cases, social media is a black hole that sucks time and resources away from marketing activities that could produce much better results.

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Social media, as a business development tool, will go down as the biggest scam of our era.

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Christopher P. Ramey, of The Home Trust International and Retail-Rescue, says, “Any offering that is void of brand lacks value to the luxury consumers, since interior designers have primarily built their business around craftsmanship, quality and an aesthetic that most customers don’t necessarily understand. But they understand ‘brand.’”

You are a brand. Understand that and learn what managing and building your brand requires. While social media may be a part of brand building, it certainly isn’t the half of it.

Retail-Rescue Can Help Interior Designers

- Our Retail-Rescue team of Christopher P. Ramey (Management Rescue), Pamela Danziger (Marketing Rescue) and Janette Press (Operations Rescue) provide trusted advice, mentoring and support in Marketing, Management, Merchandising, Operations, Service and Selling to ensure you compete more effectively and more profitability in today's changing luxury consumer market place.
- Called Retail-Rescue, we have experience across dozens of luxury retail, product and service categories, most especially interior design and home-related product segments. We could effectively be call Designer-Rescue as well.

Next Steps

Don't throw good money after bad or waste any more time trying to make social media pay off for your practice.

We can help you identify and implement the best, most effective marketing strategies to help you attract new customers, build a profitable interior design business and be positioned for growth over the next five-to-ten years.

Our promise:

- We can give you unique perspective, insights and guidance consistent with the luxury segment.
- We can measure your marketing performance and help you develop a plan to turn around underperforming practices in order to focus on marketing strategies that work.
- We will identify issues and opportunities across all touchpoints from a luxury consumer perspective.
- We understand the needs and desires of the luxury consumers who interior designers target. We can help your management team to define marketing and branding objectives and positioning that is aligned with your target client's needs.
- We can develop your interior design practice's marketing arm to ensure success and a return-on-investment.

Meet Retail Rescue's Principals at Retail-Rescue.net

Christopher P. Ramey

- Ramey specializes in helping retailers, manufacturers and service providers penetrate affluent shelter/design markets. Ramey is also president of The Home Trust.
- Ramey's long list of iconic clients includes Ferretti, Bacardi, Automobili Lamborghini, Northern Trust, Silversea, The Ritz-Carlton and many dozens more. He is Luxury Daily's most quoted expert, sits on the BrainTrust Panel for Retailwire.com and has earned the "Leadership-Top 5%" appellation from Gerson Lehrman Group for his work with private equity firms investing in design/luxury brands.
- Ramey specializes in retail turn-arounds; most notably International Design Guild and Savvi Formalwear. Ramey grew The Luxury Marketing Council Miami/Palm Beach to the second largest Luxury Council in the world.
- The breadth of Ramey's experience in luxury businesses is an asset for any firm desiring to increase sales/profitability to trade professionals and HNWIs.

Pamela Danziger

- Speaker, author, and market researcher Pamela N. Danziger is internationally recognized for her expertise on the world's most influential consumers: the American Affluent.
- As founder of Unity Marketing in 1992, Pam leads with research to provide brands with actionable insights into the minds of their most profitable customers. As a partner in Retail Rescue, she leads with marketing, merchandising, in-store and online strategies.
- Pam is a member of Jim Blasingame: The Small Business Advocate's Brain Trust and a contributing columnist to The Robin Report and Forbes.com.
- A prolific writer and blogger, Pam is author of eight books, including her latest *Marketing the Luxury of Interior Design*. In 2016 she added *Shops that POP! 7 Steps to Extraordinary Retail Success*, to her bibliography. It reveals the secrets to crafting a retail shopping experience that's irresistible to high value shoppers.

Janette Press

- Janette Press, founder and principal of Cirrus Accounting, LLC, a 'cloud-based' accounting practice, helps retailers harness accounting technologies to scale and grow their businesses more efficiently and effectively.
- Specifically she helps retailers establish a financial dashboard and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) that will keep you on track, budget and planning guidance, and purchasing and inventory controls.
- Jan holds an MBA from Alvernia University and was an early adopter of Intuit accounting technologies. Based on personal experience supporting her husband's small business, she learned the power of Quickbooks as a business tool, and became a QuickBooks Intuit Certified ProAdvisor in 2009. She followed that up by earning her CMA (• Certified Management Accountant) to share her expertise more widely.