

**What is your opinion about the public's perception of structural engineers? Provide suggestions for how structural engineers might increase recognition and general public awareness of the profession.**

Overall, I think the public's perception of structural engineers fairly mixed, and ultimately tied to their understanding of what a structural engineer actually does on a daily basis. More often than not, when I tell people what I do for a living, I am met with blank stares and questions, or just as commonly I am asked – "Isn't that what an architect does?". I believe the public as a whole has a fairly neutral opinion of the structural engineering industry – neither positive or negative – because as an industry, I think we have done a poor job educating the general public on our responsibilities and roles in the design and construction of buildings and bridges. In short, I think the majority of the general public does not fully understand the scope of our work, how we tie in to the design process, and what differentiates us from other design professionals in the construction industry. In an effort to increase recognition and general public awareness of the profession – this is where I would suggest we start: education and self-advocacy.

Educating the general public on the importance and basic job descriptions of structural engineers seems like a daunting task, with a thousand different angles from which to approach the problem. Looking long term, education should start at the beginning – becoming involved with elementary and high school students at the local chapter level and holding interactive seminars and workshops to engage interest and increase understanding of the profession. By working with the next generation of engineers, we can accomplish two goals – inspiring a larger, more diverse group of structural engineers to the field, and increase the overall understanding of the profession. In order to secure a broad understanding of the industry and develop an influx of talent, we need to inspire students and get them as excited about studying structural engineering as they are about studying medicine, law, or architecture.

Social media and popular culture are two other avenues that are critical to reaching millions of people. Increasing our presence on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and yes, maybe even TikTok, is critical to reaching a widespread and diverse audience. We need to continue to stay informed of new social media platforms as they develop and participate in popular content to reach the maximum amount of people possible. Messaging needs to be engaging and creative in order to cut through the noise and deliver a lasting impression on the public. From a local and national chapter standpoint, this requires hiring a diverse marketing team of varying ages and backgrounds to come up with ideas that will reach people. Creating a presence in popular culture is likely a larger challenge – everyone knows what doctors, architects, and pilots do – there are hundreds of television shows and movies about these incredibly popular professions. How do we participate in this industry and educate people through media? I do not know that anyone has an answer for this yet, but the television and streaming industry is one of the most influential resources to impact and educate the general public.

Lastly, the structural engineering industry needs to be more proactive about advocating for itself. In the majority of articles written about the construction industry and featured projects, the same three players are always discussed – the owner, the general contractor, and the architect. It is rare the structural engineer (or other engineering consultants) is even mentioned. This is true for both large and small engineering firms. Smaller engineering firms in particular are at a disadvantage, as they often do not have a marketing team of their own to rely on. Firms should be reaching out to the marketing teams at the architect's firm and

requesting to be credited in any articles about a given project, or better yet, including language in the project contract that requires the company's name be mentioned in any articles written. Alternatively, firms can reach out directly to the journalist who wrote the article and ask for a revision to be published mentioning the structural engineer of record. If we do not advocate for ourselves and seek recognition, who will? Public education starts with each of us, and the more times the words "structural engineer" are out there, the closer we get to our ultimate goal – widespread recognition and an improved public perception. With these goals accomplished, other dominos within the profession will fall – higher salaries as an industry, a greater talent pool of engineers, and more influence on projects as a whole. It all starts with each of us.