

Exclusive Reports

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Updating tradition: Everett contractor puts history behind it in revamped branding effort

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Edward Bond Jr.

Public perception of the former **Bond Brothers** was that the Everett contractor was old school and not equipped to handle big construction projects.

The company's Web site, which featured black and white family photos from the 1930s, was not exactly combatting the image either.

Finally, when the company almost lost out on the chance to interview with an existing client, Dartmouth College, for a \$93 million lab project, the message was clear. The 102-year-old construction company needed to revamp its image and quick.

"Marketing is not our strong forte," said Edward Bond Jr., the chairman and chief executive officer. "We're more action orientated and less show orientated."

Bond quickly learned how to tout his company's accomplishments.

Luckily, Dartmouth did give Bond a chance to show why the college should hire it for one of the largest projects on the New Hampshire campus. At the time, Bond was working for Harvard University on a 510,000-square-foot science building called Northwest Labs and

needed to show Dartmouth it could handle a complicated lab project.

The fourth generation company built its reputation on utility and public municipal work.

“They just thought off of perception more than anything,” said Bond. “For a while we’ve been pushing our bigger experience.”

The word did not get as far as Hanover, N.H., where Bond had been working as a consultant to Dartmouth. School representatives took one look at Bond’s Web site and figured they weren’t qualified, said Bond, who admitted the company was “behind the ball” on promoting itself on the Internet.

“Historically Bond is not known for doing science buildings and large science buildings,” said Matthew Purcell, associate director of planning, design and construction at Dartmouth. “That was not the forte of the company. As we looked at different firms they’re known more as a utility contractor than building buildings.”

In the end, it came down to the people, including Ed Bond himself, and the teams they proposed, said Purcell. Dartmouth chose Bond to manage the construction of its 175,000-square-foot life sciences center, which will house the biological science department.

After winning the project, the company underwent a significant makeover including shortening its name to just “Bond.” The Web site now features color photos of the company’s signature projects, top executives and even includes a blog written by Bond President Robert Murray. Murray said the company’s public persona was 10 years behind and did not reflect its the type of work the company is chasing today. Bond continues to pursue energy and utility jobs but also goes after health care and education projects in excess of \$100 million.

“In some ways we’re almost trying to overcome the history,” said Murray, who after 23 years with the company was recently named president.

Bond could have chosen a member of the fifth generation — his son Anthony, 25 and daughter, Samantha, 23, both work alongside their father — but handed the reins to Murray instead.

“Ed ran the business as the president for many years and the company has grown and I think he wants people to perceive opportunities (here) are limitless,” said Murray, who describes Bond as unassuming.

Bond worked at the company for three summers while attending **New England College**. When he graduated in 1978, he planned on taking a year off but his father had another idea, asking him to join the company.

The offer was made on a Saturday and the following Monday Bond was hard at work. He was 21 years old and was tasked with doing everything from hiring and firing to estimating

and managing construction jobs and billing and negotiating contracts. It was trial by fire.

Thirty-one years later, Bond is still at it. He is ready to transition the \$300 million contracting business and expand into new markets. Last year Bond made the decision to begin pursuing work in Connecticut. Bond would like a bigger piece of commercial construction jobs in downtown Boston where large, union shops have dominated the market for years.

Bond has kept the company lean and its balance sheet free of debt, but is cautious about taking on just any job to make it through the recession. He's laid off 40 people in the past year after a major academic project was put on hold and new work didn't materialize.

Bond has not had to take any drastic measures yet but he has begun to look at cutting memberships to associations and is "scrubbing subs" — translation: reviewing subcontractors — to make sure they are financially solid and viable. He hasn't cut into bone yet but it's getting close, he said.

If he's worried about a prolonged recession affecting the overall financial health of the company, it doesn't show. When not at the office, Bond blows off steam by riding motorcycles or flying planes.

"Life is more than just one recession," said Bond. "This is the time to learn. Sometimes you see the best of the best under the most stressful situations."