



PRACTICE RESILIENCE

Resources and strategies
to help practices thrive

“ A practice
must have a clear
vision and a
defined goal.
Make sure
‘the main thing is
the main thing’.”

Johan Taft
Magnify Your Greatness

Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
Alan Jones, RIBA President	
BUSINESS STRATEGY	
Making time to win new work	6
Future-proofing your practice with scenario planning	7
Punching above your weight through collaboration	8
Branching out to diversify your business	8
Providing branding and graphic design services	9
Business essentials for the micro-practice	10
Where to find free business resources	10
PROMOTING YOUR PRACTICE	
Finding the right words to tell your story	12
Taking advantage of networking opportunities	12
Building a strong visual identity	14
PRACTICE FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT	
The six-line P&L statement for busy practices	17
Enhancing productivity to increase profit	17
Business finance during economic uncertainty	19
Facing the challenge of increasing PI insurance	19
How to thrive in an economic downturn	21
FEES	
Publishing guideline fees upfront	23
Fee proposals and how to get them right	23
Negotiating your fee with a business hat on	24
Clearly setting out fees for clients	24
Using smart software to target late payments	25
HAPPY TEAMS	
Galvanising small practice with a spreadsheet	27
Improving mental wellbeing in practices	27
Creating a supportive practice culture	29
WORKING WELL WITH CLIENTS	
Understanding what your clients really want	31
Keeping track of clients' requests for changes	32
Getting help to deal with challenging clients	32
Finding new clients overseas	33
INNOVATION AND ADAPTATION	
Are you eligible for R&D tax credits?	35
Applying for research funding opportunities	35
How immersive technology is revolutionising the customer experience	37
Embracing digitisation to evolve your practice	37
Meeting the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge	39

This document can be viewed and downloaded at:

[architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/resources-landing-page/practice-resilience-digest](https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/resources-landing-page/practice-resilience-digest)

Introduction

Our society needs architects. Now more than ever.

We have the unique skills, vision and empathy to address the most important issues of our age head on; to become agents of positive change in the UK and globally.

However, in business terms, many practices are struggling. The UK economy is currently slow and future prospects are uncertain. Anecdotes abound of adverse effects on the progress of projects.

Nobody can entirely gauge what the short- or long-term impact of Britain's planned exit from the EU will be. Factor in rising insurance premiums and changes to building regulations, and it becomes understandable that architects are currently finding their jobs hard going.

The Practice Resilience Digest has been put together to support practices of all scales. Informed by the findings of the RIBA's 2017 research document 'Practice Resilience: How architects survive and thrive during challenging times', it provides a digest of numerous RIBA Professional Features that are packed with tips, tools and strategies to assist practices through a tough economic period. This document is interactive: each feature contains a clickable link to a longer and more detailed online version.

Featuring essential business advice, it covers areas such as: best practice in cashflow management, developing a business plan, setting fees, winning work and being paid, diversifying into new sectors, and promoting your practice. It also suggests new ways of working, highlighting alternative practices, staff wellbeing initiatives and innovative uses of technology to future-proof our businesses.

The advice in these pages comes from experienced architects and their built-environment peers. These are the insights of working professionals: the lessons they have learned during good times and bad. Not all of them will be useful to every architect in every practice. But they are all grounded in experience. As such, they can enhance your experience of what it is to be an architect today.

Alan Jones

RIBA President

PRACTICE
RESILIENCE
BUSINESS
STRATEGY



MAKING TIME TO WIN NEW WORK <<

Architects work too much *in* their business and not nearly enough *on* their business, focusing too much on design rather than growth, believes Johan Taft. Marketing, selling and ‘prospecting’ for new clients should be top-level activities for all practices.

- Ensure that ‘the main thing is the main thing’. A business must have a clear vision and a defined goal.
- Sales and marketing are as important to a practice as designing good buildings, especially in a small business.
- Make active selling a designated activity, whether it is undertaken by a senior figure in the practice, a sales team, or via a bought-in service.
- If, as with many small businesses, this is conducted in-house, senior figures should redefine their role, regularly setting aside time for prospecting.
- Employ a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This is an essential tool for chasing leads and managing information on every enquiry, contact, prospect and potential collaborator a practice encounters.
- Ask yourself questions such as: ‘What am I selling?’; ‘Who am I selling it to?’; ‘How do I reach them?’; and ‘Who do I know who knows them?’

Johan Taft is a business coach and founder of Magnify Your Greatness.

“ A business with poor management but good sales skills can survive.

A business with good management but no sales skills cannot survive. ”

Johan Taft

Magnify Your Greatness

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](https://www.architecture.com)



‘Prospecting’ should be a key responsibility: identifying new client prospects to chase. This should be a daily activity and should never be neglected.

FUTURE-PROOFING YOUR PRACTICE WITH SCENARIO PLANNING <<

From modern methods of construction (MMC) to artificial intelligence, and from climate change to Brexit, architecture is facing a number of significant 'disruptors'. Duncan Campbell reveals how architects can use Scenario Planning to anticipate future challenges to business as usual.

- Scenario Planning investigates future 'what if...?' scenarios to help identify threats to a business and to help businesses grow.
- Set up group brainstorming sessions: this is fundamental to Scenario Planning. Begin with a 'PESTEL' analysis, considering what will change in the Political, Economic, Social, Technical, Environmental and Legal sectors.
- Use the results to identify the two most significant drivers of change. These form the axes of a Scenario Planning 2x2 matrix, on which four anticipated scenarios should be plotted.
- Draw up an action plan to mitigate these scenarios. Actions decided upon might range from merely agreeing to monitor a situation more closely, such as the financial precariousness of a regular client, to a complete overhaul of the practice.
- Keep the number of actions focused: between two and five is optimum, and never a long list.

Duncan Campbell is a Business Strategist and Partner at Cognosis strategy consultancy.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

Taking the time to envisage future scenarios that could threaten or benefit your practice, your career or the industry you work in allows you to put plans in place and take appropriate action well in advance.

“ If you actively engage and position your business with future trends in mind – whether they are policy-, demand-, or technology-driven – then you can ignite growth. ”

Duncan Campbell
Cognosis



PUNCHING ABOVE YOUR WEIGHT THROUGH COLLABORATION <<

Working in partnership with larger practices provides a step up into bigger projects and new architectural sectors. Having set up practice during a recession, Haptic Architects found that collaborating with established partners was the only way to make their mark.

- Find something specific about your practice that is valuable to another. This might be a niche area of expertise or a particular design sensibility.
- Remind yourself of any existing connections that your practice could be using, such as regional or international contacts among your staff and colleagues. Revisit contacts from your student days.
- Widen your networking reach. Attend events such as architecture festivals and lectures and try to overcome your natural reticence: remember that everyone else is in the same boat.
- Consider applying for part-time or evening teaching opportunities at universities: these can lead to interesting connections.
- Initiate your own events at your practice, such as talks or exhibitions. Co-ordinate these with architecture, arts or local-area-specific festivals.

Tomas Stokke is Director of Haptic Architects.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

BRANCHING OUT TO DIVERSIFY YOUR BUSINESS <<

Providing multi-disciplinary services beyond architecture can generate highly profitable new revenue sources. Nick Marchini explains how, having established an architecture practice, he set up autonomous companies providing engineering, interior design and planning services.

- Over the course of their careers, architects develop a wealth of different skills and knowledge bases.
- Expertise in these areas can be monetised into businesses that establish their own clients. They can deliver revenue streams independent of the practice while complementing its work.
- There can be synergies between the different companies: interior design work carried out in a city far away from a practice's regular working areas can pull be a valuable way in to a new region.
- Setting up companies separately can make them a much more authoritative and persuasive option to clients and consultants than a single multi-disciplinary practice.
- Keeping diverse services as separate entities ensures they are not seen as 'competition' by other practices who might wish to use them.

Nick Marchini is Director of Marchini Curran Associates.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)



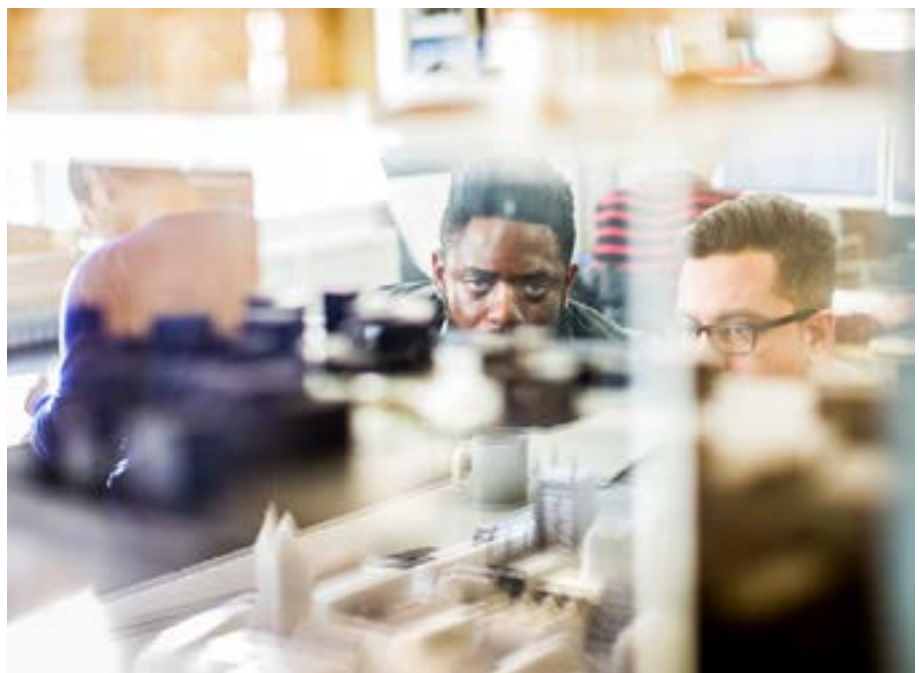
PROVIDING BRANDING AND GRAPHIC DESIGN SERVICES <<

Designing a building and building a brand have much in practices are finding complementary ways to diversify their business, and branding is one of them. Combining architecture with branding and design consultancy can be a way into new areas, such as commercial and retail sectors.

- Providing both building design and branding services leads to an impressively coherent identity for a client, conveying a consistent ethos across all aspects of its business.
- In addition to architecture, this '360 degrees' approach might include: business design, signage, furniture, printed materials, websites and other digital communications.
- Branding services work best if a practice can discuss brand values with the client at an early stage, rather than trying to implement them after a building is complete.
- Conduct brand strategy workshops with a client to ascertain how a client sees itself, identify the type of clientele it wishes to attract and work out where it wants to go.
- Small interventions can make a huge difference: using wall-space for murals, signage, and graphics can generate an identity where previously there was none.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

Keeping one foot in architecture while stepping into branding can lead to projects that integrate graphic design with interiors and product design – and work providing strategic solutions for start-ups of all kinds.



“ A building is a brand as well. Although branding and architecture are different disciplines, you apply the same kind of thinking and strategy. ”

Katie Stamp
SODA Studio

- Practices can learn a great deal about branding from undergoing a re-brand themselves. Bringing in a consultant can revitalise the practice's image and teach valuable lessons in providing branding to others.

Laura Sanjuan is Founding Director and **Katie Stamp** is Head of Graphic Design at SODA Studio.

BUSINESS ESSENTIALS FOR THE MICRO-PRACTICE <<

Setting up a small practice in a home office might be a lifestyle choice rather than a financial necessity. However, all micro-practices share common concerns in terms of profitability and resilience, as Marianne Davys points out.

- Draw up a business plan and update it annually. It should include a cash flow forecast and a profit and loss forecast. Forecasts should be monitored monthly and corrective action taken at the earliest opportunity.
- Keep overheads as low as possible. They should be regularly analysed to check they are viable in the short-, medium- and long-term.
- Work and delegate efficiently: evaluate how much time is spent on fee-earning tasks that require skills against time spent on basic admin.
- Ensure appropriate fees are charged. The right fee for the practice is the fee that is paid on time, which covers salaries and overheads and generates a profit.
- Company directors can agree to take only a small salary to keep overheads low and top up their income with dividends when the practice's income permits.
- Micro-practices need to be highly organized, with good systems in place for the running of multiple small projects and admin tasks in a consistent manner.

Marianne Davys is Principal at Marianne Davys Architects.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

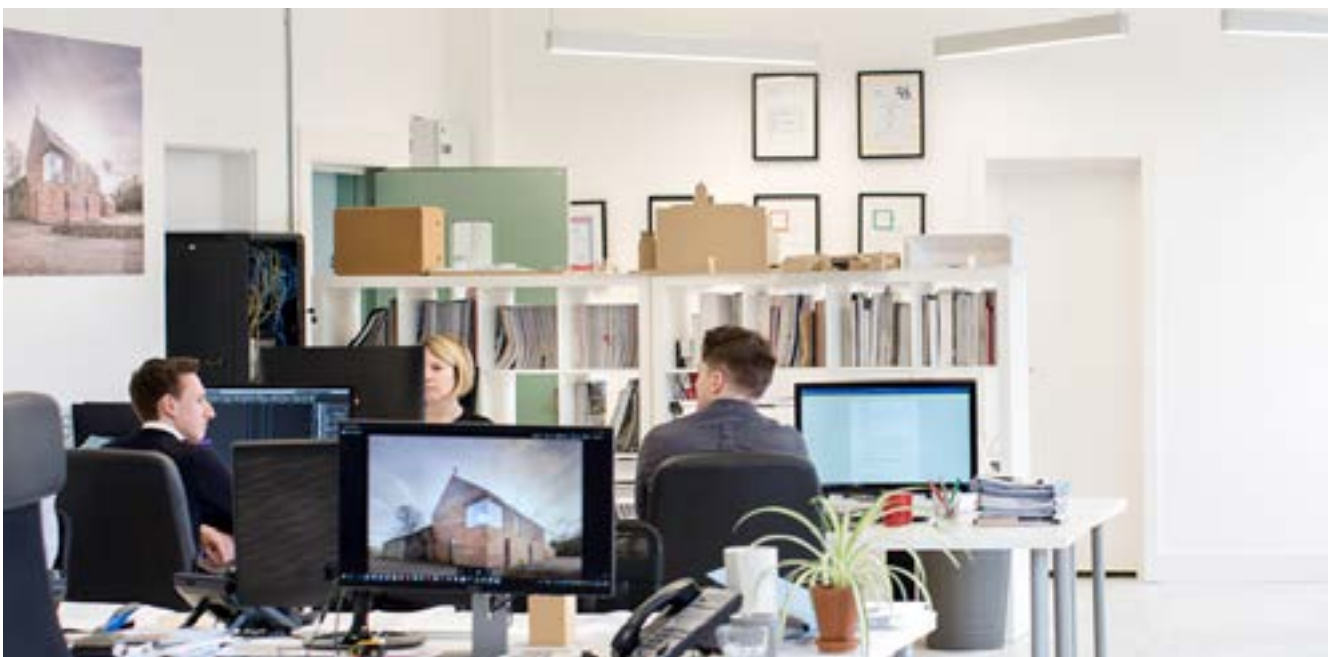
WHERE TO FIND FREE BUSINESS RESOURCES <<

There are numerous useful free business resources available in the UK; whether accessible online or in person via group or one-to-one sessions.

- The UK government's official **Business and Self-Employed** page contains advice on setting up and running a business, selling it or closing it down, covering everything from copyright issues, staffing and HR queries, cashflow management and tax guidance.
- **Finance and Support for your Business** is a government website that provides a gateway to 180 business support and finance schemes, many of them region-specific and some operating nationwide.
- The British Library's **Business & IP Centre** provides databases, market research, journals and valuable business reports; it also offers business workshops and one-to-ones with successful entrepreneurs.
- The RIBA's own **Business Page** offers business information including claiming Research and Development tax relief.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

Sole practitioners and two-person practices need to be well equipped at carrying out all standard architectural responsibilities but also know when to buy in other skills.



PRACTICE
RESILIENCE
PROMOTING
YOUR
PRACTICE

2

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS TO TELL YOUR STORY <<

A portfolio of impressive projects may not be enough to win work in a competitive industry. Successful practices can inspire clients, convincing them they provide something wholly unique. Juliette Mitchell advises architects to craft key messages and tell the stories that bring their practice and projects to life.

- Start with your website. This is typically the first port of call for potential clients. Make sure it conveys your practice's interests, specialisms and personality.
- Ensure the 'voice' of your practice is approachable, direct and human. Clients will be far more likely to pick up the phone and start a conversation.
- Try to make the way you describe your practice as distinctive as possible. Choose words that describe what you do and who you are. Avoid any 'standard' or overused phrases.
- Do not slip into client jargon or language that is too formal. If in doubt, write as you speak.
- When writing about a project, think in terms of a story arc. Your initial inspiration is the starting point; the overcoming of challenges is the narrative; and the completed building is the ending.
- When describing successful projects for social media, strip the story down to just one moment of surprise, transformation or joy.

Juliette Mitchell is a writer, editor and the founder of Architypal.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES <<

Networking generates work. A strong portfolio and a string of regular interesting projects is generally not the result of mere talent alone: it comes from making oneself known to potential clients and building up a profile. Leanne Tritton dispels a few networking myths.

- Networking is the most cost-effective way for a small practice to make contacts that will win work.
- Few people consider themselves to be 'natural' networkers. But networking is not about being an extrovert: it is simply making use of personal connections to get more work.
- One connection can lead to another. Successful businesses or individuals will often cite one particular social occasion, perhaps on the periphery of a business event, that led to work that led to further work in turn.
- Even a conversation that does not directly lead to a new client can lead to a useful referral.
- The RIBA's regional and local branch activities are a great way of networking with other practices. They provide platforms to engage with the wider built environment.
- Architects can also be proactive in creating such platforms themselves. Giving talks or organising a seminar is another way of making connections.

Leanne Tritton is Managing Director of ING.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)



On websites, blogs, social media and communications in general, avoid jargon and focus on what makes your practice special and unique.

“Generic websites are all too common, often the result of an attempt to appeal to the greatest number of potential clients. Phrases such as ‘multi-disciplinary, award-winning practice’ do not communicate a distinctive identity.”

Juliette Mitchell
Architypal



Studio Egret West published 'Framing Serendipity' to mark the practice's twelfth birthday – a great way to showcase their work and ethos in depth.

BUILDING A STRONG VISUAL IDENTITY <<

Given the amount of energy practices invest in tenders and competitions, the message that a practice conveys in its branding should not be underestimated. Practices can really benefit by having coherent branding and a recognisable visual identity, suggests David Tanguy.

- Pay attention to detail when it comes to communications and the practice's overall visual presentation. Clients, and the public in general, are increasingly design savvy.
- Make the practice's visual identity a statement of its aesthetic and its philosophy. Use branding as a tool to state who you are, what you do, and how you work.
- Everything from the fonts used in print and online communication to the images and photos should be weighed up in terms of the overall impression they give.
- Start with the basics – choosing colours and a typeface – when developing a visual identity. A complete visual language can be implemented over time.
- Remember that a practice's website is likely to be a client's first port of call. First impressions count.
- Avoid playing it too safe. Companies within the same industry tend to follow each other and have a similar approach to their branding. Architects are sometimes overly conservative in their branding.

David Tanguy is Director of creative design agency Praline.

““ Even when a practice's work is really good, its image can be let down by a poor identity. This can make it hard to be taken seriously by people new to them. ””

David Tanguy
Praline

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

When Alison Brooks Architects decided to completely rebrand, moving from 'ABA' back to its full name, it began by custom designing the characters of its logo.



““ If you can be smart about what adds value for your clients, they will value you in return.””

Teresa Borsuk
Pollard Thomas Edwards

PRACTICE
RESILIENCE

PRACTICE
FINANCE
AND
MANAGEMENT

3

THE SIX-LINE P&L STATEMENT FOR BUSY PRACTICES <<

Every practice should be able to tell how healthy their business is. Neil Boyde points out that a good P&L statement shows at a glance how much you are making or losing.

- It is essential that practices understand their financial health and sustainability: P&L statements and cash flow forecasts can provide this.
- A P&L statement need not be a formal annual statement prepared for company accounts. It can be a short monthly production.
- Six lines are all that are needed: 'turnover' less 'direct costs' equals 'net revenue', less 'staff costs', less 'other operating costs', equals 'operating profit'.
- Practices can then develop a Staff Cost Ratio by taking staff costs and dividing them by net revenue. A Staff Cost Ratio of over 70% is a concern.
- An Operating Costs Ratio can be calculated by dividing costs by staff costs. Between 30% and 40% is healthy.

Neil Boyde is Chief Financial Officer at Grimshaw Architects.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

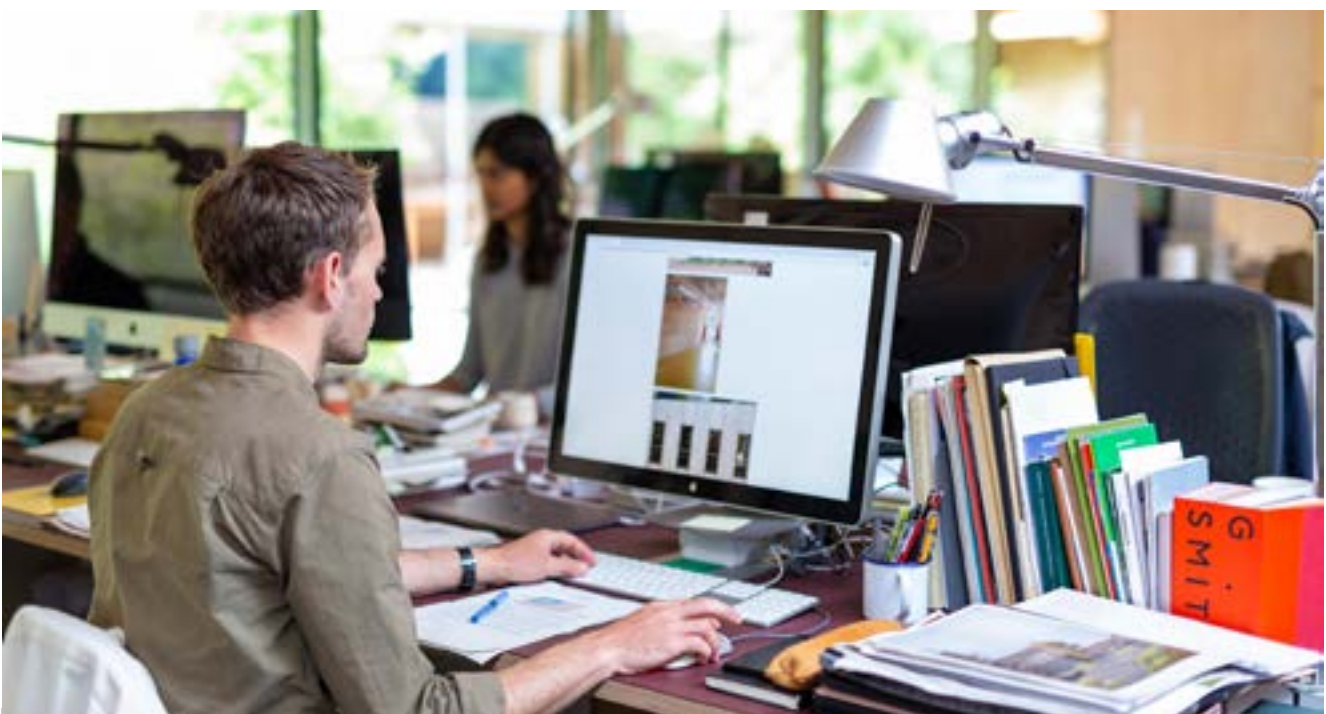
ENHANCING PRODUCTIVITY TO INCREASE PROFIT <<

If a practice is not making productive use of its team it is not realising potential profits. Thorough time recording, resource management and tracking of expenditure against income are all essential to productivity, counsels Ian McBane.

- All practices should set annual budgets for income and expenditure. This is to understand what you hope to achieve and what resources are needed to do so.
- Capture detailed data about your practice's productivity, via staff timesheets. Logging hours is key.
- Thorough resource management must examine the pricing of services and the recoverability of cost overruns. All should be measured against a business development plan.
- Monitor the cost of time spent by fee earners against their charge out rates, and regularly assess what margins are actually realised.
- Employ apps that provide automatic data capture, giving a real-time view of a practice's situation. These can integrate time sheets with project management and can be checked anywhere on almost any device.

Ian McBane is a Partner at accountancy and business advice firm BDO.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)





BUSINESS FINANCE DURING ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY <<

Financial planning is too often seen as a secondary consideration by architects working on pressing project deadlines. But cash flow is the most important factor in business survival, urges Neil Boyde.

- Rolling revenue and cash flow forecasts should be a constant focus for anyone with responsibility for practice finances.
- Try to maintain a cash buffer of two to three months' worth of operating costs if possible, either in the bank or via an agreed banking facility.
- Every practice should identify a figure who can understand and manage the overlap between financial and operational decision making.
- This need not necessarily be a dedicated salaried position, but the responsibility should be recognised and fulfilled by a nominated member of staff.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

Regular detailed cash flow auditing is essential for any business. If a small practice cannot afford dedicated finance personnel, it should identify staff to take on the responsibility.

FACING THE CHALLENGE OF INCREASING PI INSURANCE <<

Renewing Professional Indemnity (PI) insurance cover is becoming more and more challenging for architects. Many practices are experiencing rising premiums and exclusions. Mark Klimt investigates what practices can do.

- Anticipate the cost of PI insurance cover to remain challenging for some time. Make it a serious budgetary consideration, particularly if your work involves combustible cladding and high-value basement extensions.
- Engage with your broker early, and give insurers as full and accurate a picture of past and present projects as possible.
- Be prepared to complete detailed questionnaires rather than just form filling.
- Complete an audit of past and current projects going back 15 years so that you can give a comprehensive review of risk at renewal.
- Be prepared to demonstrate to insurers that you have robust quality and risk-management systems for current and future work.
- Expect limitations of cover and exclusions – which may be quite wide and vary between insurers.

Mark Klimt is an RIBA Specialist Practice Consultant.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)



“ Though they are time-consuming, project audits are a sensible thing for practices to do, and might produce positive outcomes when it comes to insurance renewals. ”

Mark Klimt
RIBA Specialist Practice Consultant



HOW TO THRIVE IN AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN ‹‹

Several experienced practitioners reveal the strategies they employed during the last UK recession in order to safeguard their business. They provide simple ways practices can become leaner, more agile and more adaptable.

- Keep cash flow positive. Clear all debtors as speedily as possible and, if necessary, agree discounts for quick payment.
- Never be tempted to 'buy work in'. Many projects will outlast a recession, so fees must be realistic not just for lean times but for when the office is busy once more.
- Involve the whole team in fee proposals and scheduling. Ensure all staff input the time they spend on projects. This allows an immediate assessment of each project's performance and identifies any additional fees for changes to the brief and overruns.
- Set up a weekly meeting to make use of every connection from across the business. Make the most of all potential leads.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

“ Never depend on just one big client. Ensure the practice has three key markets, and find a balance between public sector and private clients. ”

Mark Percival
Architecture:M

Mark Percival is Managing Director, Architecture:M; **Simon Bayliss** is Managing Partner, HTA Design; **Barbara Kaucky** is Director, erect architecture; **Nick Marchini** is Director, Marchini Curran Associates.



PRACTICE
RESILIENCE
FEES

4

PUBLISHING GUIDELINE FEES UPFRONT <<

Few practices publish guideline fees on their websites. However, Clare Nash Architects have found that providing a ballpark figure for commonplace work significantly increases enquiries from potential clients.

- Providing fee estimates for 'typical' projects by type can be a client-winner. In other industries, providing an idea of how much services are likely to cost is standard practice.
- Publishing guideline fees signals honesty and transparency to first-time clients who may be wary of using an architect.
- Any such quoted prices or price ranges are not set in stone: they are simply a starting point that will form part of the proposal package presented at a client meeting.

Clare Nash is Founding Director of Clare Nash Architecture.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)



“ Be sure you can fully justify what you are doing in how you set out fees. ”

Barbara Kaucky
Erect Architecture

FEE PROPOSALS AND HOW TO GET THEM RIGHT <<

Putting an effective fee proposal together and getting paid is fundamental to any professional service. To stay profitable, architects need to fully understand their costs and overheads, taking a methodical approach to every element of the service they provide. Stephen Brookhouse and Peter Farrall reveal how.

- The RIBA Professional Services Contracts and Plan of Work provide a sound template for thinking methodically from the outset about time requirements and rates of charge.
- Sketch out the programme with milestones and key events listed and outputs clearly defined. Identify invoice milestones in advance.
- Allocate the practice's resources and staff based on a net day rate. The break-even point should be noted and a view taken on risk and profit.
- Ask the client to sign off after every Plan of Work stage. This will remind them what billable tasks the architect has carried out and highlight issues arising from any changes the client has introduced.
- Faced with a late payer, adopt a three-step approach: a timely 'nice' letter; a firmer letter raising whether work can continue; and a face-to-face with the client to identify and solve the problem.

Peter Farrall teaches at Liverpool University School of Architecture; **Stephen Brookhouse**, is Interim Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at the University of Westminster.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

NEGOTIATING YOUR FEE WITH A BUSINESS HAT ON <<

Learning how to negotiate, thoroughly preparing for meetings and taking the most business-like approach possible are instrumental in securing the fee that you want, as Nigel Ostime, Delivery Director of Hawkins/Brown, explains.

- Explain how you will manage the process and provide a timetable if you possibly can.
- Show any prospective client that you understand their particular business sector, including its language
- Demonstrate an understanding of the client's business drivers and what makes a project successful in their terms.
- Never go into a meeting without having worked out your own costs and overheads beforehand.
- Emphasise ways your practice can add value to the project. If possible, talk the client through your achievements on a previous project.

Nigel Ostime is Delivery Director at Hawkins\Brown and Chair of the RIBA Client Liaison Group.

Watch the RIBA video [How do you set out fees for clients?](#)

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

CLEARLY SETTING OUT FEES FOR CLIENTS <<

A lack of clarity over what an architect will provide and how much it will cost can cause serious disagreements over fees and their payment. Openness and honesty are key from the start.

- Set out the scope of your role clearly, including the number of meetings and on-site meetings at each work stage.
- Carry out resource planning for stages of work before presenting a fee proposal to clients.
- Never be apologetic in stating the time and costs that specific activities will incur:
- Using the RIBA's Professional Services Contracts (PSCs) makes the method of calculating payment of fees simple and clear for both client and architect.
- The RIBA Briefing Template facilitates the conversation between architects and clients about the scope of services and their costs.

Barbara Kaucky is Director of Erect Architecture, **Jane Duncan** is Director of Jane Duncan Architects + Interiors and **Nigel Ostime** is Delivery Director of Hawkins\Brown.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)



Show prospective clients that you understand their particular business sector, demonstrating understanding of what makes a project successful in their world.



USING SMART SOFTWARE TO TARGET LATE PAYMENTS <<

Nobody enjoys chasing late payments. It is time-consuming and socially awkward. David Ayre has found that the automation functions of accounting software can take some of the pain out of the process.

- Setting up smart accounting software can automatically generate detailed invoices. These are then followed up with automated invoice-chasing at specified dates.
- If clients have an online payment facility set up, they can be prompted to make instant payments via the hyperlinks within emails generated by the software.

Smart accounting software can take some of the hard work out of chasing payments by generating detailed invoices, providing reminders of due dates and embedding hyperlinks to payment methods in emails.

- Live data on a practice's finance is readily available, showing fees outstanding and amounts overdue, with the facility to sort the data in a number of ways, by client or the number of days overdue for example.
- Never regard automation as the entirety of the process. It should be complemented by human contact, via phone calls and personal emails.

David Ayre is Practice Director at Ayre Chamberlain Gaunt.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

PRACTICE
RESILIENCE
HAPPY
TEAMS

5

GALVANISING SMALL PRACTICE WITH A SPREADSHEET <<

The humble spreadsheet can be surprisingly powerful. Not only is it a top-to-bottom management tool, it can empower staff and inject a new enterprise culture into a small practice. Barbara Kaucky explains how spreadsheets should not be underestimated. They can make a near-instant transformational change.

- Adopt a central, governing profitability spreadsheet and make it readily accessible to all staff. This can spark a revolution in office morale.
- Encourage staff to input their own working hours. This integrates them much more closely in the overall enterprise of a practice.
- The practice's entire workflow becomes transparent. All staff can see at a glance how their own activity relates to everybody else's contribution at all levels.
- Individual staff members can then better prioritise their workflow across projects. Timesheets can remind architects not to produce work ahead of the RIBA stage that has been billed for.
- Making project resourcing completely transparent is not only about assessing and monitoring. It becomes a learning experience: staff learn where the opportunities for profit lie.

Barbara Kaucky is Director of Erect Architecture.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

IMPROVING MENTAL WELLBEING IN PRACTICES <<

One in three architecture students suffers from mental health issues, while wellbeing issues are reportedly rife in practices. Priya Aiyer shares some insights in how to de-stress the daily workload and improve the office cultures in which we work.

- Practices should: monitor staff hours; carry out a Stress Risk Assessment; and offer paid overtime, flexible working and time-management training to staff.
- Individuals should: keep a 'daily habits' diary to review their hours and work practice; and aim to work 'smart and hard'. All staff should set daily goals and avoid unproductive multi-tasking.
- Senior staff ought to provide a 'trickle-down' example by leaving at a sensible hour and demonstrating that it is possible to work successfully and productively without the need for extra hours.
- At least one senior staff Mental Health Champion should be appointed within the office, who should draw up a Mental Health Strategy for the practice.
- Let staff know about the Five Ways to Wellbeing (New Economics Foundation). These are daily little activities to improve personal wellness, like eating your 'five a day'.

Priya Aiyer is an architect at MACE and an ABS wellbeing ambassador.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)



Aiming to work 'smart and hard', setting daily goals and avoiding multi-tasking, which many studies show to be counter-productive, are just some of the ways to work productively without stress.

“ Having the profitability spreadsheet gave me a real feeling about the finance and timeline of the project and put the everyday tasks into perspective. I feel more a **part of the team** and the collective destiny of the office. ”

Nozomi Nakabayashi
Erect Architecture





CREATING A SUPPORTIVE PRACTICE CULTURE <<

Fostering an environment in which staff are motivated, committed and enjoy working together, in which everyone feels they are working towards a shared goal, is key to a resilient practice. Geoff Rich shares the ways his practice brings people together.

- Formalise your attitude to social responsibility in both the work you take on and the culture within your practice. Instil a sense of 'mission' both externally and internally: this sets out a reputation to live up to.
- Listen to staff right across the organisation, from top to bottom. Ensure that platforms for communication exist for all staff to have an input. This can help attract and retain the best talent.

Feilden Clegg Bradley's staff take a morning break and receive a daily free lunch. This encourages lively discussion while promoting a healthy attitude to timekeeping.

- Include all staff in regular reviews of the company's overall direction. Ask their opinions on which sectors and clients to target and where business can improve. This encourages practice growth and innovation, and inspires staff loyalty.
- The team that eats together stays together. FCBS offer all staff a free lunch allowing employees to discuss ideas informally and bond with each other.
- Clients that visit are impressed to see a practice with focused and engaged staff. Having an inclusive, coherent practice philosophy inspires confidence and goodwill.

Geoff Rich is Managing Partner of Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

PRACTICE
RESILIENCE
WORKING
WELL WITH
CLIENTS

6



UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOUR CLIENTS REALLY WANT <<

The client-architect relationship has to be very carefully managed. A successful, stress-free project that leaves all parties happy is the goal. After all, referrals and repeat business are key to an architect's livelihood. Make sure you are all on the same page from the very outset.

- Tech companies dedicate entire teams to customer experience. Architecture too often considers this as a lowly consideration or a by-product.
- Use an initial questionnaire, or the RIBA's Briefing Template and Tracker, to ascertain the client's goals, develop their ideas and carry them out efficiently.

Download the RIBA's Briefing Template and Tracker to help manage projects and ensure each stage has been properly carried out.

Customer satisfaction is an important aspect of any business. It is easy to forget that there is much more to a contented client than providing a good design.

- Clients who have never used an architect before will require some additional guidance. Running through their goals and their anticipated schedule will flag up any time or budget considerations.
- Emails can sometimes be too blunt a communication tool. Properly recorded in-person meetings or phone calls can often achieve much more.
- Take boards of sketches to client meetings, and make use of accessible media such as Pinterest. This helps bridge the gap between an architect's technical understanding and imagery the client is accustomed to.

Teresa Borsuk is Senior Partner, Pollard Thomas Edwards; **Will Mawson** is Director, Mawson Kerr; **Rachael Davidson** is Director, Höt Architecture; and **Shahriar Nasser** is Director, Belsize Architects.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

KEEPING TRACK OF CLIENTS' REQUESTS FOR CHANGES <<

Changes to a design, specification or fees have always been among the most common sources of claims against architects. Scrupulous record keeping of requests for changes is essential, particularly those arising from a casual on-site conversation.

- Contractors often employ professional claims teams as part of their business model, making good record-keeping essential for architects.
- Every requested change should be recorded and sent to the instructing client or contractor to confirm in writing.
- When changes to a design are requested on a casual basis on site, it is all the more important to keep a formal record and confirm what was agreed.
- If an architect has reservations about a requested change, these should be expressed in writing; and the client should state the reasons behind the request.
- It should be agreed in writing that the architect takes no liability for consequences resulting from changes they do not recommend, confirming that they are not part of the original submitted design.

Paul Dinwoodie is Executive Director, Financial and Professional Risks, Arthur J. Gallagher.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)



GETTING HELP TO DEAL WITH CHALLENGING CLIENTS <<

Some situations test the limits of dialogue between client and architect. When that relationship breaks down, a practice may need legal guidance. The RIBA publishes standard contracts and provides a free legal service for chartered members, delivered by a team of Specialist Practice Consultants. Shabnam Noor found their guidance invaluable.

- Disputes between architect and client frequently arise over terms of appointment. Using the RIBA Standard Professional Services Contracts can ensure that terms are watertight.
- Take scrupulous records, keeping track of every piece of work carried out, right down to individual phone calls. This provides evidence of good practice in the event of a dispute. The RIBA's Briefing Template and Tracker can help to monitor goals and activity.
- Initial enquires about help in resolving a dispute can be made via the RIBA Information Centre. An RIBA Specialist Practice Consultant will then be selected based on relevance to the specific case.
- The Consultant can, for example, suggest what to write in emails to a client regarding the dispute, when to send them, and how long to leave in between.
- Depending on the specific case, recommendations might include writing: a 'Record of Concern for Behaviour'; a notification of suspension of services; a contract termination notice; or, if all else fails, a warning of legal action to be taken via the Small Claims court.

Shabnam Noor is Founder and Lead Project Architect at Stories by Shabnam Noor.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

When changes to a design are requested on a casual basis on site, it is all the more important to keep a formal record and confirm what was agreed.

FINDING NEW CLIENTS OVERSEAS <<

Having a diversity of projects reduces a practice's vulnerability to downturns in demand. And building up international work is more feasible than many practices assume. Here, small practices explain why projects outside the UK are not just for large firms.

- Review any contacts you already have among your colleagues. Fellow staff may be potential sources of valuable overseas contacts.
- Network, network and network again. Securing international work requires attending major events which attract developers from across the world.
- Broadening a practice's international reach may lead to other opportunities, even if it does not directly find new clients. New business efficiencies can result from collaborations with architects, practices, engineers and consultants based abroad.

Marco Ortiz is the Mexico-trained, Director of Emergent Design; **Mara Vasilache**, Director, BCI Studio, heads its East Europe portfolio.

“ The key is to be able to fill a gap. An international understanding of architectural standards, fills a gap and adds value to a project in an emerging market. ”

Mara Vasilache,
BCI Studio

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)



PRACTICE
RESILIENCE
INNOVATION
AND
ADAPTATION



ARE YOU ELIGIBLE FOR R&D TAX CREDITS? <<

Activities that qualify for Research and Development tax credits need not be academic or involve cutting-edge technology. R&D tax credits can be awarded for researching a solution to a problem, as Tomas Millar and Bruce Bell have discovered.

- If there is not a standard solution available and an architect must analyse the problem, devise a solution and test it, the process might qualify for R&D credits.
- R&D activities do not have to lead to a built project to qualify and design competition entries could be a potential source, even if they did not win.
- R&D tax relief for small or medium sized enterprises (SMEs) is 230%. Therefore, for every £100 of qualifying R&D costs, a practice could reduce its Corporation Tax by an additional £130.
- Embedding a category for R&D work into practice employees' spreadsheets or timesheets ensures any time and costs that could qualify for tax credit claims are easy to track.
- Many accountancy and business advisory firms offer an R&D tax credit service, charging a proportion of the savings generated.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

APPLYING FOR RESEARCH FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES <<

Architects do not apply for, or receive, nearly as much funding for research as their peers in construction and the creative industries, writes Flora Samuel.

- As with R&D tax credits, most architects are already carrying out research in some form or another: it is simply that they do not regard it as fundable research.
- An application for research funding has a much better chance of success than an entry for a design competition.
- Research is not the sole preserve of large- or medium-sized practices. Small practices have just as much to benefit by engaging in research activities and find a research grant.
- Research can be a route to rewarding and satisfying work. Through research, a small practice can build a reputation in a particular area in which they might not yet have completed a building.

Flora Samuel is Professor of Architecture in the Built Environment at the University of Reading and is the former RIBA VP for Research.

Tomas Millar is Director at Millar + Howard Workshop.

Bruce Bell is Managing Director, Facit Homes.

View the RIBA's guidance on Research and Development Tax Relief and download its leaflet.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)



“Research can be a route to rewarding and satisfying work. Through research, a small practice can build a reputation in a particular area in which they might not yet have completed a building.”

Flora Samuel
University of Reading



HOW IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGY IS REVOLUTIONISING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE <<

Tomas Millar has learned many lessons from agile internet startup companies and applied them to his practice. He believes architects should make the most of what VR and other technologies can provide, not only in design, but in bringing in clients and winning work.

- Simply supplying a great service is not sufficient in today's world: the most successful companies manage to truly connect with their customers in a qualitatively transformative way.
- A raft of technological innovations can allow architects to convey their ideas and services more comprehensively to their customers, rather than being limited to drawings, CGIs and their power of persuasion.
- Employing Virtual Reality (VR) at all stages of a project can speed up the process. Clients can make decisions more quickly, based on their immersive, human-scale experience of the proposed space.
- Photogrammetry creates a textured digital model of a space by feeding in several hundred photos taken at different angles. This lets clients experience a site, via VR, with the architect's design imposed onto it.
- The 'manufacturing' approach to home building takes the automotive and aerospace industries as a model and can add value to the customer via automation, precision and predictability.

Tomas Millar is Director of Millar+Howard Workshop.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)



EMBRACING DIGITISATION TO EVOLVE YOUR PRACTICE <<

Knowledge accrued through BIM can feed into project after project and dramatically improve efficiency. Aaron Perry has found that informed use of BIM can significantly speed up design, while immersive visualisation tools can provide clients with a much better understanding of design possibilities.

- Place BIM at the heart of practice to capitalise on design research and development from a multitude of previous projects. Design and technical lessons learned while working on projects can be shared across the practice to inform future projects.
- Use a digital authoring tool that supports BIM outputs, regardless of whether a client has specifically requested it.
- A body of BIM data can be used to develop 'standard' parts of schemes for use at early design stages. For buildings that feature a 'supercore' (with standard provisions such as WCs or lifts), a conceptual volume or even a well-developed core can be autogenerated and revised.
- BIM data can identify rapidly where a design decision may have a negative impact on the scheme without the full, detailed redesign that a traditional approach would have required.
- Software algorithms can help produce a range of design options relatively quickly. A greater number of options of a high visual standard can be created in the same time that it would take to explore only a couple of options using traditional methods.
- Live-render visualisation tools are becoming increasingly easy to employ. Animated or virtual reality experiences of a building are fast becoming a standard expectation for clients, stakeholders, local authorities and planners.

Aaron Perry is BIM Manager at Allford Hall Monaghan Morris.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](#)

Providing detailed 3D models to clients, as Millar+Howard Workshop did during their work on the cloisters of Gloucester Cathedral, can provide a much more informative customer experience.

“Employing Virtual Reality at all stages of a project can speed up the process. **Clients can make decisions more quickly,** based on an immersive, human-scale experience.”

Tomas Millar
Director of Millar+Howard Workshop

MEETING THE RIBA 2030 CLIMATE CHALLENGE <<

The RIBA is urging chartered practices to sign up to its 2030 Climate Challenge: to deliver net zero whole-life carbon emissions for new buildings and full refurbishment projects by 2030. With UK housing associations increasingly specifying low- or no-carbon housing, Ruth Butler, Alastair Mallett and Maria Smith explain why practices should sign up.

- More than 200 councils have now signed up to carbon reduction targets, while planning authorities in London and Manchester can insist new developments comply with zero-carbon targets.
- Educate the client and contractor. Arrange an introductory day to bring a contractor up to speed on practical issues of low-carbon specifications. It may be worthwhile to enlist the services of a professional consultant to do so.
- Collaborate with service engineers – they have the tools to measure operational energy and potable water usage.
- The RIBA's 2020 Plan of Work will feature a sustainability overlay, helping architects to manage and deliver a sustainable project, integrating sustainability with each work stage.

[Read the full feature on architecture.com](https://www.architecture.com)

“ We need to provide leadership. Let’s show everyone that great architecture is at the core of sustainable building ”

Ruth Butler
Ruth Butler Architects

Ruth Butler is Director, Ruth Butler Architects; **Alastair Mallett** is Technical Director, Noviun Architects; **Loreana Padrón** is Associate Director & Head of Sustainability, ECD Architects; and **Maria Smith** is Director, Interrobang.

Find out more and sign up to the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge



