

## Shifts and Disruptions: What's Next for 2025

By Dr. Paula Raymond Stamp

The second half of 2025 is shaping up to be a pressure test for the A/E/C industry. Economic headwinds remain unpredictable, yet the project pipeline is brisk, and clients are demanding faster, more personalized solutions. Against that backdrop, four macro-trends—artificial intelligence (AI), social media, talent, and client experience—are converging to redraw the playbook for A/E/C firms. What's coming, why it matters, and how we prepare given this ever-evolving landscape is where challenge meets opportunity.

### AI Becomes the New Co-worker—Just Don't Fire the Humans

The SMPS AI Quarterly Insight Report (Q2 2025) reviewed 90 days of conversations, including posts and comments from subreddits dealing with topics such as content marketing, SEO, social media marketing, influencer marketing, advertising, and artificial intelligence. The analysis noted that obvious trends, such as AI-powered content personalization, surfaced alongside less obvious yet growing tactics, such as leveraging user-generated content for SEO benefit. The takeaway: AI is moving from experiments to everyday workflows.

Per Joist AI, a content enablement platform, generative AI is becoming a true co-worker for marketing teams—helping firms draft proposals, pitch decks, and content in a fraction of the time. HubSpot, a sales, marketing, and customer service platform, noted in their Marketing Executive's Playbook that 24% of marketing leaders are already piloting multimodal AI campaigns, and 22% are deploying end-to-end automation agents. What does this mean for marketing? AI augments the process but does not fully take it over. The most successful companies maintain

human oversight to preserve nuance and creativity. In other words, let the algorithms create a boilerplate, but keep your marketers and business developers out front to shape strategy and relationships.

### Social Media Listening and Disruptive Creativity are Commonplace

Social media management platform Hootsuite nailed the current state of social media in their 2025 trends report: nearly 48% of companies devote the majority of their posts to entertain, educate, or inform—not to sell their services. A quarter are “creative risk-takers” focusing purely on entertainment content and storytelling.

Why should A/E/C firms care? Because buyers are scrolling after-hours just like everyone else, and relatable content increases win probability long before an RFQ drops. People are pretty vocal on social media. Firms learn more about what their customers or clients want through reading the brand feeds in real-time than they can by doing a static survey. This “social listening” is already used by 62% of marketers, and you can spot pain points before they show up in a client call. Teams that do this report higher confidence in social ROI.

Add to that an influx of marketers from consumer and tech sectors moving to A/E/C firms, and you get a landscape where TikTok day-in-the-life videos, meme-based SOP manuals, and behind-the-scenes Reels from job-site drone footage will feel normal—because that's how the new talent already plays and works.

### Talent Acquisition Gets Interesting

Talent challenges are accelerating the need for efficiency and strong employer branding. Marketing teams are being asked to do more with less, so automation



matters—and so does showcasing a firm's culture and purpose to attract the next generation of talent. Firms are navigating a major transition. Senior experts are retiring, and there's a shortage of seasoned replacements. That's creating both a talent gap and a knowledge gap—and it's fueling demand for tools that capture institutional knowledge, increase speed to market, and help leaner teams get more done.

Artificial intelligence is disrupting the talent race. According to Joist AI, by 2026, AI agents will start to automate multi-step workflows—monitoring RFP portals, parsing documents, drafting outlines—saving teams hundreds of hours of manual work. Rohan Jawali, CEO & Founder of Joist AI, said, “AI won't replace marketers; it will make them more strategic. The next wave isn't just about automation; it's about precision, personalization, and freeing people up to focus on what truly moves the needle.”

### Client Focus = Digital Transparency

Clients don't wake up wanting your service; they want their problem solved or their facility open on time. SMPS's AEC. BD 2024 research notes that 33% of all buyers and 44% of millennial buyers prefer a “seller-free” experience—the proliferation

of digital tools has been an enormous disruptor to the business development and marketing process, diminishing the need for in-person contact.

Therefore, winning firms are leading with digital transparency:

- *Accessible dashboards*—show schedules, carbon metrics, and change orders in real time for the client to access at anytime from anywhere.

- *Data-driven personalization*—a punch-list email that adapts to a client's project stage and signals you understand their day, not just your scope.

- *Transparency in pricing*—build trust early, especially as AI tools let owners benchmark fees instantly.

### What's Next?

Think of your marketing and business development engine as an interconnected team:

- 1. AI sets the pace**—crunch data, flag opportunities, and auto-draft first passes before humans and our critical thinking skills take the wheel.

- 2. Social creativity keeps the energy high**—turn technical wins into share-worthy storytelling.

- 3. Talent acquisition**—scale for impact, leverage AI, and boost automation with fewer resources.

- 4. Client empathy and transparency**—balance automation with human touch to show clients you hear them.

If you're already experimenting in all four lanes, double down. If not, pick one to start and build momentum. The firms that master this integrated approach won't just survive the next market cycle; they'll set the benchmarks everyone else will follow. ■

*Dr. Paula Raymond Stamp, MBA, FSMPS, CPSM, is the CEO and Principal of Geaux Consulting Group, a business strategy consultancy practice, and Board President of SMPS, a Washington, D.C.-based international association of marketing and business development professionals working together to move the A/E/C industries forward. She can be reached at [paula@geauxconsultinggroup.com](mailto:paula@geauxconsultinggroup.com).*

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