Report on a Case by the Board of Ethical Review

Case No. 63-3

Subject: Advertising-Repeated Use of Card
Canon 2-Canons of Ethics; Rule 5-Rules of Professional Conduct.

Facts:
A book-type bound directory for a particular industry consisting of several hundred pages, and having a distribution of over 6,000 copies within the industry, includes business and professional cards in the margins of the various pages. A consulting engineering firm, specializing in the engineering work for the industry involved, published its professional card in the same issue of the directory on ten different pages. The card in question met the requirements of being dignified, reputable and free of any factor that would bring disrepute to the profession, and the card was limited to facts.

Question:
Is the repeated publication of a professional card in a trade directory offensive to the Canons of Ethics?

References:
Canons of Ethics-Canon 2-"He will not advertise his work or merit in a self-laudatory manner and he will avoid all conduct or practice likely to discredit or do injury to the dignity and honor of his profession."

Rules of Professional Conduct -Rule 5-"Circumspect advertising may be properly employed by the engineer to announce his practice and availability. The form and manner of such advertising shall satisfy in all respects the dictate and intent of the Canons. Only those media shall be used as are necessary to reach directly an interested and potential client or employer, and such media shall in themselves be dignified, reputable and characteristically free of any factor or circumstance that would bring disrepute to the profession or to the professional using them. The substance of such advertising shall be limited to fact and shall contain no statement or offer intended to discredit or displace another engineer, either specifically or by implication."

Discussion:
It is accepted practice for engineers to publish professional cards in professional and business journals. It is equally permissible to publish a professional card in a trade directory as a means to reach an interested and potential client.

The ethical question raised, therefore, is limited to the fact that the card was used ten times in the same issue of the directory. It was apparently thought by the consulting firm that in a large directory with a great many pages, the users of the directory would be more apt to note the card in a number of places, whereas it might be overlooked if appearing on only one page. While this may be a sound business reason for repeated

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use of the card, we think the repetitive use of a professional card in the same publication is not in good taste, even though the content of the card in and of itself is not self-laudatory. Rule 5 permits "circumspect" advertising and we think that this applies to form as well as content. When a professional card is used repetitively in the same publication, it takes on the nature of business or commercial advertising, as distinguished from a dignified offer of professional services. Rule 5 specifically refers to both "form and manner" in stating that advertising "shall satisfy in all respects the dictate and intent of the Canons." Likewise, Canon 2 limits advertising to practice which will not discredit the dignity and honor of the profession.

Conclusion:
Multiple insertion of a professional card in the same issue of a trade directory is a violation of the Canons of Ethics.

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