Report on a Case by the Board of Ethical Review

Case No. 68-9

Advertising - Professional Cards

Facts:
An engineering firm which specializes in airport design and other engineering services carries two cards in a state society professional engineering magazine. One is the normal professional card which lists the name, address, and telephone number of the firm, and its fields of specialization. This card is of uniform style and size as that of similar cards of other firms.

The second card is on a different page and of larger size than the uniform professional cards. It provides the same information as the professional card, but in addition states: "Airport design & layout planning is our specialty. We will fly in to meet with your commission or council anywhere in the forty-eight contiguous states."

Question:
Are these cards in accordance with the Code of Ethics?

Reference:
Code of Ethics-Section 3 (a)- "Circumspect advertising may be properly employed by the engineer to announce his practice and availability under the following conditions:

"(1) Professional cards in recognized, dignified publications, and listings in rosters or directories published by responsible organizations are acceptable forms, provided that the cards or listings are consistent in size and content, not in excess of one-quarter page, and are in a section of the publication regularly devoted to such professional cards. Information given must be restricted to firm name, address, telephone number, names of principal participants, and the fields of practice in which the firm is qualified. A dignified symbol or art work representative of the firm's practice may be used.

"(2) Identification of the firm name, address, and telephone number on vehicles and equipment together with services related thereto.

"(3) Brochures and other factual representations of experience, facilities, personnel, and capacity to render service, providing they are not misleading with respect to the engineer's direct participation in the projects described.

"(4) A statement of his name or the name of his firm and statement of his type of service may be posted on projects for which he renders services."

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Discussion:
This case was submitted prior to the amendment of the Code of Ethics by the NSPE Board of Directors in July, 1968, as quoted above.

In view of the change in the Code the previous cases on advertising are no longer applicable from the standpoint of the analyses of wording in the advertisement.

The revised Section 3 (a), in effect, now prohibits all advertising of engineering services with the exception of professional cards and then only within the stated limits, plus the items in subparagraphs (2), (3), and (4).

On this basis, it is not necessary to review the text of the second card in this case because it falls outside of the permissible use of professional cards. As a separate card of larger size it is an advertisement. The text itself confirms the advertising nature of the card by its promotional tone.

Under the revised Code provision, any professional card of engineering firms may not ethically contain promotional statements or text beyond that permitted in section 3 (a) (1).

Conclusion:*
The professional card is in accordance with the Code of Ethics. The second card is in the nature of an advertisement not permitted by the Code of Ethics.

***Note**-This opinion is based on data submitted to the Board of Ethical Review and does not necessarily represent all of the pertinent facts when applied to a specific case. This opinion is for educational purposes only and should not be construed as expressing any opinion on the ethics of specific individuals. This opinion may be reprinted without further permission, provided that this statement is included before or after the text of the case.

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