

**Report on a Case by the Board of Ethical Review  
Case No. 61-3****Subject:****Advertising of Engineering Services-Display Canon 2-Canons of Ethics; Rule 5-Rules of Professional Conduct.****Facts:**

For many years the availability of engineering services has been brought to the attention of the business community and the public through advertisements in a great variety of publications. These range from technical and trade publications of limited circulation to the general press and nationally circulated magazines. Such advertisements also range in size from so-called "professional cards" of one column inch to full page and double-page "spreads." The styles range from a simple few lines of type to elaborate designs, employing art work and color. The text of such advertisements generally convey the availability of the firm or company for engineering services, in general, or in a specialized field of technical knowledge. The simpler forms may simply state the name and address of the engineering organization and the more elaborate advertisements may refer to past accomplishments, statements of experience and competence and an invitation to contact the engineering organization for additional information. The types of organizations involved in such advertising efforts embrace organizations which provide only consulting engineering services, companies which offer engineering services in conjunction with an over-all manufacturing or fabricating function and companies which specialize in the design and construction of engineering projects, sometimes including also management and financial services.

**Question:**

Do the Canons of Ethics and Rules of Professional Conduct prohibit or restrict advertising of professional engineering services as to size, format or style, and, if so, to what degree?

**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 in tended to discredit or displace another engineer, either specifically or by implication."

**Discussion:**

In Case Number 59-1 we discussed more limited types of advertising through three examples and indicated whether certain words or phrases in those advertisements were of an ethical nature. It was then noted that Canon 2 impliedly authorizes the advertising of engineering services short of "self-laudatory" advertising, and that Rule 5 specifically recognizes the right to engage in advertising for professional engineering services within the limitations stated in the Rule.

It is clear that neither the Canons nor the Rules provide any limitations or guides as to size, format or type of advertising, provided that the advertisements are not "self-laudatory," or "circumspect," and the media employed are "dignified," and "reputable." It is assumed in this discussion that the advertisements are limited to fact and do not contain statements or offers intended to discredit or displace another engineer.

The only basis under the Canons and Rules for holding that certain advertisements are improper based solely on size, format or style would be a finding that they injure "the dignity and honor" of the profession, or would "bring disrepute to the profession." At the same time, it is realized that a substantial segment of the engineering profession looks with disfavor upon advertisements which are felt to be "too commercial," although there is no precise definition of the meaning and application of this term other than individual personal opinion. This Board is without authority to impose conditions or limitations on advertising which are not Supported by the Canons or Rules.

**Conclusion:**

The Canons of Ethics and Rules of Professional Conduct do not prohibit or restrict advertisement of engineering services as to size, format or style, provided such advertisement is dignified, circumspect and in good taste, and is not self-laudatory.

Board of Ethical Review - MARVIN C. NICHOLS, P. E

Note: Member Nelson did not participate in the consideration or decision of this opinion.