Why real estate agents rarely rank highly in search engine results

by AGBeat in Business Marketing - December 6, 2012

As the listing syndication debate remains contentious, brokers are battling for consumer eyeballs. A new study reveals that it is a major challenge for real estate agents to be found in search engine results.

Realtors and search engine results

The long running real estate listing syndication debate has been heated and resulted in brokers across America evaluating the final destination(s) for their company's listings. It has been contentious for many reasons, but the underlying reason the industry remains in upheaval is search engine rankings, leaving real estate professionals to analyze whether syndicators are helpful or hurtful when it comes to connecting with consumers.
After reviewing results, brokers are coming to different conclusions to this same question, which is why Real Geeks IDX Provider studied the current state of real estate SERPS (search engine result pages) to examine how a real estate professional's listing is showing up in search engines and why so that brokers can make more informed decisions.

In the first part of Real Geeks' series on the topic, they point out that when consumers search for terms like "Tampa Real Estate," it is no longer likely that an individual agent or even brokerage is at the top of the search engine results in the first, second, or third page, rather the results are dominated by large syndicators or national brands.

This is the very reason that some brokers have opted out of syndicating, as they don't seek to help syndicators to outrank them individually, while others continue to syndicate as they continue to garner most of their business through the large sites.

Current state of real estate SERPS

When Real Geeks did a search with "[city] real estate" (while logged out of Google, of course) with the top 50 metro areas by population, they logged the first three pages of Google results. Of the 1691 individuals collected from the first three pages of the top 50 metros, 30 percent of page one listings were local sites, 8.0 percent of which were Google Plus pages.

Fully 58 percent of page one listings were traditional organic pages rather than paid listings or ads, 47 percent of which were root pages (homepages), and 53 percent of which were interior pages (not homepages). Further, 5.0 percent of all page one results were for news organizations.

Real Geeks offers that this is a challenge for individual real estate professionals, because when you consider the number of independent agents in a given city, of the three local listings on page one (results that are not syndicators, big brands, or news), the odds are stacked against a single agent making the cut to be one of those three on page one.

(Real Geeks post below is by itself a companion to this article)

The State of Real Estate SERPS

This is the first post in a series on how independent real estate agents can improve their search engine rankings.

By Real Geeks

Have you noticed something different about the search engine results pages (SERPS) lately? Specifically, when you use Google to search for terms related to your business and your local area, does your site appear? Do any sites belonging to independent real estate agents in your area appear? They probably do, but it's likely they're not coming up on the first page of Google. They're possibly not even on the second page, either. That means it's more difficult for your potential customers to find you, and that's not good for your business.

The current state of real estate SERPs is a little disturbing. Large national brands are dominating the SERPs, keeping the smaller sites – like yours – pushed further down, where potential customers are unlikely to look. This is easily demonstrated by performing a simple search of your city followed by the phrase "real estate", as in "Chicago real estate".

We did just that for the top 50 metro areas in the United States (by population), and logged the first three pages of Google results. This is what we found:

- 1691 individuals URLs collected from the first 3 pages of the top 50 U.S. Metros = average of 34 listings per metro-

- 750 individual URLs collected from page 1 of the top 50 U.S. Metros = average 15 listings per page-

- 30% of page 1 listings were local sites (8% of those local pages were Google Plus pages)-

- 58% of page 1 listings were traditional organic (rather than paid listings or ads) (438 of the top 750)-

- 5% [age 1 listings were for news sites (35 of the 750)-

- 53% of organic listings were interior pages (pages other than the home page) (231 of the 438)-

- 47% of organic listings were root pages (home pages)-

- 40% of organic root pages were localized domains/subdomains (contained the full city name in the URL, i.e., (http://chicagorealestate.com)

What does all that mean? Well, first of all, the statistic that should stand out the most to you is this one:

30% of page 1 listings were local sites

This means when we did those "<city name> real estate" searches, only 30% of the results on page 1 of Google were for local – not national – sites. Google displays ten search results per page, not including the local pack that appears at the top of page 1. So in these searches, only three results were for local sites.

Consider the number of independent real estate agents in your area. Is your site one of those three listings on page 1 when someone searches for "<your city> real estate"? What are the odds?

The answer is, they're not good. It's much more likely your site isn't appearing on the first page of Google, and is possibly difficult for potential customers to find unless they really do some digging through the SERPs.

Now, think about how you search, and how often you click past the first page to find what you're looking for. Not often, right? The same is likely true for most of your potential customers as well.

This series will go into great detail about the state of real estate SERPs, what's affecting them, how you may be unwittingly putting yourself at a disadvantage against the 800-pound gorillas in the space, and what you can do about all this to improve your site's visibility in the SERPs, thereby improving your business.

Our next post will discuss predatory linking practices, widget spam, and how you're helping Zillow and Trulia to outrank you.