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4 secrets of real estate agent marketing

Win more clients with 'inbound' tactics

BY BERNICE ROSS

In the early 1990s, personal marketing brochures were all the rage. This spawned two decades of the "Me! Me! Me!" show in real estate marketing. This approach simply doesn't work in today's conversation-based social media environment. So what does?

Several years ago Best Agent Business surveyed more than 1,000 consumers to find out what they liked and what they didn't like about real estate agent marketing programs. The feedback was stunning, to say the least.

First, with the exception of one person who was in marketing, everyone who responded to the survey was in agreement: "We hate cold calls!"

The same was true for postcards with your picture on them. As one consumer summed it up so eloquently, "Who do these people think they are? Movie stars?"

Another example that supports the Best Agent Business findings comes from a marketing company handling postcard-marketing campaigns for its real estate customers. The campaigns were very successful until the agents had the marketing company change one thing: adding the agent's picture to the postcard. Time and time again, this caused the response rate to drop to virtually zero.

This trend has been amplified by changes brought about by social media. So many agents and companies claim to be No. 1 that the consumers tune out all the hype. In fact, the trend cuts across virtually every type of advertising.

People simply don't believe the hype in ads. Instead, today's consumers seek out peer-to-peer endorsements through social media sites such as Twitter, or ratings sites such as Flixster, TripAdvisor and Yelp.

So what does this all mean in terms of how you conduct your real estate business? Here are some important guidelines for success in today's market.

1. Enough about you -- let's talk about me!

Today's consumers want to work with agents who care about who they are, understand their lifestyle, and can match these factors with the right house and the right community. They are likely less interested in hearing *all about you* and your accomplishments, but they may want you to share some details about yourself (see No. 4 below) to find common interests.

Also, those agronomy's after your name that so many agents list on websites and business cards may not matter much to consumers: an Inman News survey of agents who earn more than \$100,000 per year found that there was not a correlation between National Association of Realtors designations and level of production.

2. Use "you" language, not "I" and "me" language

To make the transition to speaking to today's consumers in a way that will resonate with them, shift from using "I" and "me" language to using "you" language. Here are two examples:

"When can I drop by to discuss the comparable sales that I found?"

"What time would be convenient for you to discuss the latest comparable sales for your property?"

In the first example, where is the focus? The word "I" places it upon the agent. In the second example, by eliminating the word "I" and substituting the word "you," it becomes about the client.

As a corollary to this rule, also avoid using the word "we." When you tell clients, "When we list your house" or "when we sell your house" or "when we

close your transaction," then when something goes wrong "we" are expected to pay for it.

The approach here is to keep this simple guideline in mind: "It's their house, it's their mortgage, and it's their decision."

3. Inbound vs. outbound marketing

The folks at HubSpot draw an important distinction between "inbound" and "outbound" marketing. In the past, advertisers broadcast information about their products. This is known as "outbound" marketing.

Today, the smartest marketers recognize that the best advertisement is "word of mouth" or "inbound" marketing. This occurs when someone else says how great you and your services are as opposed to you proclaiming that you are the best.

To capitalize on the inbound marketing approach, use video. When a client closes a transaction, ask her permission to take a video of her as she unlocks the front door and walks into her new home for the first time as a homeowner. At the same time, ask what was it about this home that she loved that motivated her to buy it.

This type of testimonial builds your credibility as an agent who is capable of helping his or her clients find the house that was best suited for their needs. Of course, don't be shy about asking for a testimonial for your services as well.

4. Give-to-get marketing

Video is a powerful tool for creating credibility as well as raising your ranking on the search engines. An excellent way to leverage this trend is to use LinkedIn. Where LinkedIn really shines is peer-to-peer testimonials.

A simple way to increase the number of testimonials you receive is to do a testimonial exchange with people in your referral database. Normally when you post a testimonial for someone else, he or she is happy to do the same for you as well.

While business testimonials are important, have you ever considered getting testimonials from other people who know and appreciate you as a person? Personal similarities that clients find in you can form the foundation for a connection that leads to transactions in today's environment.

But remember the bottom line: Don't make all of your messaging all about you. Focus on your clients, their lifestyle, and giving before expecting to get. It's a great way to build your business in today's social media-based engagement environment.

Bernice Ross, CEO of RealEstateCoach.com, is a national speaker, trainer and author of the National Association of Realtors' No. 1 best-seller, "Real Estate Dough: Your Recipe for Real Estate Success." Hear Bernice's five-minute daily real estate show, just named "new and notable" by iTunes, at www.RealEstateCoachRadio.com. You can contact her at Bernice@RealEstateCoach.com or [@BRoss](https://twitter.com/BRoss) on Twitter.