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5 Simple Ways to Perk up Your Web Site

Is your site following these best practices? If not, your online image may be at risk.

By Michael Russer

As I often emphasize, there's so much potential for you to generate business through your real estate Web site. Last month I talked about [how to increase your site traffic by landing high on search engines' results pages](#), which is one good way to get visitors to find you.

But once you succeed at getting prospects to land on your site, are you giving them what they wanted? Or better yet, are you exceeding their expectations? If you want to keep them coming back, the answer to both questions must be yes.

So this month, I'm going back to the basics to talk about five things that all real estate Web sites must do in order to engage visitors, generate leads, and encourage repeat visits. Go down this list and see if your site is following these best practices. If not, it's time to tune up your Web image!

1. **Target, Target, Target.** I've said it a thousand times and I'll say it again: Targeting your Web site to a specific niche market is the most powerful thing you can do to make your site truly effective as a lead generation tool. The vast majority of practitioners make the mistake of using generic Web site formats that try to speak to everyone — which ends up engaging no one. Your site must be able to answer the question:

“What’s in it for me?” from the perspective of a specific target market, otherwise your visitors will simply ignore it. Here are some examples:

- www.skiptheoutfit.com (this has to be one of the most unique target markets I’ve ever seen!)
- www.goarmyhomes.com
- www.nosnownaples.com

2. **Make Web Copy “Speak” To Your Prospects.** Effective Web copy starts with headlines that grab your visitors’ attention. Without good headlines, chances are slim that the average Web visitor will read anything else on your site. Your headlines need to be crafted in such a way that they reflect the “emotional profile” of your target market. For example, headlines designed for first-time buyers should tap into the excitement and uncertainties that consumers feel before buying their first home. Headlines written for the sophisticated luxury buyer or seller, on the other hand, are much more subtle and refined — often appealing to the ego of this particular market segment. Also, the body of your Web copy should create a one-on-one conversation between you and your visitor. They should feel that you are speaking with them as if you are sitting right next to each other. In my experience it seems that most agent Web sites are written in either first person (“I” and “me”) or third person (about you, as if you were a celebrity). If you really want to connect with your visitors, have your copy written in second person, where there are lots of “you”, “your”, “yours.” This may seem like a minor point; but from the perspective of your Web visitors it makes all the difference in the world.

3. **Be Friendly to the Internet-Empowered Consumer.** Online prospects want to keep their identity private, yet access abundant information for their home search. If you’re not careful, your site could end up driving these visitors away. Here are some standards of Web design to help make sure your Web visitors feel welcome.

- **Have a privacy policy.** Make your visitors know if or how you will use their information. Create a policy and then post it prominently on your site.
- **Don't require visitors to say who they are.** Consumers use the Internet because it affords them a sense of anonymity, so let them browse listings freely. If you have forms on your site, make sure that visitors know that they're not required to fill everything out. If you insist that they enter their contact information, you will likely drive many of them away. Human nature is really interesting. Tell people they have to do something and you will find a load of resistance. Reassure them they don't, and they probably will give their information just like your friendly approach.
- **Provide instant feedback.** When a visitor completes a form, have your site instantly show a confirmation or "Thank You" page. This adds to the perception that you "heard" the visitor's request, making that person feel more connected. Your site can also fire off a confirmation e-mail, as well.

4. **Keep Your Site Navigation Simple.** Don't confuse your visitors. There's lots of real estate information out there, so do them a service by presenting the best of the best, and presenting it in a way that they can easily browse. Too many real estate home pages are offering way too many options. At most, you want your site's main navigation menu to offer no more than seven choices. Within each of these main menu options you can have submenus, but don't go overboard with those either. Also, avoid having your visitors work too hard to find what they want. Ideally, all your content should be within three clicks reach from the home page.

5. **Maintain a Consistent, Visitor-Friendly Design.** Make sure the look and feel of your Web design is consistent throughout the site. It should also be appropriate for your target market. For example, less

sophisticated target markets — first-time buyers, for example — can have a more light-hearted design approach. More sophisticated ones — such as luxury buyers and investors — require a more refined and stylish look. Ideally, have your site located to show up in the center of the browser window, designed to fit (without horizontal scrolling) for monitors set at 1024 x 768 pixel resolution or greater. Lastly, make sure your Web designer has your site conform to [W3C standards](#) and use appropriate Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to control the look and feel of your site. (Don't worry if you didn't quite understand that last sentence, just make sure your Web designer does!)