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Create content that gives real estate consumers what they want

Agents can build trust, offer answers to basic questions

BY ANDREA V. BRAMBILA

SAN FRANCISCO -- While getting a consumer to contact them may be the marketing aim of most real estate professionals, consumers themselves have little interest in talking to them -- at least at first, according to Brian Clark, who spoke last week at the Real Estate Connect and Agent Reboot conferences.

"Buyers want home listings; sellers want to know what their home is worth. Don't ever make the mistake of thinking that people want to talk to you," Clark said. Clark is the founder of Copyblogger, a site that offers online marketing advice.

Too many real estate professionals make the mistake of talking about themselves instead of directly addressing consumers' problems and offering solutions, he said.

"If you can get someone to request a CMA (comparative market analysis) from you, you've got a lead," Clark said.

Between 2001-05, Clark ran an online real estate brokerage and found online marketing the part of the business he did best -- he had no problem generating leads, he said.

*"Content strategy is simple -- not easy, but simple," Clark said. Agents' approach should be threefold: **Who do I want to reach? What do they want? How do you get what you want by giving them what they want?"***

Clark advises that agents look to local media producers instead of other real estate professionals as their competition in the blogosphere.

"People want content before they want a pitch. That's the main underlying philosophy of Internet marketing," he said.

"The fact that people pass around content is the greatest word-of-mouth marketing ever. You have to create (great) content, but you don't have to pay money for them to share. If you think like a publisher or a media company first and your monetization strategy is in real estate ... (that) could make you a fortune," he added.

Agents should provide content that no one else is providing at the neighborhood level, he said. "Lifestyle is what you build your content around. It's the next phase of (a consumer's) life -- they're not just buying a house."

In terms of search engine optimization, content that's too broad is a nonstarter.

For instance, with popular keywords like "Dallas homes" and "Dallas real estate," "You're not going to rank for that. You're just not," Clark said.

After developing general content about particular neighborhoods, the next step is to target specific types of consumers by creating tutorials for first-time homebuyers or relocating buyers, for example. If the tutorials are sent out by email over a period of weeks or months, that's also an incentive for people to provide their email addresses, Clark added.

"It's counterintuitive, but I see it happen time and time again: You make more money by going more narrow. I'm not saying turn ... business down if it shows up," but "knowing exactly who you want is the first step of your content strategy," Clark said.

"Who is your ideal client? Who is being underserved? Who are your competitors ignoring? Or go with your passion: Who do I really like to work with? Who am I excited about?"

Targeting helps the agent create content that connects with "the worldview and desires and problems of (those) people," Clark added.

"Some of the most effective online marketers annoy or inspire outright hate in 98 percent of the people that come to their site, but that 2 percent love them so much they buy everything."

At that point, consumers "will be open to a phone call from you because they think they know you," Clark said.

"That's why you lead with information, so they get what they want and get to know you. All you're doing is you're trying to get people to know, like and trust you so they contact you as their Realtor," he added.

Developing content is a lot of work and may even require hiring a freelance writer or two, "which is not as expensive as it sounds," Clark said.

"It needs to be basically a form of journalism. But it doesn't pretend to be objective. (You say), 'The reason I'm providing you with this information is because I'm in the real estate business,' " he said.

Go basic

Content creation can often be intimidating for agents who want to build their online presence on social media and blogs. But it doesn't have to be, according to speaker and social media consultant Laura Roeder.

"A lot of people are guilty of writing for their peers and not their audience. Your clients are probably not looking for the most innovative theory (on real estate) -- they're looking for very basic things," Roeder said.

"It's so easy to take for granted all the things you know, so to you it seems silly to write a blog post about 'What's a mortgage?' "but that's the kind of information an agent's true audience -- people looking to buy or sell a home -- loves, Roeder said.

While such content may not win any awards, "if you focus on the very most basic, elementary-level topics, I promise you will get a great response to your blog," she added.

There is any easy way to come up with those topics, she said: "Write down the questions people ask you. It really is that simple. You know 20 of these at the top of your head. If you can't think of more, go through your inbox."

If an agent can think of 52 questions and blogs once a week, that's a year's worth of blog posts, she said.

"Make sure these are topics you want to write about" or they'll be a chore to complete, she said.

The posts don't have to be long articles, she added. They can simply have the question as a headline and an answer of any length below.

"It's not necessarily the most original content," but as an agent builds up an audience, that audience will return for the agent's take on a topic even if there are other sources elsewhere, Roeder said.

By posting ads at the end of posts, agents can also use their blog to send consumers to their niche sites, Roeder added.

Roeder recommended agents draw up an editorial calendar of what they're going to write, how often, and what day(s) of the week, so that their audience knows what to expect. Stay consistent, she said. "If people see a dead blog, they might think you've gone out of business."

Post frequency

Conference speakers had differing opinions on how often an agent should post to a blog or social network. Roeder said it was "a terrible idea" to write a blog post every day when one has a business to run.

Alex Chang, co-founder and CEO of social media marketing company Roost, recommended between one and three posts of original or curate content every day to Facebook. "Certainly daily, for sure," he said.

Todd Carpenter, director of digital engagement for the National Association of Realtors, said the trade group doesn't post on Facebook more than once a day.

"We used to (post) three a day. We were pushing down our own posts. We got more impressions posting once a day than three times a day," he said.

Twitter is different because of the sheer volume of accounts most people follow, Carpenter said. "Tweet away. Put as much stuff up there as you can handle."

Emily White, senior director of local for Facebook, said, "We have found a sweet spot that we're still looking into: three times a week. (You) don't want to spam people."

For engagement purposes, setting up alerts to let you know when someone else comments or "likes" a post is important, said Geoff Cramer, founder and CEO of social media marketing company SocialMadeSimple.

And when it comes to offering curate content, agents should say why they are sharing that content, he added.

"It can be as simple as one sentence," he said.

Chang agreed. "When you share the article, that's your opportunity to bring you into the equation -- you as a Realtor," he said.

But "please don't go into Google and find the only other article that says the housing market is doing really well," because that can hurt your credibility when every other article they see disagrees, Cramer said.

Bombarding social networks with listings is also taboo.

"There's nothing wrong with sharing listings. You are an agent, that's a big part of your life. But don't sell that listing. Be personal about it," Cramer said. For instance, one agent he knows put up a Facebook post about baking cookies for an open house and how hard it was not to eat them on the car ride over.

"You want people to understand that you're good at marketing homes," Chang said. Nevertheless, "the first person I hide on Facebook is the person who's filled up my feed with 10 listings.

"But if you have one killer listing and you're talking about how you love what they did with (a particular feature), I love that."