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5 smart tech tools for real estate agents

How to be more productive in less time

BY BERNICE ROSS

With so many hoops to jump through to close transactions, falling home prices, and unrealistic sellers and buyers, today's agents have to hustle harder than ever before. This doesn't have to be the case. With the right systems and the right processes in place, you can work smarter rather than hustling harder.

Everyone has systems. The question is: Which systems support your business to thrive vs. which systems create a drag on your production? A system can be as simple as taking a different route to work each day to search for for-sale-by-owner homes, or as complex as doing all your business online.

The hallmarks of a strong system are that it is repeatable, it reduces time and effort, and it yields consistent results. If you're interested in working smarter rather than hustling harder, here are five areas where you can begin to systematize your business.

1. Simplify your phone and message system

If you're like most agents, you have multiple phone numbers on your business card. It's much easier for clients to contact you on a single phone number. One of the simplest solutions is to use Google Voice. Google Voice provides you with a single phone number that goes to every one of your phones in the order you specify.

Your clients can find you easily, no matter where you are. Google Voice also allows you to keep your cell phone and your home phone private. When you

are in a situation where you cannot take a voice call, Google Voice can transcribe your message into an email or text message. Surprisingly, there is no charge for this service, and it works both in the U.S. and Canada.

2. Go paperless

An increasing number of companies and agents are electing to go paperless. Many associations already publish their various contracts in a digital format. You can download these forms to any type of computer. They may also be available in the "cloud," using systems such as DocuSign. Digital signatures can be obtained either through the equivalent of a lock-and-key approach (think of your credit card number tied to a password) or with an actual digital signature. On the tablet PCs, your clients sign their documents with a light pen. On the iPad, they can sign using their finger with apps such as Zosh.

Another way to go paperless is to create a digital pre-list package. In addition to the various forms and documents required to close a transaction, you can include a sample 90-day marketing plan, a digital brochure of the seller's property, plus a link to the single-property website that you create for your sellers. Going paperless is one of the most effective ways to save both time and gasoline costs.

3. Blogging: as simple as an email

Many agents struggle with the idea of starting and maintaining a blog. There's a simple solution, and it's right in the outbox of your email. If you're like most agents, you haven't cleaned your outbox recently. If this is the case, look back through your past emails. Every email where you answered a client question is a potential blog post.

A simple way to create great content for your blog is to answer client questions using your blog rather than your email. Post both the question and the answer in your blog. You can also post market updates plus upcoming neighborhood events.

If you enjoy taking photos or videos, post them on your blog or your Facebook business page. Since most blogging platforms allow you to schedule your posts at a later date, increase the effectiveness of your system by doing all of your posts at the same time each week. Plug in the time and date you want the post published and the blogging platform handles it automatically.

4. Systematize your social media activities

Your interactions on social media are another great area to systematize. For example, if you have 150 Facebook friends, take 10 minutes each day to either "like" or comment on something that five of your friends post. At the end of the month, you will have contacted all 150 of your friends at least once.

Another approach is to use a system such as HootSuite. When you come across an article, picture, blog post, or some other online material that you believe your friends or followers may like, you can click the "Tweet this" button and HootSuite automatically creates a Tweet and posts to Facebook as well.

You can send the Tweet as is or modify it. The process takes just a few seconds and allows you to provide your followers with great information with a minimal amount of effort.

5. Use Evernote for presentations, inspections and walkthroughs

How much time do you spend entering notes you have taken at listing appointments, inspections or walkthroughs on your computer? The paid version of Evernote allows you to take notes on your smartphone, iPad or personal computer. Evernote then makes those notes available on all of your Evernote-enabled devices simultaneously.

Instead of wasting time transferring this information from a handwritten form into a digital format, Evernote eliminates having to enter data twice saving you tremendous amounts of time and effort.

Which systems are best for you? The real test is in finding a system and then developing the habit of working with it regularly. The more you work with a system, the more efficient your use of the system becomes.

If the increasingly fast pace of the real estate business is draining your energy, a systems approach may be exactly what you need to put you back in control. Having systems that support you and your business is critical to surviving in today's fast-paced environment.

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