

## Web Site Marketing for Realtors

**Cost Effective Generation of Qualified Leads** – this is the basic goal of all marketing campaigns. Newspaper ads, specialty magazines, farming, social networking, radio ads, TV ads, and loaner trucks with you name on the side and the Internet are all lead generating tools. Effective marketing programs generally exploit several channels simultaneously where each “tool” supports the other. This document will focus entirely on the Internet, as a lead generating tool but you should consider your use of the web as only one component of your overall lead generation strategy. Web assisted local marketing is the new buzz phrase for this activity. The effectiveness of traditional channels can be augmented or amplified by combining them with an effective web site. For example a small-classified newspaper ad with a web site address may be more cost effective than a display ad in the same paper. Pens, refrigerator magnets, direct mail flyers and business cards should have your web site address. The balance of this paper will focus on five topics.

1. Specifying a new web site.
2. Improving an existing web site
3. Soliciting information from a web site visitors
4. Search Engine Marketing
5. Pay-per-click search engine strategy

### **Specifying a new web site.**

How do you get started? How much will it cost? How long will it take? Will it generate cost effective, qualified leads? You can probably add 50 more questions to the list. To get started sit down with a blank piece of paper and starting writing search phrases. Write down phrases you think potential visitors to your web site might use to find your site using a search engine. Write as many phrases as you can. Look at the key words in the phrases and use your thesaurus to create phrases using synonyms. Edit your list of phrases down to the ten most important. Use these phrases to search the web, visit the sites that appear in the ten. These web sites should be your competitors. If they are not you may have the wrong phrases. When creating phrases be sure to use regional or geographic words. “Truckee real estate” is a better search phrase than “real estate”. Study you competitor’s sites. Make extensive notes on what you like and what you don’t like. Be sure to write down the URL for each site you make notes on. At this point you should have a vision of your web site developing. The next step is to write 300 words about your site incorporating the most important key phrases you developed earlier. Make a list of all the pages you envision. Put the pages in outline form and think about how they relate to each other. Imagine you are sitting down with a prospect. Write text in a conversational form as though you are talking to the prospect. The more you write the better.

If you don’t have a domain name it is now a good time to register one. You want a name ending in .com. It should be short, easy to remember, and should describe your site. Don’t select a name that is easily misspelled or a name with hyphens or numbers. If you find several names that suite you register them all (\$14 each) then decide later, which one

will be your primary name. The extra names will not go to waste. They can be employed in more advanced search engine marketing programs. You can check name registrations at our web site. <http://www.focusedweb.com> click on name registration.

It is now time to spend money. If you have done your homework you will know what you want and you will get good value for your money. Think about what you can afford to spend. What is a good web site worth? What constitutes a good web site? One that generates qualified sales leads. What are good qualified leads worth? A lead that turns into a sale is worth thousands. If a web site has a life of two years and it generates one good house closing lead per month it is most likely worth thousands. The real question may be what will it cost me if I don't have an effective web site.

You are now ready to talk with a web developer. Maintain your focus. You want good qualified leads. That is all you really want this web site to do. Everything else is a diversion. An elegant front page using flash will cost a lot of money and send some visitors away because they don't want to wait for it. Will it generate more leads? Talk with your web developer and make sure they understand what your goals are for this web site. View each element as to how it will contribute to the primary mission, generating good qualified leads. Graphics and photos should support the text message not the other way round. Are you planning a simple navigation scheme? Think about every page. Is there a call to action? The call to action may be as simple as clicking on to the next page, but you should be conscious of the call to action. The key to generating leads is traffic. The key to traffic is good search engine ranking. It is imperative you consider search engine ranking at the very early stages of web site development. Make sure your web site developer understands you want a site that will rank well with the major search engines. It doesn't cost any more to build a site that will rank well with search engines. It can cost a great deal to modify an ineffective site later. Simple things like using navigation link names that contain key phrases can substantially contribute to your success with search engines.

**Linking to other sites and providing community information.** Many realtor web sites are built with the philosophy that they should be a central source of community information by providing maps, community calendars, useful telephone numbers, community history etc. Do sites offering extensive community information generate more cost effective qualified leads or do they distract a prospect from his primary mission of identifying himself to you? Community information is a good thing if it is accurate and easy to use. Unfortunately many sites providing community information fail to keep the information current, which gives a negative impression to the client. Some realtors provide links to timely community information located on other sites. This is a nice gesture but it is not cost effective to spend money-getting visitors to your site then give them the opportunity to leave by clicking on a link. It is easy to argue in favor of extensive community information on a realtor web site. It provides better search engine exposure and a means of encouraging prospects with a long-term time horizon to return to the site, accessing the community content numerous times before they identify themselves as prospects. If you are going to include community information make provisions to keep it up to date.

### **Improving an existing web site**

This is like remodeling an old home. It is often easier to just start over. If you start over or do a major overhaul make sure you consider current search engine listings of old page addresses. If one of your old pages was called mywebsite.com/new\_listings.html and your new version of the same page is called mywebsite.com/listings/new\_listings.html you will lose the benefit of existing search engine listings. Potential visitors may search for sites like yours and be given a result with the old page address. When they click on it they will receive a page not found message. This is a very common problem. Web developers just don't consider the old listings in the search engine databases. The way to solve this problem is to use the old address for the new page or create a refresh page with the old address refreshing to the browser to the front page of your site or the section containing the new information. When you talk with a potential web developer ask her how she will deal with the old search engine listings this will give you a clue as to their experience with web site marketing.

When our clients are contemplating significant modifications to their existing site we recommend they go through the same process as they would with a new site. Search phrases, writing a 300 word description and review of competitive sites. The knowledge gained with this exercise will make the process of improving their existing web site more efficient. You, or your web developer should review old server logs to see how visitors actually use your existing site. It is like having an office building where you are planning a major renovation. If you study how the current tenants are using the building you will do a better job of designing the improvements.

### **Soliciting information from a web site visitor**

The second most common complaint we hear from web site owners is; "they will not fill out the form" or "they don't fill out the whole form" visitors are reluctant to identify themselves. Have you addressed the question from the web visitor's point of view? "What's in it for me?" What incentive do they have to fill out the form? Filling out the form is a commitment. It is giving permission for a contact. You have to give them something that is not already on your web site. Our experience has shown that real prospects with an immediate interest pick up the phone and call. Put your phone number on every page.

The easiest information to solicit from a web site visitor is an e-mail address the most difficult is a phone number. Don't demand a visitor fill out a detail form by making the fields mandatory. They will simply go away. Be satisfied with just the e-mail address to start. We assume you will implement a process to develop these e-mail address "suspects" into "prospects". The best way to get an e-mail address is to provide a timely piece of information by e-mail auto responder. You can offer something like hot new listings or a current calendar of events. The offer is to e-mail this information to the visitor immediately. They enter the e-mail address in a form, hit the submit button and, within a few seconds, you send them an e-mail with the information piece attached. They have the information they wanted and you have their e-mail address.

Some site owners expect to use an information request form to force the “suspect” to qualify themselves into prospects by making all of the form fields mandatory. We think this is a mistake. Web visitors have no loyalty they will simply find a site that is more accommodating.

### **Search Engine Marketing**

Search engine marketing is a highly specialized process. The technical management behind the search engines and directories are constantly changing their criteria for a "relevant search result" which dictates frequent "tweaking" of the pages presented to the search engine spiders. The process is made even more complex by the fact that each of the major search engines uses different criteria for relevant search results. To add even more complex terms to the equation most of the search engines and directories share their databases. When Yahoo cannot find relevant web sites in its database it uses Google. A search of the Google database from Yahoo will yield different results than the same search using Google and the Google database.

What determines the ranking of one site over some other site with the same basic subject matter? Relevant content and popularity are the simple answers. If most people select sites from the first 30 results how do you get popular so that you will appear in the top 30? How does the same web site show up well in several search engines if they use different criteria to determine relevancy to the search term entered? These are the questions we address with our search engine management program. We focus our attention the top 13 search engines and directories. In addition to this we encourage our clients to purchase keywords on some of the pay for placement search engines programs from LookSmart, Overture, Google and FindWhat. Purchased keywords generate traffic immediately and contribute to the popularity rating for a site. In addition to the major search engines and directories there are about 500,000 specialized search engines, directories and Free For All (FFA) sites but they only represent about 8% of the total searches.

The path to search engine success has three components; Optimization of the web site to appeal to the search engine spiders, submission of the web site information to the search engines and directories and fine tuning of the web site to meet new criteria. It is an expensive process to upgrade a site that was not initially constructed as a search engine efficient site. You should expect to spend about \$1,000 to improve a site that was constructed without regard to potential search engine positioning. Our basic search engine management program cost \$100 per month.

Many of the major search engines now charge a fee for evaluation and inclusion. The most expensive is Yahoo now charging \$299 per year. A Yahoo listing is still free for non-commercial sites. Inktomi, AltaVista, FAST, Ask Jeeves all charge fees of about \$40 /year. If you are launching a new site you need to budget about \$500 for search engine placement.

### **Pay-per-click search engine strategy**

Pay-per-click search engine listing is the current new thing. There are currently 178 pay-per-click search engines charging from \$.01 per click to over \$10.00 per click. Out of the 178 Google and Overture represent over 90% of the activity. These two search engines serve all the major search engines on an income-sharing basis. Google provides results to AOL and Overture powers the “sponsored” listings for Yahoo. If you do a search on Yahoo two sponsored listings appear at the top of the page, before the regular listings. If you click on one of these the owner of the site is charged a fee. The position of your listing is determined by bidding. The site at the top of the list is willing to pay more per click than the site directly below. Both Google and Overture have excellent tutorials on how their services work. Before you start a pay per click program you must choose the most efficient key words. It would not be wise to choose the phrase “real estate” when you are only offering real estate in Truckee. You should only be willing to pay for the phrase “truckee real estate”.

### **Summary**

Web site success is directly proportional to the amount of time you are willing to spend. The dynamic nature of the Internet demands a reasonable understanding of the whole process on the part of the decision maker. If you are well prepared and have a clear objective you can substantially reduce the cost of developing and operating a web site.

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