



10 Simple Keys to Explode the Return on Your Internet Marketing Buck

Internet marketing has many powerful advantages. Home buyers and sellers are actively looking for your services online,

and customers who find you online are the warmest, most qualified leads. Measurable results can be felt instantly, and the average cost of a lead is often lower than that of other media.

[stat: Industry reports predict that real estate ad spending in online media will surpass print advertising in 2009]

Use these 10 keys to improve online profits and optimize your Internet investment immediately.

1. Become truly "marketing minded."

When agents think of marketing the majority think of "sell, sell, sell." There is another dimension, branding, necessary to ensure that you meet customer needs in a way that is different from your competition. Ask yourself: Do my customers really see me as different from my closest competitors? Use your Web site as one of the tools to differentiate yourself. Provide reports and local resources and become the local expert.

2. Register optimal domain names.

Registering domain names has become as easy as buying a gallon of milk at the grocery store. Register your name, and variations unique to the area. Most importantly, make sure to secure www.YourCityHomes.com, www.YourFarmingArea.com and all other variations. I've seen agents register a domain and have their top competitor register the ".net," so don't forget to register ".com," ".net" and ".biz," even if you don't intend to use these domains.

You are not alone if you have a domain name that looks similar to this – www.youragency.com/office3/agentname. This is not an optimal domain; it's too long, hard to remember and doesn't support your overall brand identity.

3. Create a user-friendly Web site design.

Make your Web site easy to read, navigate and find. You will still see a lot of agent Web sites with black backgrounds and small yellow text – this is not easy on the eyes. Focus on usability first, with your visitors' goals in mind so they can easily navigate through your site. If your visitors cannot find what they want quickly and easily, they will

simply go to your competitor who is just a click away.

[stat: Of homebuyers, 57 percent select the first agent they visit]

4. Include advanced home-search functions on your Web site.

The top reason consumers visit real estate Web sites in the first place is to see listings. A lot of Web sites display the whole MLS; how are you separating your home search function from other agents? Get IDX, provide free home updates via e-mail, add rich media virtual tours and take advantage of the many enhanced mapping capabilities on the market.

5. Optimize your site with rich content, meta tags and body copy.

Understanding and selecting the most effective keywords that potential visitors are using to arrive at your Web site is essential to optimize your Internet investment. Use tools like WordTracker (www.wordtracker.com) to prepare your list of keywords. Remember the importance of keyword prominence and place your keyword phrases early in the body text of the page. Try to craft the beginning text so that it is appropriate to be used as a description of your site. Using techniques such as these will increase your chances of being ranked in the top search engines, thus increasing the number of visits to your site.

[stat: 74 percent of today's consumers use the Internet to search for homes, versus 52 percent who use the newspaper.]

6. Accelerate your Web site traffic.

One step to driving traffic to your site is search engine optimization and gaining top search engine rankings, which can often take months. Agents who are looking for immediate results can use pay for performance traffic programs. For example, you can bid on local areas or keywords and receive Web site inquiries from potential buyers in those targeted areas within 72 hours.

7. Measure Link Popularity.

Measure and monitor with tools like MarketLeap (<http://www.marketleap.com/publinkpop>). Link popularity refers to the quality and the quantity of external links to your Web site and it is one of the most important criteria used by the search engines to determine your site's ranking. The benefits of increasing your site's link popularity are:

- Improved search engine rankings,

particularly on Google, Yahoo and MSN.

- Direct increase in traffic via links from other Web sites. Ask for reciprocal links through your business network. Real estate is largely based on building a strong referral network, which will help you grow your business.

Warning: Enhancing your link popularity through reciprocal links is an important traffic building strategy, but it is not a quick fix. It may take two months or longer to see the effect of your new incoming links on your search engine rankings.

8. Invest in a lead management system.

Consumers are becoming increasingly more demanding when it comes to response time. They want quality information and fast. Take advantage of systems that do the work for you, while you are out showing homes. Automatically send out new listings and e-mail updates, keep your prospects engaged and build long-term relationships.

[stat: 65 percent of real estate consumers on the Internet expect a response time of four hours or less to their online inquiries]

9. Partner with a real estate Internet marketing expert.

Home buyers and sellers are using the Internet. Most successful real estate agents and brokers are turning to marketing experts to assist them with their Internet marketing strategies. It is essential to partner with a company that offers a complete agent solution, campaign management, Web site creation and lead generation. Do not choose specialists who do not fully understand the complex needs of agents.

10. Evaluate where your Web site stands now.

Measuring your Internet marketing investment and Web site conversion will help you to improve your returns in the future. Set clearly defined objectives so you can go back and compare against what you hoped to obtain over the year. For example, you set a goal to obtain 30 hot leads from your Web site in the next 60 days and to close three new homes.

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