

Using Technology to Become a Leader in the Marketplace

BY ANN BROWN

Imagine what business would be like without cells, voicemail, Palms and the Web. We wouldn't worry about sending faxes or returning e-mails and could just do our "job."

That, of course, is not the way business is done today. Many REALTORS® avoid the computer at all costs. Yet, a majority of today's homebuyers and sellers go online to retrieve data, find info and stay in touch with friends and business contacts. If you want to lead in your market, you must maximize technology's benefits.

Leave the Old Behind

If your Web site looks the same today as it did a year ago, you're probably missing opportunities for new business. Even if you do nothing more than change the graphics, "tweak" the template and update the text every two months, you are way ahead of the game.

Prospects who visit your Web site will be impressed by the timely and relevant info you offer, which gives them a reason to come back. If they visit your site over the course of a month or two and nothing is updated, why would they return? A stagnant site gives the impression that no one is watching the store.

Your Web site is a storefront to attract new and repeat prospects. Offer different reports each month

instead of the same things repeatedly. Update past client testimonials, too. Clients want to know that you are continuing to serve new people who are satisfied with your work.

This business is all about perception. If you don't know how to make the changes or don't have the time to keep your site regularly updated, outsource the work to a professional who does.

Enhance Your Image

Updating your image is important and has little to do with getting a new hairdo or suit. Once again, it is how you are perceived that counts.

In an image-based business such as real estate, why would you have a business card printed in black and white without your photo? Ninety percent of REALTORS® with a business card photo, have one taken from the shoulders up. Doing what everyone else is doing won't set you apart. Do something that others are not doing, such as you photographed at your desk, holding a "sold" sign or standing in front of a gorgeous house.

Is your listing presentation still in a three-ring binder with plastic sheets? Imagine the perceived expertise if you were to open your laptop at the listing appointment and show clients everything you want to communicate through a professional online presentation with sound and animation. You'd better believe that

you'd be perceived not only as a leader, but as a winner.

Dare to be Different

We've all heard the phrase, "Fake it 'til you make it." You have to stay busy, look busy and act busy. After all, you are at the top in your business, right? Using voicemail correctly will help spread that message.

Don't fall into the trap of being like everyone else and having voicemail say, "I'm sorry I can't take your call right now. I'm either on the phone or away from my desk. Leave a message, and I'll call you back as soon as I can."

Of course, you're either on the phone or away from your desk. If you weren't, you would take the call. Instead, change your voicemail daily and reflect that in your message. An updated message can say, "This is (your name), and today is (the date). I will be busy showing houses today, but your call is very important to me."

If a potential seller was trying to reach you and heard that message, as opposed to just "I can't take your call right now," what kind of impact would that make? Not only are you perceived as someone who is busy and in demand, but also in the back of his mind your prospect is thinking about how you're going to market his property when he lists with you. You want him to get excited. Use your voicemail to convey that message.

Little things mean a lot. In today's

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business world, that is more true than ever. Think about the little things that can impact your business. This is a very visual business. Use pictures—on the Web, on your cards and in your marketing of properties.

Make an appointment today to get a new and unique professional photo taken. Remind yourself every morning to change your voicemail with that day's message, and then take it one step further. At the end of the voicemail say, "Please leave me a message, and I will call you back before 5 p.m. today."

Clients and prospects need to know that they can count on you, and that they're important to you. They will not mind getting your voicemail, as long as they know that you'll call them back that day. Think of all the fellow REALTORS® you call in a day and what their voicemail says. Will saying you'll call someone back by five help you stand apart? You'd better believe it. Do something they're not doing, and then keep building on that.

Exceed Expectations

Most people today are just happy to get the job done and don't even think about going beyond that. It is so simple to go one step further, and the effort is worth its weight in gold.

Don't be too busy, too distracted or too important to exceed people's expectations of what you can do for

them. Think of something you can do that they are not expecting. Maybe you can mail them a card, remember their birthday or send them a gift certificate to have lunch on you. Use

your Web site to spotlight a "featured" home of the week. Tell new listing clients that you will put their home in your featured spot for the next two weeks.

Whatever it is you do, answer this question: "What can I do that every other

REALTOR® can't do or is not doing?"

Reconnect with Clients

Get your name, picture and phone number in front of people on a regular basis. If you can send out a monthly newsletter, do it. Be sure to send thank you notes, and take the time to write them by hand. With all of the impersonal technology available today, people appreciate the extra time taken to write a personal note.

Do things for your prospects before they ask, such as sending a school report, new listings or something funny you saw in the newspaper. Make them remember you and stay in touch. Make sure to have a call-to-action on your Web site: "Click here for..." or "Call me today for..."

Pick one idea to implement immediately. You don't necessarily have to be the best, spend the most money or have the fanciest car. You can, however, be perceived as the

leader in the marketplace by doing the little things that really matter to clients and prospects. In the long run, that will take you to the top quicker than anything else.



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assistant. And when you calculate how much you make by the hour, you won't hesitate to spend the money. An assistant can answer calls, schedule appointments, fax, file, e-mail, research, create sales presentations and keep on top of your inventory. Picture your life with less responsibility for the minutiae.

13. Set aside your next planning day now. Schedule a day six months from now.



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