

INSIDER: Blogging and Chatting to Promote Your Business and Generate Leads

By Mark Tarro, MBA Candidate

Promotion and lead generation are two essential functions for a successful real estate agent. However, many agents lack the time and financial resources to promote their businesses at the level they desire. Finding ways to maximize any investment in these areas, both in terms of time and cost, is essential for long-term agent success.

“Blogging” and “chatting” are often undervalued online tools that can improve business promotion and encourage leads. In *Blog for Business: Leveraging Content for Online Marketing & Lead Generation*, author Erik Wolf walks through the essentials of these tools and how to tie their use into an existing online presence. Whether a novice or expert, Wolf shares wisdom relevant to today’s agents, including the how-to’s of website creation and the fundamentals of integrating an online presence for maximum results.

THINK POINT #1: Blog Your Insights and Expertise Which Promotes Your Brand and Your Business

One of the best ways for an agent to promote her business, insights, and industry expertise is through blogging. Blogging is essentially an online, public journal for users to engage in storytelling and/or opinion sharing. In business (and specifically in real estate), blogs are often used to communicate valuable information to a given market. A blog can be a mechanism for an agent to show-off her expertise in a given subject area (e.g., seller financing tips, trends in a specific market, etc.) and to brag about her successes (e.g., sales figures from a given period, average time a property is on the market, etc.). Blog entries can also add dozens of pages of relative content to an agent’s website each year.

When selecting a blogging platform (or a website to host your blogging activities), be conscious of how easy the blog is to update and how easy it will be for a reader to navigate. Visual appeal and simplicity are important components to consider, and can differ depending on the platform you select.

[WordPress](#) is one of the easiest and most popular blog platforms to use. Most importantly, it is *free*. [ActiveRain](#) is also another free blogging option, and is tailored specifically for real estate agents.

Whatever platform you choose, make sure to link your blog to your business webpage to encourage cross-site accessibility. By ensuring you have a blog that is easy to use (both for the user and the reader), time spent on blogging activities will be maximized to create value for your business.

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As you move begin to promote your business, insights, and expertise, consider these “3 C’s” of a successful blog:

Content to Promote Lead Generation

Content is the #1 driver of an effective blog. Readers look for information sources and content that are interesting and thought-provoking. If you (or your work) is stimulating enough, readers will look to you as an information leader, which increases the likelihood they will return to your blog in the future. Remember that an increase in readership often translates to an increase in lead-generation opportunities, as well.

Blog posts should cover a wide variety of topics to engage and entice different constituents. Developments in your city, new legislation, and even world events can serve as effective topics to blog about. Articles from the [Keller Center Research Report](#) can also be a source of interesting information to share through your blog. Whatever areas you have interest or expertise in (business- and/or real estate-specific, preferably) can help you develop content that will be relevant for your constituents.

Consistency to Encourage Readership

The length and frequency of posts are often considered the next most important part of blogging. If your blog is not updated consistently, your audience will not know when to check for updates. This can discourage readers from returning to your site with any frequency.

A good blogging strategy might include setting aside a certain day/time (or two) during the week as a designated blogging time. If you blog even one time a week, you will add a minimum of 52 pages of content each year to your online profile. In turn, this will enhance your personal and/or company’s Search Engine Optimization (SEO) position and support any Search Engine Marketing (SEM) campaign in which you might be engaged.

Commitment to Your Investment

Developing an effective blog takes an investment of time. While the financial costs of blogging are relatively low, the time it takes for a blog to become/remain successful is often undervalued. If you choose to begin or revamp a current blog, commit to it as a valuable component to your overall marketing and lead-generation strategy.

THINK POINT #2: Chat Services – Connecting to Customers in Real-Time

If a prospective client is browsing your website and cannot find what he is looking for, most likely he will only search for the answer for a short time before leaving altogether. Although no web strategy can fully anticipate and address all user needs, preferences, and questions, a contingency plan must be in place to help ensure prospective clients do not leave your site lacking information or negative impression of your service.

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Many company websites have employed a passive “Contact Us” feature that encourages users to submit a form or send an email to the organization with any questions; however, many businesses are moving toward a more proactive *chat* feature to provide real-time communication with prospective clients browsing their websites. This feature has important implications for real estate agents, as providing the opportunity to chat live can mean the difference between converting a lead to a client or letting her slip away to a competitor.

Companies like [BoldChat](#) and [WebGreeter](#) provide website chat functionality at a reasonable price. Depending on the scope of your business, chatting can be executed by an individual agent, an administrative assistant, or, in some cases, subcontracted to an outside firm.

While chat features require a financial investment, there are a number of ways to execute the strategy effectively. If you contracted a professional web design firm to create your website, you can check to see what adding chat features directly to the website would cost. If you developed the website in-house, social media or e-mail-based chat can serve as an alternative approach. The important thing to remember is that regardless of the strategy chosen, a time investment is also required for chatting to be successful.

A chat feature has a lot of positive potential for agents, but should not be treated as a be-all/end-all solution to customer questions. The representative in charge of chatting with customers should be knowledgeable and courteous. S/he should serve as a “tour guide” for site visitors to ensure information is effectively communicated, that customers have a positive online experience, and ultimately guide prospects toward an in-person interaction with the agent.

Remember that the chatting process is a lead-generation tool for your business. While representatives chat with prospective clients, they can also be requesting pertinent contact information (e.g., e-mail addresses, location identifiers/zip codes, etc.). This deliberate lead-generating practice can help build a database of leads from web interactions and provide valuable data for follow-up activities and future online marketing campaigns.

THINK POINT #3: Your Customers are Your Brand Assets

In today’s socially-minded business environment, many consumers want to connect with the brands and businesses from whom they purchase. Integrated SEM, coupled with blogging, chatting and other social media efforts can help boost an agent’s visibility and brand in a given market, which can promote sales opportunities.

A [December 2011 Keller Center Research Report article](#) discussed how to set up an effective SEM campaign. As the article mentioned, a proactive approach to online marketing can help differentiate an agent from his competition and can increase his customer-base if he is willing to invest the time and resources into an effective campaign. Additionally, a proactive approach to blogging, chatting and social media activities create opportunities for your customers to become your advocates – give them something to talk about! As you provide consumers with content,

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supported by strong customer-oriented service experiences, you increase your ability to leverage your customers as your brand assets.

Conclusion

It is important to invest in your online business presence. Spending time to engage in blogging, chatting, and other socially-based activities can help promote your business and generate leads. While these activities require minimal financial investment, they do require significant time investment. Regardless of the platforms you choose, a commitment to consistently providing relevant content will improve your online positioning considerably.

Recommended Reading

Wolf, Erik (2012), *Blog for Business: Leveraging Content for Online Marketing & Lead Generation*, Alpharetta, GA: Zodo Group.

About the Author

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