Effectively Marketing
Real Estate Online

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1:
Introduction to Effective Online Marketing

It has been a handful of years since I shifted my career into the field of internet marketing. You might say it was my aversion to finance combined with being burnt out on direct sales. To me, internet marketing was a way for me to drive customers (and sales) without having to constantly track my pacing with a direct quota.

Perhaps it was a cop-out but I am happy with the decision. Since that time, I have thrust myself wholly and completely into this area of expertise. You could argue that this is perhaps the greatest time in history to be involved in marketing. Advancements in technology have produced more opportunity, at lower costs, with more targeted audiences than ever before.

My resume includes working in both radio and print advertising, and most recently, in real estate marketing. I have hands-on experience with what it takes in today's landscape to position any realtor in a manner that puts him or her in the customer's eye and mind. I have worked for both brokers and agents in creating an image for themselves and their business (i.e. branding) while simultaneously capturing new leads and converting those contacts into sales. After all, that's what it's all about!

The premise of this book is to help anyone practicing real estate in the 21st century to effectively market their business using today's technology and online opportunities.

What You'll Learn From This Book

- The way that the internet has expanded the playing field of marketing methods from which to choose
- How consumers have changed the ways they gather information and how you can capitalize on that
- The fundamentals of a successful marketing presence and why this is the vital starting point
- The quintessential elements that make up a valuable website and how each of these aspects of your online presence will help increase sales
- Both paid and free methods of self promotion online and what you can do to start using each technique today

One of the most common objections I hear when it comes to better utilizing the internet for the sake of generating more listings and buyer leads is "I'm not computer savvy, I can't do this myself." Let me assure you that anyone with a computer and a basic understanding of the internet can put these skills into practice. And trust me, once you start using the information included here, you'll find yourself excited to learn more. In today's competitive market it's the way you use technology that will separate you from your peers in the eyes of your prospects.

For the sake of this book, I will note that my use of the terms internet, online and web are interchangeable. When I'm talking about an "online presence" or your use of "the web" I simply mean the internet (the "worldwide web" if you prefer).

When you are finished reading, you will have a working knowledge of what today's internet has to offer and how you can quickly become the top producer in your area. If you are ready to begin your journey of becoming a stronger real estate sales professional, read on!

Today's Trends & Statistics

You may have read that the average consumer is bombarded with over **3,000** marketing messages per day (source: Yahoo Answers). Between the print ads in the local newspaper, page ads in real estate publications, direct mail pieces, display advertisements and the rising accessibility of the internet, consumers have grown smarter. They have learned to see through the clutter and go directly to the source for the information they are seeking.

In today's climate, it is more important than ever to exploit niche marketing techniques and to be there at the moment they are seeking answers to the problems you can solve for them. Here are some relative statistics that are helpful to know. You can use these when talking to prospective sellers.

- 84% of people use the internet during their home search
- 73% of people drive by or view a home they see online
- 23% of people find the agent they use to search/buy a home from the web
- 81% of people who use the internet in their decision process use an agent/broker to close the sale

Source: *2007 National Association of REALTORS® Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers*

If you don't believe the research, look for yourself. Run a simple search on the web for "real estate" in your area and notice the number of agents in your area listed. Ask your clients whether they've ever logged on to research real estate listings in your region and you will find a staggering number admit they have.

That information is incredibly helpful to know. After all, the challenge of any marketing effort is first determining where your customers are spending their time and how to reach them efficiently. That puzzle is now solved. They're on the internet!

Today's fear of the stereotypical salesman runs so strong that with any major purchase decision, the information gathering phase of their buying decision typically starts from the comfort of their home… online.

Prospective clients search online for the real estate agent they choose to represent them as well as targeting the properties they might like to buy. How you market your properties

on the internet not only helps sell your current listings faster but enables you to effectively capture new clients as well.

CHAPTER 2:
Steps to Creating a Compelling Marketing Presence

Before we go further as to how you can best use the internet to get your marketing message across, I feel it is important to examine what a compelling marketing presence will consist of.

Photography

Whether planning your online or any other marketing campaign, the thing always to remember is the importance of your photography. In this visually stimulated society, the old adage still holds true: "A picture is worth 1000 words!"

It sounds cliché, but just pay attention to the magazines on the racks at the supermarket. The ones that sell always lead with a captivating cover. Or to put it in more relevant terms, have you ever seen a $1,000,000+ listing in your market with a shabby lead photo? If you have, you know first hand what that does to negatively impact the value of the home.

The important thing to note is that you can have photography that rivals that of Ansel Adams without spending an arm and a leg. In my market, I deal with a lot of condominium sales where there are multiple units listed for sale in the same property at any given time. I can't tell you how many buyers have mentioned that they looked at our unit first because "it looked so nice" and getting them inside your unit (and not your rival) is half the battle.

In your market, perhaps single-family homes are more prevalent. No matter. Getting your listing to pop off the pages of a home search pays big dividends. Here are a few tips on how you can produce amazing photography for your client.

Photography Tip #1

If you have a digital camera, learn how to use it! So many agents I talk to have expensive cameras and do nothing more than use the "auto" feature. Why spend your hard-earned money on a camera with oodles of features if you're not going to try each one? In dark settings, adjust the shutter speed.

If you've got ample light (imagine picture windows on a sunny day) play around with the aperture. If you're shooting rooms with bright colored walls, adjust the flash to point up

(towards the ceiling) so you avoid a bright circle reflection appearing in the middle of your picture.

Play around with the features of your camera at home or at one of your "vacant" listings where you can spend some time. Take the same shot with different settings until you master the best functions to use under different conditions.

Photography Tip #2

Don't be afraid to take a TON of photos! Digital cameras these days often come with enough memory to hold enough photos for a week-long family vacation. You never know which angle will look best until you get them back to the office.

Assuming you have arranged a time with your seller to photograph their home, make it count! The hour or two you spend taking pictures will pay off immensely when you are ready to post your listing to the MLS and your personal website. The last thing you want is to have to go back through the home because you missed something.

After all the work you've done to get that listing, and knowing how important the visual aspect of their home is in the selling process, err on the side of too much versus too little. This is one aspect of the marketing process you can not and should not skimp. The beauty of digital photography is that the "delete" button is only one click away.

Photography Tip #3

Use the highest resolution your camera has to offer. A common mistake I see is that people spend gobs of money on a high-tech piece of equipment and forget to change the settings to "super hi-res."

Perhaps the fear is that it will take up too much space on their hard drive or will load slowly on your website. I can't name a single professional photographer that shoots in anything less than 2MB per picture.

Don't be the agent that has a camera with the capacity to save large files and not take advantage of it. Always shoot hi-res photography and lower the resolution (for loading pictures on the web) using your photo software later.

Photography Tip #4

Invest $15 in a tripod! Most cameras, even the small, convenient types on the market have a tripod connecting feature. This becomes especially important when you begin to play around with different shutter speeds.

Even the most steady-handed can't prevent a blurry picture when shooting in low shutter speed without a tripod. The other useful function of a tripod comes into play when using stitching software to produce your own "virtual tours" (discussed in more detail later).

A tripod allows you to snap pictures from the same height and angle in 360 degrees.

Photography Tip #5

If the listing warrants a professional photographer, shop around. Maybe it is a high-dollar property that you just don't feel comfortable photographing yourself or perhaps pro photography was promised in your listing presentation. Whatever the reason, when dealing with professional photographers, I have found that pricing can vary quite a lot from one person to another.

Ask around your office for recommendations and start there. If you see a listing that shouts "buy me" in print, find out who did the work. Perhaps there is someone in your market who is just starting out but takes wonderful pictures. They are often more willing to negotiate on price for the same quality photos.

On a side note, if you do hire a pro and have the opportunity to be on hand when they shoot, pay attention to what they do! You might not ever see exactly what aperture or shutter speed they use, but you will still learn a lot about what they look for. And don't be afraid to ask questions about the functions of the camera. Within reason, I've been impressed with how much these folks will usually share with you. After all, they want your repeat business!

If you're ready to get serious about your marketing and improve your photography skills, check out these great books (all available on Amazon.com):

- *Interior Photography by Eric Roth*
- *Photographing Architecture and Interiors by Julius Shulman*
- *The Complete Guide to Light & Lighting by Michael Freeman*

Writing Copy

Now we are getting into another crucial element of the "nuts & bolts" that make up a successful marketing campaign. Once you have secured the listing agreement, your task at hand becomes how you sell it with words.

Every listing on the market has the same ingredients such as number of bedrooms, bathrooms, square footage, etc. Anyone with access to your MLS (which is just about anyone with internet access these days) will be able to compare homes based on a set of search criteria.

But when competing for buyers, it is the glowing prose you write that will captivate the audience. If you don't feel strong in this arena, here a few tips to get you started.

Copy Writing Tip #1

Whatever you do, <u>don't</u> follow the pack. All too often I scan various realtor websites for homes and end up feeling bored to tears. Anyone can list the number of bedrooms, baths and other features such as "open floor plan." And guess what, as stated above, anyone with access to an online property search can find these vitals too.

The copy you write is what separates your listing from all the rest, so don't be afraid to be creative. Make your copy stand out by using numerous adjectives and analogies. If this is something you are not accustomed to, give it a try. It might feel a bit strange at first but now is the time to broaden your comfort zone. Besides your photography, the copy your write to describe the property is your next opportunity to leave prospective buyers with a lasting impression.

The goal here to get people excited about the property and desire to see it for themselves. Think of this as your unique sales letter for each listing you have. Want inspiration? Pay attention to ads for toothpaste or razors. Each performs a basic function which we all need. But it's how Colgate and Crest compel you to buy their product over the others that differentiate them in the consumer's mind.

Copy Writing Tip #2

Be honest! The worst mistake you can make is to write about how absolutely immaculate the property is if in fact it has cracks in the ceiling and stains on the carpet. If you have taken a moderate listing and made promises to sell it, work with what you have. Just because the home has flaws (and trust me, they <u>all</u> do) does not mean you have to feel trapped.

The dictionary is filled with thousands of words, so choose yours carefully. There are seemingly endless ways to describe someone's domicile without stretching the truth. As a perfect example, your local Kmart might stock a load of products that you feel have sub-par craftsmanship, but they still seem to move off the shelf. Finding unique features of the home and focusing on those is your best option.

Perhaps prospective buyers will appreciate the fact that they can build "sweat equity" by upgrading the home themselves. By simply playing-up the best features of the home and making positive remarks about those can keep you moving closer to a sale without stretching the truth.

Copy Writing Tip #3

Get your selling points straight from the owner! Finding out why the current homeowners were first attracted to the property is most likely why the next buyers will too. There's no better way to find out the best attributes a home has than to ask the people currently living there.

A second benefit of asking the current owners about their home before writing the copy is that you avoid a "why didn't you mention this?" conversation later. Including your sellers early in the process helps them feel they are playing a role in the marketing of their property and goes a long way in creating customer loyalty.

Copy Writing Tip #4

Use a thesaurus! Yes, I know that this sounds like a trip back to grade school, but a thesaurus can be your best friend when it comes to writing interesting copy. I can't tell you how many times I found myself starting down the same boring road of mediocre copy when my thesaurus bailed me out.

Better yet, bookmark www.Thesaurus.com on your internet explorer and have it loaded when you sit down to write. Toggling over to it whenever you feel stuck on a word will help keep your creative juices flowing. Don't overdo it though. You always want to remember your target audience. Using words like "effulgent" when you really mean "bright" is a mistake.

Not many people know every obscure word you might find, especially those clients typically looking in the lower price ranges. Get creative, use unique words, but not words so unique in everyday English that only half your readers know the meaning. This is a major turn off to prospective buyers.

Virtual Tours

A great opportunity for you to showcase the home in a more interactive way is in virtual tours. A virtual tour of the home is a way for a prospective buyer to "look around" a room and get a more complete knowledge of what that property offers on the inside. Don't be afraid if you think that virtual tours require a whole new set of equipment or hiring a professional service.

You can produce a very attractive virtual tour simply by stitching together the still photography you have taken yourself. There are a lot of great stitching software packages on the market from which to choose. I have become comfortable with the Visual Tour Marketing System (www.VisualTour.com) but there are others too.

Simply put, all you need to do is take still photos of the room from one side to the other, clicking pictures in a manner so that the photos overlap. As discussed earlier, a tripod is recommended so that the height and angle of the photos stay exactly the same. Once you have your individual, overlapping photos, simply load them into your software program which should likely walk you through the finished product.

I'm not going to go into extreme detail as to how to load these photos (each software program is slightly different) but the bottom line is that anyone with a digital camera can create moving virtual tours. This is a primo chance to not only attract buyers but win the

trust of more sellers too. Yes, not every realtor has caught on to the virtual tour craze yet so there's room to set yourself apart with this simple technology.

Video

There are a lot of different ways to implement video into your marketing campaign and it would be hard for me to cover them all here. But a few things to consider would include "video tours" of the home or hosting a "virtual open house."

A video tour is much like a virtual tour that you might do with your still photography. But with streaming video you have more opportunity to move around. While with still photography you miss an opportunity to explore various nooks of a particular room, video allows you to zoom in on a specific feature and let your website visitors spend more time "exploring" the home.

With video, there's also the benefit of adding audio commentary. This is where the idea of a "virtual open house" was born. I've seen more and more agents using video to literally walk a prospective buyer from room to room while pointing out the selling features along the way. It is as if you are giving a guided tour of the home that can be viewed by buyers any time around the clock.

Another frontier where more and more realtors are finding success is through the use of video blogging. I go into more detail later as to what makes up a good blog (stands for "web log") but for now, think of a blog as your personal viewpoint about your particular market.

By using video to record and highlight your thoughts, industry insight, specific knowledge or skills, you are welcoming prospective clients with a more personal touch than a simple website can do. You are not only putting your face with the name, but adding personality to your business in a way that only video can offer.

A useful tip you can put to use is simply to recite a short article or market observation in front of a camera and post it somewhere on your site. If your existing website is not set up to host such files, see below for ways you can quickly post a video online and add a hyper-link from your Home Page. Regardless of how you go about adding a video element to your site, this powerful medium should not be overlooked. More and more people are getting personal with video and it will only become more prevalent in the future.

Outstanding video cameras with lots of handy features can be purchased these days for less than $200. My personal favorite is the Flip Video Recorder. Check out www.TheFlip.com for more information on how easy it is to get up and running with video applications in no time.

Once you've recorded something of merit, video can also be quickly uploaded to popular sites like YouTube, Facebook, Google Video, MSN and others which ultimately expand

your marketing reach. Best of all, these sites are free to post! Once again, this broadens the scope of your online marketing campaign and adds a "WOW" factor to your listing presentation when pitching prospective sellers.

Not a steady hand? Check out www.FixMyMovie.com and clean up your jerky, dark or low resolution videos before you post.

CHAPTER 3:
What Makes a Good Website

Now that we have reviewed the fundamentals that make up the key real estate marketing elements, we are ready to talk more specifically about your online game plan. As you are aware, there are probably hundreds (or thousands) of websites dedicated to real estate in your area.

Thinking of just the other agents fighting for listings in your area, you can probably rattle off 10 websites where a prospective client could go right now to start searching real estate in your market. The question that naturally comes from this knowledge is "how do I separate my website from the pack?"

That's what this chapter covers. I will breakdown the key elements that <u>have</u> to be included in your website and touch on a wish list of components that you should explore.

There has been a renaissance happening on the internet for the past several years that will continue to evolve. In layman's terms, the web has turned from a place of stagnant information to a full-blown interactive community.

Gone are the days that one could simply post a few items of interest on their webpage and expect to draw continuous, repeat traffic. Your website needs to be more than just your photo, bio and calling card. Browsers these days are looking for sources of wisdom and the ability to control the information they receive.

They want to be in the "driver's seat," so to speak, when it comes to pulling from you the knowledge they seek. If your website is set up as a content originator and not just a destination on the web, you will win the game of online dominance in your area.

IDX Feed

The first and most important element of any real estate website should be the listings. You must provide a place for potential customers to explore the various properties for sale in your area through some sort of direct connection with your MLS. This is accomplished through a function called an "IDX feed" (stands for "Internet Data Exchange").

By linking your website with the local MLS in your area, you effectively give your web visitors the ability to search any and all listings in your region based on their selected set of search criteria. This is where the majority of people start their journey into buying or selling a home, so give them what they want.

A real estate website that doesn't offer this type of functionality will get ignored more often than not, no matter how appealing your own listings may be or how otherwise informative your site might be. That is not to say that you should not prominently highlight your own listings. You absolutely should! Have a designated area of your site that lists your "Featured Properties" or something to that effect, but don't neglect the notion that most people want to see more than just your properties.

And once you have integrated this feature, make it prominent on your site! Don't make someone search around to find it. Put a big, bold icon smack-dab at the top of your home page stating "Search All Area Listings!" Since this is what the majority of online real estate browsers are looking for, give it to them, front and center.

Lead Capture

This segues right into the second most important function of your website which should be the ability to capture leads. Think of your website as a giant net that you have set up to trap that day's meal (ok, we're not actually going to "eat" your customers, but you get the point). What good is it to garner a lot of traffic on your site and not have the ability to capture these leads?

As a tool, your website should serve as a method of supplying you with the names and contact information of prospective clients. At some point on your site, there should be a directive to "sign up" as a member. Some agents advocate using their listing search page to do this.

An example of how this would work is that a guest can't browse the area homes for sale without first giving up their name and email. As mentioned before, the ability to search all the area's listings through an IDX feed on your site is quite valuable. But chances are that many competing agents are also offering this service for "free" (i.e. a visitor would not have to give up any information about himself to search). Without first building up a person's trust in you and baiting them with something truly unique, having your search page require their contact information might backfire.

If you feel that your listing search feature is lure enough, you should consider setting up a method for your site to ask for this personal information only after they've viewed 3-5 properties. Since they are actively engaged on your site at this point, they might hand over their information more easily than if asked at the start.

Another method of lead capture is to offer something completely unique that can not be found anywhere else. Perhaps it's your own, self-written e-Book ("electronic book" file)

on a particular topic pertaining to your area of expertise. By toting this as the "most helpful" or "complete" or "insightful" information about local real estate in your market, you are tantalizing these folks to sign up.

The chances of someone balking at giving up contact information are far less when the offer is sweet, so make yours something of substance. Or perhaps the lead capture comes from offering "listings by email" or something to that effect. Your MLS program gives you the ability to sign up clients to receive daily emails about new listings in the area so go ahead and offer this.

By offering the ability to sign up for this service through your site, you're effectively capturing interested leads and giving the consumer something of value in return. Maybe you prefer to come up with some other creative offer of your own (e.g. a free month's subscription to the local newspaper) and offer it exclusively from your website.

Whatever you decide, the ability to capture leads is vital to nurturing future business. Otherwise it's here today, gone tomorrow.

At this point, you might be asking "What the most effective ways to capitalize on your list of contacts now that you have them?" Welcome to the wonderful world of *auto responders* and *drip email campaigns*.

Auto Responders

An auto responder is simply an automated program that immediately acknowledges the receipt of an email (or completed contact form from your website) via an automatic reply with a previously prepared email to the sender. One creative way to use an auto responder is to disseminate an email brochure.

This brochure can include information on specific listings, your website features, the services you offer, etc. Auto responders can also be used as a method of qualifying "opt-in" recipients to your electronic newsletter or email correspondence.

If you're interested in learning more about auto responders and how easy they are to integrate into your marketing bag of tricks, I suggest you begin your research with:

- *www.Aweber.com*
- *www.GetResponse.com*
- *www.iContact.com*

Drip Email Campaigns

Next we delve into the realm of drip email campaigns. Think of a slowly leaking faucet that lets out a drop of water every minute or so. This where the term "drip email" comes from. You set up an entire campaign of pre-written emails you plan to send to would-be customers with a specific focus in mind and dictate how and when they are delivered.

From the client side of things, it appears as if you are personally writing them an email follow up on a timely basis but the beauty is that it's completely automated. Once you have captured a lead's email address and they have opted-in to receive your correspondence, you can stay in regular contact with that person with the simple click of a button.

Better yet, depending on how you are generating those leads, you can design specific campaigns for specific types of prospects (i.e. buyers, sellers, FSBOs, etc). One of the most popular products in this arena can be found at www.ConstantContact.com.

One thing to point out here is the fundamental distinction between an email campaign and your website. An email campaign is a form of marketing whereby you are actively reaching out to your prospects. Your website is the marketing you do to attract customers to come to you.

The reason that drip email marketing is so effective is that you are proactive with the information you send out and not simply hoping for someone to find you. An effective drip email campaign should include timely information and call-to-action so as to drive more customers directly to you. Think of these emails as a gentle reminder to your prospects that you are happy to start going to work for them

Collaborative Search Tools

Real estate is seldom a one man show when it comes to decision making and the search process as a whole. There are often whole families or outside friends that are involved with everything from the initial search, to the information gathering phase, to a final purchase decision.

Along that vein, make it easy for visitors on your site to share the information they find. Whether it's the ability to email a listing to a family member or download a printable brochure of the property that they can show off to friends, make it easy to share.

This is just another way to separate your site from the countless others one might visit for information on real estate in your community. The sharing of information like this also has a rebound effect. Considering that any shared materials can be branded with your name and contact information (which is easy enough to do) you are effectively spreading your reach beyond the direct visitors to your site.

It's not a far stretch to believe that some of the people who are introduced to you this way will make referrals to others with similar needs or do business directly with you in the future.

Eye-Catching Blog

The concept of blogging should be discussed in the context of adding original content to your site. Think of your blog as the on-going, timely and unique vehicle to disseminate information about your market. It should be treated as the hub of original information that's added to your site regularly.

It is costly and time-prohibitive to constantly have a web designer update whole pages of your site so treat your blog as the best avenue you have in frequently releasing new insights about your market. If you have the ability to "embed" your blog as a built-in part of your site, even better.

Search engines are designed to look for websites that contribute and create original information. If your blog is a connected part of your site, this increases the odds that your site will come up high in a keyword search for real estate in your area. There are countless books written on "search engine optimization" so if you have interest in this area of marketing there are resources galore.

If you don't have the ability to embed your blog directly on your website, there are many places that you can easily create a blog and start posting today. Google Blogger (www.Blogger.com) is one that works very nicely to serve this purpose.

To make sure that you are integrating your blog posts with your primary website, add easy to locate links to your blog scattered throughout the pages of your site. Since the most up-to-date information about real estate in your area can be found on your blog, it is important to make this easily accessible from multiple places on your website.

Whether you create the blog as an embedded part of your site or use an outside blog source such as Blogger, make sure you have the ability to offer an "RSS Feed." RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication" which means just that.

You are making it seamless for current and prospective clients to get a direct link to your blog posts and read what you have to say. Once again, the goal with all of this is to become the information originator and the leading source for what's happening in real estate in your market. This ultimately builds trust and positions you above the competition when it comes to someone choosing you to help them buy or sell real estate.

Niche Pages On Your Site

One area that I have seen a number of agents exploiting is the development of a market niche for the area you serve. I have heard agent testimonials that support the concept of becoming a niche expert in your region and how it can pay big dividends. This is especially true in larger cities where every neighborhood has its own characteristics.

For example, it is no longer enough to simply say something like "Your source for Chicago real estate." You have to take it one step further and offer specific information

on the various subsets of the Chicago metro area. By demonstrating that you have specific, detailed knowledge of these more closely targeted areas of the city you exude confidence in your ability to steer a prospective buyer in the right direction.

From a seller's point of view, who wouldn't want to choose an agent that seems to "specialize" in a certain area that they currently reside? That is not to say that you can't offer targeted, niche information on multiple areas within the region you represent. But come up with niche pages for each and keep them distinguished and separate.

So how is niche expertise best represented on the web? Specific to your personal website(s), here are two suggestions. The first way is to offer dedicated pages on your website that speak specifically about a branch of your market that you have discovered to be a valuable niche.

As stated already, perhaps this is a neighborhood or common area within your market. Or perhaps it is a type of real estate in which you specialize (i.e. condos, apartments, commercial real estate, ranches & land, etc). By targeting your information to specific niches within your clientele, you take one step closer towards winning that business by being the "expert" in that niche.

Once you've created niche pages within your site you should consider registering different domains, specific to that niche, and point the domains directly to niche pages. I'm not suggesting that you fragment your marketing, but simply refine it. In some instances it might be prudent to promote and advertise a specific domain name for a niche page that you've created for an area of expertise.

An example of this type of targeted marketing would be an ad in a small distribution community bulletin. If the circulation of these print materials is directed exclusively in an area you are targeting your niche, a specific niche website domain is typically the best one to promote.

Freebie newspapers or newsletters available at the supermarket in an area you're trying to target is another avenue you might explore. Promoting a targeted, niche domain name directed to a specified page on your website is a great way to attract prospective clients to your site for the first time. From there, they are free to explore the other services and skills you have to offer.

The second way to exploit a niche in your market is to actually design specific websites for each niche you serve. These can be highly targeted sites that speak directly to those most interested in what that website represents. Delve deeply into whatever information you have to set this body of knowledge on its own.

The more specific and targeted you can get, the better. The goal for each of your sites is to get people to contact you for consultation, but the sites themselves will be kept largely separate. By taking this approach, you will want to map out a unique marketing plan for promoting each independently.

To get a start in this arena, design a mini-site (5 pages or less) dedicated to a specific niche in your market while keeping your main site as the primary. Promote your mini-site(s) within some social networks and other free advertising opportunities (discussed in detail later) and gauge what kind of traffic you generate. Track these leads and decide for yourself how many new clients you garner by serving this niche in the marketplace. If you find that it's creating a lot of new sales, build other mini-sites and keep expanding.

Liberal Use of Keywords

Keywords are the words or phrases that search engines look for in finding relativity between a web user's search criteria and the websites that are listed as a result. There are volumes written about the art of "Search Engine Optimization" (i.e. getting your site to come up as the first result in an online search).

I will leave the multitude of ways you can optimize your search results for another essay, other than to discuss how keywords help. Anytime you write copy on your website, whether it is your home page greeting, a niche page you've created for a specific neighborhood in your area, your blog (if embedded) or any other page with text, you should focus on including specific keywords in the text.

As with most business decisions, you are often best served by starting with what keywords are most often used in a search and proceeding from there. This can be accomplished on a number of useful sites:

- www.Wordtracker.com
- www.Nichebot.com
- www.Keyworddiscovery.com
- www.KeywordAnalyzer.com

It is important that you understand that when a person does a search on the internet, the pages that wind up in the coveted "Top 10" results are those that contain the exact keyword phrase they are searching for. Therefore, if you live in Bend Oregon and use the keyword "Bend Oregon Real Estate" but not "Bend Oregon Condominiums" or "Bend Oregon Investment Property" you could be missing out on thousands of searches monthly.

Write your text to not only include the words "Real Estate" but take some time to discover what other related words are used in popular searches for real estate in your area. You might be surprised to see how easily you can get your site to land in the Top 10 results simply by writing copy that intelligently incorporates widely used search phrases.

Call to Action!

This may sound like common knowledge, but I have seen a lot of realtor websites that actually make it difficult for a viewer find who to contact for more information. I hope for their sake that this is unintentional. Don't make the same mistake with your site.

The objective with using your website as a tool to gain more leads is to encourage visitors to perform different actions. As stated before, your website serves very little utility unless you have got mechanisms to capture and generate leads. This is most easily done by asking your prospective clients to register on your site.

Perhaps you offer them an option to "Register for a comparative market analysis" on their current property. Or maybe it's an opportunity to "Sign up to have new listings emailed to you." No matter what your offer may be, once you have attracted people to your site, you need to take the next step and urge them to act. If you are not prompting your guests to offer you a way to contact them in the future, you have effectively set up your site to cater to every "Looky Lou" in the region.

Along these same lines, make sure that your contact name, phone number and email address is on every page. No matter where they are on your site, a guest should be able to quickly and easily find a way to call or write you for more information.

Even if you have a "Contact Us" page on your site, don't rely on this page alone to promote your contact information. Make it as easy as possible for people to know who you are and how to get in touch with you.

One idea is to create a hyperlink where people can click on your email address and automatically pull up an email screen which they can easily use to compose a message to you.   Whatever you do, simply make it easy for buyers and sellers to get in touch while you're top-of-mind.

CHAPTER 4:
How to Best Promote Your Site Online

Now that you have hand-crafted a superb marketing presence and created a top-tier website, the question quickly becomes "How do I attract prospects?" This next step can be easily achieved in a few simple ways.

By designing your site in such a way that search engines are naturally attracted (covered previously) a lot of the work has already been done. But here a few additional steps you should take to ensure a larger presence on the World Wide Web.

Submit Your Site to Search Engines

Yes, as we covered previously, search engines like Google and Yahoo will eventually discover your site and begin to place you in the search results for keywords pertaining to your site, but that takes time.

Often it takes 3-6 months for the large search engines to recognize your site and give it proper merit in regard to listing it anywhere near their Top-10 search results. You've got to get proactive and physically submit your site to these places to speed up the process.

GOOGLE -The first one to address would be Google. Google has earned a lion's share of all web search traffic and is widely recognized as the largest and most often used search engine. Fortunately, Google makes it easy to submit your site information.

There is more than one way to list your site with Google and I encourage you to explore them all. After all, the more places you are listed within Google, the better. The first step is to log into the Google home page (www.Google.com). From there, find the "Business Solutions" tab which will open your eyes to all sorts of magnificent features that Google provides.

The first place to get listed would be under "Google Maps Business Listings." This is a free service to list your business and fill in all sorts of information about who you are. If you're a lone agent working under the umbrella of a franchise, you can decide if you want your name to be the "Business Name" or go with a combination of the franchise name and yours.

I have even seen some agents use their website as the "Business Name." No matter what you decide, this should be unique to you. If you work for Prudential Dallas Realty, don't list your business as that. Choose something else like "Jane Doe – Prudential Dallas Realty." This way you and your own business stay differentiated from your firm's listing in the eyes of Google.

Another place on Google to get listed is GoogleBase (www.Google.com/base). GoogleBase is a place on Google that you can list products, or in your case, listings. By taking the time to enter your listings individually, you expand the overall presence your properties will have on the web and boost the relevance of your main website as well.

One other Google submission technique found within the "Business Solutions" area falls under the "Webmaster Central" tab. Here you'll find an easy link to "Add Your URL" to Google. Simply by following the prompts on this page, your site will be added to Google's database in no time.

Take it a step further and find where you can "list your business" in the Google Local Business Center (www.Google.com/local). By taking the steps needed to manually submit your site to Google you are planting all the right seeds and getting your website search engine results to grow.

YAHOO - The next place you will want to focus your search engine submissions is on Yahoo. The Yahoo search directory can be found at:
http://search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html

From here you can easily follow the pages that will explain how easy it is to submit your site's URL and get it recognized more quickly on the Yahoo search engine. In addition to "pay per click" (discussed later) Yahoo also offers Yahoo Directory Submit and Yahoo Search Submit, however these are fee-based services.

MSN – MSN is Microsoft's powerhouse search engine. Though not as heavily used as Google or Yahoo, MSN owns a considerable market share in the search engine business and should not be ignored. To get your website picked up faster on MSN, log on to
http://search.msn.com/docs/submit.aspx

REDZEE – This is a new form of web search that's quickly gaining momentum. Redzee is different in that it offers image-based search results. This means that one can actually see a screen shot of your home page in conjunction with a description of your site versus only a text description.

They take the "A picture is worth a thousand words" analogy very seriously. They have been primarily targeting their marketing towards prospects with high-speed internet connections that load images quickly and I have personally seen some great results from tracking this site. Submitting your website to this engine couldn't be simpler. Just log on to www.Redzee.com and click "Website Upload." It's just that easy.

Pay Per Click Advertising

Unfortunately, having a well designed website with a liberal use of keywords, interactivity and updated information along with your URL submissions to the major search engines is not enough to guarantee top search placement.

Many of the most successful website managers choose to add "pay- per- click" (PPC) advertising into their marketing mix. Pay per click advertising means just that; you pay a small fee for every person who clicks to your website from the sponsored search engine where your site is listed. You are in effect buying your slot in the top search result placements.

The benefit of using PPC advertising is that you are guaranteed a premium search result placement from the moment you sign on. Unlike reliance on your site's content and "findability" by the search engine crawlers, you buy your way right to the top.

By making a commitment to pay for everyone that clicks to your site you can instantly drive traffic to your business. The costs associated with PPC advertising will vary depending on the keywords you buy and the overall demand for those keywords at the

time. All of the major search engines offer pay-per-click programs and have resources to help you determine which targeted keywords will work best.

Of course the idea of paying for search engine results can be difficult to swallow when you may see your competitors' sites listed high in the rankings for free. But PPC advertising is the only <u>guaranteed</u> way to ensure top placement and can be useful especially when you're first starting out.

Before you decide whether PPC is needed or not, spend a little time and do some search result investigating of our own. Log onto the major search engines and run a few searches for the keywords with which you would like to be associated. If your site is not appearing in the Top-10 search results (NOT including the sponsored sites at the top) then it might be wise to explore PPC advertising. If the optimization practices you have implemented so far are garnering good search results on their own, PPC might not be needed.

If you do decide to explore PPC advertising, there is a lot of flexibility that comes with it. Typically there is no long-term commitment and you can often set daily, weekly or monthly budgets. So start small. Set a reasonable budget for what you would like to achieve and run it for a month.

Monitor how many new visitors you attract to your site during that time. See if the new leads that come to your website are quality prospects and how they are helping your bottom line. In our business, it often doesn't take a lot of new business to justify the expense of PPC advertising. Two or three qualified new clients per month might be all it takes to support continued PPC efforts.

A last word of advice about PPC advertising is to constantly monitor and test different keywords. Simply buying the keyword "real estate" for your market might generate a lot of new visitors but not result in many actual clients.

Your goal is to avoid the wasted expense of "tire-kickers" aimlessly surfing the web. Play around with the niche keywords you created as part of your website. If you decided to include some niche pages on your site, use those keywords and direct the traffic to those pages of your site. The more specific you can get with your keywords, the more targeted your PPC advertising will be.

Post Your Listings On Other Sites

Another way to positively affect the amount of web traffic you get on your site is to post your listings on other major real estate websites. This will obviously benefit your clients with more exposure for their home, but it will also help drive more traffic (and leads) to you.

There are a lot of popular sites that generate a ton of monthly traffic that I am sure you have heard of. Realtor.com, Trulia.com and now even Craigslist.com are teaming with visitors looking for real estate information.

Realtor.com – From the National Association of REALTORS® comes the nation's leading real estate website. As a member of NAR, you are automatically eligible to receive exposure for your listings. Best of all, the basic listing information is free. As with any profitable website, there are a lot of paid ways to increase your exposure on Realtor.com which you may eventually opt to include, but you can always begin with a basic and free presence on this site.

There are 6.3 million buyers using Realtor.com which makes it a site you simply can't ignore. In addition to more web exposure for your own site, Realtor.com offers you free reporting that you can use to gauge the amount of views your listings are receiving.

Use these statistics when talking to your clients and let them know exactly what your marketing efforts are generating for them. There is also a realtor white page directory on Realtor.com that you can list yourself for free.

Trulia.com – This site, launched in 2005, boasts 5 million unique visitors per month. It has quickly become a major player in national real estate search sites of note. Once again, this site offers agents the opportunity to submit their listings and personal information for free.

Getting started is very easy and the site walks you through the process. By including a link to your website with every listing you post, visitors are easily guided to you while the links themselves help improve your site's search engine optimization. Trulia has a handful of media partners as well, so if you advertise in print publications like *Homes & Land*, your listings might already be uploaded automatically for you.

Craigslist.org – Craigslist has quickly become one of the most well-known free classified websites in the nation. Those agents who are not posting their listings on craigslist are missing out on a huge number of prospective clients.

It is hard to find concrete visitor traffic numbers that everyone can agree on, but according to Quantcast.com (a traffic reporting website) the rough estimate is somewhere close to 40 million U.S. visitors per month! If just a small percentage of those people are searching for real estate in your area it still amounts to a load of potential for selling more homes.

Posting to craigslist is very simple and, of course, free! To get started, you'll need to log onto craigslist.org and set up an account. The set up process is very simple and quickly walks through the steps. The next step is to define the city or area you want to post your listings.

Craigslist.org will not allow you to post duplicate ads in more than one city or region so you will need to choose where you want yours listed. This will most likely be the city in which the listing is located unless you work in a resort town and feel a nearby metro area will be more effective for you.

One thing to note about craigslist is that ads/listings are posted in a running chronological order of when they were posted. This means that you will be at the top of the list when you first post but your property will quickly fall further down the list as more homes are listed for sale.

One trick that I will share with you is how to always keep your listings fresh and near the top. Craigslist allows you to delete and immediately re-post your listings after a 48-hour window of time has passed since the original posting. This means that you cannot re-post listings before they have been on for at least 48 hours, but if you have multiple listings, you can stagger them out and always keep some at the top of that day's list. Here's how:

- Log into your account and find your oldest listing (has to have been listed for at least 48 hours)
- Highlight the listing and choose to "Delete this Posting"
- Select "Return to Account"
- Scroll down and select the listing you just deleted
- Select "Repost this Posting"
- Follow the prompts to classify the listing the same as you originally did
- You'll have to re-enter the address, but the rest should already be there
- Follow the authentication process and now the listing will be on "today's" list of postings!

In my experience, it takes about 5 minutes per day to re-post 3-5 listings and it is well worth it to stay near the top of the list. While your competitors are posting their properties and allowing them to grow stale, you will ALWAYS have something in "today's" search page.

If you get into the habit of staggering your listings over a week's time, you'll not only have listings in the most current day, but every day down the list as well. This gives the appearance that you're an extremely active agent which is not only good for selling your listings but in attracting prospective clients looking for an aggressive agent too.

CHAPTER 5:
Leveraging Other Mediums to Promote Your Website

Now that you have created a complete website designed to attract, hold and track visitors while turning them into active clients, you need to promote your site every way you can!

Think about the total range of marketing you do, be it print advertising, property flyers, business cards and everything in between.

With the statistics showing the majority of people performing an online search for real estate before making a purchase decision, it is imperative that you promote your site everywhere you go.

Print

No matter what sort of ad you are putting together, make sure your web address is a prominent part of the ad. If you're running classified advertising, place your website in **BOLD**. If the prospect doesn't know you personally, they are much more apt to visit your website before picking up the phone to call.

If it is a magazine ad, template your page or pages so that your website stands out, perhaps at the top of the page before your listings. Print advertising is great to wet the client's appetite, but it should be your website that ultimately convinces them of your abilities.

If your site is set up with the key ingredients discussed above, let your print advertising be the driving force to create traffic and let the site itself take care of the rest.

Flyers

Of course your website should be a major component of any flyers you create for a property listing. If it is a printed one-sheet, make sure your website is on the front and stands out. Again, the flyer is there to entice prospective buyers but your website will contain a lot more photos and information than a flyer ever can.

Attract buyers with your flyer but drive them to your website to convert them into qualified clients. If you create flyers for a flyer box, the same holds true. Most people that grab a flyer from the box are drive-by prospects and often un-represented. Impress them with your website and you will realize new clients this way year after year.

Sign Riders

If you're in the habit of using sign riders on your "For Sale" signs, make sure one of them is **always** your website. In most markets, call-ins from signs account for at least a third of floor calls.

That means there are a third of prospective clients looking for homes in your area actively trying to get more information. Again, make it easy for them to log onto your website, get the information they need and call you once they have become comfortable with the services you offer.

It seems like most people are getting accustomed to remembering web addresses so make yours readily available on your signs. It's the best advertising you can get!

In Conclusion

This is a general synopsis of how to effectively market real estate online. I have covered what makes for effective marketing and how to incorporate it into your website design and marketing plan.

The hope is that you gained at least one or two insights from this piece that you were not already using. Now that you have grasped the basics of what constitutes effective web marketing for your business, go and put them into practice!

Try these methods out for yourself and see first hand how they can and will boost your bottom line. If your goal is to attract more clients and sell more real estate in the coming years, these proven approaches are where you should start.

As you follow these guidelines, I wish you the utmost success in your real estate career.