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Selecting the right marketing firm to achieve your business goals

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Many real estate professionals get to a point in their businesses when they require the assistance of a marketing firm. The reasons for this vary: they need to build or strengthen their personal brand; they don't have the skills required to increase their web site's search engine rankings or design eye-catching direct mail pieces; or they simply don't have the time to focus on marketing and public relations efforts. At the end of the day, those agents and brokers seeking a marketing firm have one thing in common - they want to expand their business and increase its profitability.

If this describes your current situation, do you know how to select the right marketing firm for your real estate business? In order to prevent difficulty comparing quotes by various firms - and to keep you in control of the process - it is critical to take the time to understand your marketing situation before you start researching.

The first step is to gather your existing electronic and printed marketing materials, and review them objectively. Using them as a foundation, define your marketing goals so that you can clearly articulate your needs. Next, determine how much you are willing to budget for this assistance on a monthly basis.

With your marketing requirements and budget defined, you are ready to start searching for a marketing firm. Follow these tips to find the firm that best fits your business and personality:

*Request recommendations - ask your colleagues, friends, and business associates for the names of marketing firms they have done business with and would recommend. Ask detailed questions about their experiences, and find out if the firms have a local market focus.

*Search online - review the web sites of the marketing firms suggested by your network. They should include portfolios and client lists. Research those to determine if the firms have experience with projects similar to yours, and if you like their design style and presentation.

*Ensure online/offline integration ability - real estate businesses must embrace integrated on- and offline marketing efforts in order to gain market share. Identify firms that have experience developing and executing integrated marketing plans in-house.

*Interview - select at least three marketing firms to interview. Present your needs and budget to them, and request delivery of a written proposal with a line item budget included, along with hourly rates. Find out if the firms are open to phasing your project, if needed, for budgetary reasons.

*Check references - once you've selected a firm, call their references and ask about the timeliness of project delivery, level of customer service provided, and campaign outcomes.

A marketing firm should serve as your partner in business development. Select one that can be your trusted advisor and that can deliver the scope of services you need to further your real estate business in your local market.

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