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Linda Fanaras - Build some buzz!

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One of the greatest challenges facing real estate agents and brokers is creating a highly recognizable personal brand that steadily attracts new clients. As I've discussed in previous columns, it is vitally important to integrate both on- and offline marketing strategies - from advertising and public relations, to optimizing web sites for search engines and employing mobile marketing methods - to consistently build a brand across multiple mediums. Another valuable tactic that can amplify results for the real estate industry is buzz marketing. This approach requires planning and effort at launch, but if executed correctly, the outcome can last for months - if not years.

Buzzing Around

Word-of-mouth marketing has traditionally enjoyed top rank as the most effective marketing strategy, as it is human nature to favor the opinions of those individuals closest to us. However, word-of-mouth success typically ends when the closest circle of family and friends around the customer have heard about his/her experience with the product or service. Alternatively, buzz marketing is viral in nature, and can be so impactful that it achieves top-of-mind brand awareness and delivers continuous customer referrals.

Major corporate brands have enjoyed success with buzz marketing strategies including videos that have gone viral on the internet (think 2010's Old Spice Guy) and guerrilla marketing tactics like Nike's International Car Free Day in Prague, when it placed Nike sneaker police "boots" on hundreds of cars to promote its brand message: Run on Air. These tactics reach a wide audience, make a huge impression, and continue to attract attention without any additional effort from the brand itself.

Even though the real estate industry is service-oriented, agents and brokers can hop on the buzz bandwagon, too. An identifiable personal brand must already be established in order for the audience to connect the buzz marketing tactic with the individual or company - and remember it. Most importantly, the tactic must be creative and unique. For instance, Butch Grimes of WeTalkRealEstate.com sends chauffeured limousines to his clients' workplaces to pick them up for their closings. He also uses life-sized cut-outs of himself attached to direction signs to open houses, so it appears that he is personally directing prospective buyers to the event (according to Bernice Ross in "7 Tips to Create Real Estate Marketing Buzz," Inman News, March 14, 2011).

The trick to buzz marketing is to develop a tactic or a series of related ones that showcase your individual personality and sales approach. This doesn't have to be as flamboyant as a cardboard cut-out, but can include a special way you temporarily decorate the door of a home you've sold to announce the sale, or even a giveaway gift for surrounding neighbors of a home you've just listed. Simply think of ways to share the best you have to offer with your clients, and the positive buzz will grow. If you require assistance, an integrated marketing firm can help establish your personal brand and brainstorm buzz marketing tactics that align with it.

Linda Fanaras is president and founder of Millennium Integrated Marketing , Boston and Manchester, N.H.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540