

How to Win the Web-Popularity Contest

The ability to harness search engines' power likely is in your grasp

Online marketing is one of the most important pieces of business promotion. The question mortgage brokers must ask when it comes to mastering online marketing is: What do search engines seek?

What people often don't realize is that what their Web site's home page looks like has little to do with whether people find their site. Rather, it depends more on the substance of your message and the consistency with which you deliver it.

Blogs are one of the best tools you can use to deliver fresh, relevant online content regularly. One of the best things you can do is have your Web site built with a blog displayed prominently with your latest post on the home page.

The vast majority of blogs use really simple syndication, better known as RSS. This means that every time you post to your blog, RSS essentially will deliver a news flash to search engines letting them know there is news out there. This can help how often and high up your site appears in search results.

It also can be critical for mortgage brokers because it will help you know what to write about in the future. If you write about things people are searching for, then you'll appear more in their searches. That will yield more traffic.

Buying attention

When it comes to the Internet, traffic causes traffic. But how do you get the preliminary traffic that causes more traffic?

Although gaining initial Web site traffic can be tricky, it's certainly not impossible. One of the best ways to launch your site and get people to pay attention to you is to

buy that attention. This is known as pay-per-click advertising, which works exactly as it sounds. Advertisers, including mortgage brokers, pay every time someone clicks their advertisement. Nearly every search engine and Facebook offers these services.

A pay-per-click campaign works by creating the right environment for Web searchers to follow based on their searched criteria. In the mortgage business, some of the most commonly searched terms are "interest rates" and "mortgage rates." "Mortgage rates," for example, is searched on Google about 5 million times every month.

The problem with using Google to run a pay-per-click campaign on popular terms is that it will cost you a pretty penny. Pay-per-click pricing is based on the amount of traffic to the specific phrase or criteria. This is where you must get creative.

For example, the phrase "Chino Hills mortgage" — Chino Hills being a California city of about 80,000 people — is searched roughly 22,000 times per month. This makes local pay-per-click campaigns more affordable. Another advantage to a campaign like this is that you connect with a segment of the population more aligned with the areas in which you operate and the products you have to offer.

One of the best ways to discover what people are searching for on Google is to go to the source: adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal.

Meanwhile, Facebook has emerged as one of the most-important developments in Internet marketing since Google. With one-third of the U.S. population now on the site, Facebook is no longer an option you and your business can avoid.

We're not talking about the personal side of Facebook but rather the side on which you can make money. You know those little advertisements that pop up while you're browsing Facebook? It's no coincidence they align with your interests. The great thing about Facebook advertising is that it's possible to target your audience by geography, age or specific interests.

Facebook catalogs everything you do on the site and sells it to marketers. What you see now is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Facebook's marketing power.

Are you listed?

Do you remember paying for your phonebook ad? Maybe you still do. But those ads can be costly and even a waste of money. Think of the last time you used a phone book.

When you want to find a business or a service, chances are you pull up Google and type away. Have you ever noticed what comes up? All kinds of little directories with people's business information. Is yours there?

continued >>

John Driscoll, co-founder of Organic Sales, also founded Driscoll Financial Services, which launched in 2000 and produced more than \$1 billion in mortgage production in its first five years. Driscoll is a popular speaker and consultant in marketing and social media. Organic Sales is a marketing-consulting company advising various companies in all aspects of marketing. Driscoll's clients include best-selling authors and large sales organizations. Reach him at john@organic-sales.com. Visit www.organic-sales.com or www.johns-facebook.com.

<< continued

Hundreds of little directories feed Google and other search engines information every day. They tell the engines who you are, what you do and how to get a hold of you — all of that and a link to your Web site. Google sees each one as a vote for who you are and how highly your page should be ranked.

An amazing thing about these directories is that many businesses don't use them, yet they are almost always free to join.

One way to take advantage of this is to pay a search-engine-optimization company to list you with at least 100 directories. This typically costs about \$100 to \$500.

Where to start

Now that you know some of the basics about online marketing, you must keep yourself from feeling overwhelmed by the task. Here are a few steps to help you get started and to stay in control:

- **Choose a champion.** Elect someone in your office or your company to

educate you on the best steps, services or changes to overhaul your Web presence.

- **Develop a plan.** Make sure you have or create a plan with specific dates and goals that you would like to reach. Don't forget to have a budget. A good benchmark is to spend 10 percent of your gross revenue on marketing.
- **Commit to success.** Some people think they can treat Web or social-media marketing the same as a single mailer. But you can't expect success before you've made a full-time commitment.

Many mortgage brokers used to hit the streets to talk to people. On a good day, a broker might have spoken with 15 or 20 individuals. You now have the ability to reach hundreds of people per day while completing other tasks at the same time.

Having a Web site isn't enough. You must know how to drive people there. After all, it doesn't matter how good your content is if people never see it. ●