

## All The Ways You Can Market Your Site On The Web

Realtors measure the success of their Internet investments one way: Return On Investment. I've seen what hundreds of the successful ones do - agents who are generating hundreds of thousands in commissions each year, strictly from the Web. I know what works, and what flat-out doesn't.

You have to invest in marketing to generate Web site traffic.

"Build it and they will come," seems to be the unspoken motto of Website designers, who think their "cool" design with "killer" features will generate traffic for you on its own. It won't. Not unless you market the site.

Unless you - or someone - markets your site to real estate consumers, you'll have no visitors - so what's the point? Getting found on the web is the first thing savvy Realtors think about. When my company started putting Realtors online in 1996, their fundamental response was: "Cool site. But how is anyone going to find it?" I made it our company's mission to have a definitive answer to that question. For your personal site - so should you.

Here's what works:

*Search engine optimization:* Find a company with proven expertise at getting sites positioned in search engines. It is critical you measure their abilities with multiple long-term client references, not snake oil promises or guarantees. Real optimization isn't cheap, either, because doing it right requires time and smarts. Four figures up front and 2-3 figures monthly isn't unusual for a Realtor's personal site. Commercial sites often spend 5 figures annually for ongoing optimization. I put optimization first on this list, because it has the best ROI compared to other online advertising investments. Earned or not, coming up high in search results has a powerful effect on your credibility with consumers.

Search engine submission is *not* optimization: Keep in mind even a child can submit web sites to search engines. Some vendors make you think your site is going to do well in search engines via submission alone, saying things like, "We submit you to hundreds of search engines!" Or, "We resubmit your site every month to the search engines." Reality check: There's only a handful of search engines that matter. And most search engines ignore most submissions nowadays, preferring to find you on their own, via links to your site from sites already in their database. It helps them weed out the chaff.

An optimizer takes responsibility for your site doing well in search engines. A submitter doesn't; they just submit. After that, you're on your own. An optimizer adjusts the source code and content of your site, sometimes extensively, to make it more relevant to search engines for your preferred key word phrases. Optimizers can even help with measurements of your site's popularity; a crucial factor in doing well in search results. And an optimizer should be there for you today, tomorrow, and next year, because search engines change their ranking algorithms all too regularly. One day you're on top, the next, you're nowhere. Happens all the time.

*Pay per click:* In addition to, or instead of, optimizing your site to do well in searches, pay for it, on a click by click basis. A click is someone clicking on a link to your site. The cost per click is often determined in a bidding process. Overture and Google are the primary vendors. Google allows you to test multiple ads at the same time to hone your strategy - a direct marketer's dream. In my experience, pay per click is significantly

more expensive than optimization, but yields quicker results. They can work well together.

*Pay for inclusion:* You pay to get included in a directory of sites, or in a search engine's database. \$300 annually gets you into Yahoo's directory, for example. It's a wise and modest investment, as Yahoo is the dominant directory. [Business.com](#) offers a hybrid pay-per-click, pay-for-inclusion model, as does Looksmart and others. Inktomi's entry-level pay for inclusion offering guarantees your site is spidered (refreshed in their database) every 48 hours.

*Pay per impression:* These are typically graphical ads, such as the "banner" ads across the top of most commercial web pages. Target your ads, by search phrase or location within a site, or by seeking out local Web sites, such as your newspaper's. Don't expect a click-through rate much higher than direct mail, unless your offer and targeting are exceptional. The industry average is less than 1 percent. Rich media ads (Flash, DHTML) increase response rates significantly, some report as much as six times. Banners are now used as much for branding as for response generation.

*Listings advertising:* On the web, listings drive consumer traffic. That's why Realtor.com has the most visitors. But it works for you, too, on a smaller scale. Get your listings featured on sites like [Realtor.com](#), [HarmonHomes.com](#), and others. Ideally, you should place your listings on sites that drive consumers back to your personal Web site. Or generate leads only for you.

*Offline advertising:* An advertising strategy, which integrates multiple mediums, is simply more effective. A message is reinforced in people's minds when they see it in multiple contexts, over time. Not everyone looks for homes online, either. TV didn't kill radio. Radio didn't kill newspapers. The Web's not going to kill either, nor other mediums. Some consumers are more comfortable with mediums such as newspapers and homes magazines. Promote your Web site there. At minimum, include your web address – and a reason for visiting – with every listing you advertise offline. If your goal is to dominate your local market, you'll have to have a significant presence in all the dominant mediums. You can't win the war by taking over a corner. On the other hand, some corners, also known as niches, are highly profitable. It's a strategic decision you'll have to make.

*Specialized programs:* [Market Conditions Reports](#) allows you to report on your local marketplace - providing the one thing online consumers want to see besides listings. Realty Times, the largest real estate news service and content provider on the Internet, pushes you and your report and your Website to leading real estate portals, including Realtor.com, eBay, MSN, Yahoo! and many more. It costs \$300 annually. You can't get better personal exposure or distribution for the money.

*Agent locator sites:* It seems like a new one pops up every week. It doesn't take much to put a list of agents on a Web page and ask for an annual or monthly fee. Most announce their presence by arriving in your inbox as spam. A couple of reputable ones include Realty Times, RealEstateABC, and IRED. They've been around for a long time, and typically peg the top of results when searching for "real estate." Some agent locator sites charge referral fees, or per lead generated. They are controversial because some Realtors feel they undermine the traditional real estate industry. You decide.

*Web sites with built-in marketing:* A few vendors offer Realtor web sites with varying degrees of built-in traffic generating strategies, such as [Realtor.com](#), [Homes.com](#), and [NUMBER1EXPERT.com](#) (from my company, [Best Image Marketing](#)). Find out exactly how each sends consumers to your site. Talk to Realtors you know and trust, who use their products. Most of these vendors primarily market their company's portal site, and you get traffic by being a part. Some distribute your listings to other sites. Some market your site individually, too. Some include search engine optimization. Some do it all.

*Web sites without built-in marketing:* Most Web sites offered to Realtors don't come with built-in marketing, and leave that job up to you. Some offer helpful marketing tips. They typically cost less, too. Custom site designers give you a unique look, but are relatively costly, some surprisingly so. Mid-four to low-five figures is a typical fee from a reputable web graphics designer, in my experience. Again, traffic generation is your

responsibility with every true custom site I have come across. Designers aren't marketers, nor optimizers. Know what you are buying.

"Who sends traffic to my Web site - me or you?" It's easy to determine who is responsible for generating traffic for a Web site. Ask the vendor: "Who sends traffic to my Web site? Me or you?" If they say, "We submit your site to search engines," and don't accept responsibility for traffic at the same time, you might want to look elsewhere – unless you are planning on marketing your site by yourself. If a vendor says they'll send you traffic, they should be able to tell you exactly where and how. Just as importantly, ask them what they'll do if you are not satisfied with the traffic levels. If their only answer is, "We'll resubmit you to the search engines," consider choosing another vendor.

Here's a secret: You don't have to limit yourself to one Web site. Most of the successful online Realtors I know have multiple Web sites. They average about three. Some have as many as 10. Why? It's a simple matter to determine if a site is making you money. One transaction can pay for a site for an entire year. One of the reasons the Web took off so fast is the return on investment is high, compared to traditional mediums. A Web site for a year can cost one to three grand or more, plus marketing. Boilerplate sites can cost less. Compare that to traditional mediums, which can cost as much or more, and for a shorter time period.

Savvy marketers shift dollars to mediums that generate higher returns.

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