

It's Print *AND* the Internet

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You've probably heard this one before: "Eighty percent of homebuyers are online. You need to cancel your print advertising. It's a waste of money. Go where the buyers are."

Speakers across North America are chanting this mantra. Many of these same speakers have a vested interest in online marketing. Now I admit to a bias: I am the CMO for a company that prints five million magazines per month. I do believe strongly that the agents who listen to the hype and cancel their print advertising are making a huge mistake. Online advertising definitely has a place in an agent's marketing portfolio, but online advertising is not sufficiently visual, repetitive, or frequent enough to achieve all of a top producing agent's career goals.

Let's examine what I mean. When agents tell me that they plan to advertise exclusively on the Web, I ask them precisely what their plan includes. I usually hear a mix of Google Adwords, SEO that might yield some clicks to an agent's website, listing enhancement on sites like Realtor.com, membership with a lead referral company, and maybe a blog. Now each of these options has benefits, and I encourage you to explore them all. However, even added together they don't provide the comprehensive marketing system that a productive agent needs.

For example, an agent plans to buy sponsored links like "Orlando Real Estate" on Google. This is a valid way to spend money; however, the reality is the top three sponsored links on a search page get a lot of clicks, the next five spots get some clicks, and after the top eight spots you get zero clicks. Even in medium size markets there may be 2,000 agents competing for the top few slots with obvious keywords like "real estate," and most agents don't have the time or knowledge to go after the more obscure search terms. The bottom line is that there will be very few agents in your market who can succeed by *only* buying keywords, and these agents are open to immediate displacement by a higher bid from a competing agent.

Perhaps an agent tells me that she is going to put more money into improving her personal website and then hire an "expert" to help push her site to the top of the search results. Once again this is a limited strategy. Almost every agent and broker has a website, and it is very tough to get to the top of the search results. A search on Google for "Orlando Real Estate" yields 1,820,000 websites. That is a tough ladder to climb. There are a lot of so-called experts making big promises to agents about what they can achieve. Most agents end up being disappointed.

And those agents whose sites come to the top are extremely vulnerable. Google changes the algorithms that determine who gets to the top. If a change is made, the agent's rankings may fall without warning, and then where is she?

Some agents participate with lead referral companies. Most lead referral companies offer designated territories, usually by zip code. There are a limited number of spots available. These companies charge a referral fee on closed transactions or a hefty per-lead charge. In addition, the popularity of these sites is on the decline. Referral sites are not a bad option, but they are a limited option.

The agent plans to pay extra to enhance his listings on Realtor.com. This should help, but there are over 4,000,000 listings on Realtor.com. Is that how the agent is going to brand himself or win listings? Too many agents are already doing the same thing.

Once again I am not dismissing these options; I believe they all have some value. An important question to ask is, "What am I trying to accomplish with my advertising dollars and will these online options achieve my goals?" Even added together the online options don't provide the comprehensive marketing plan that productive agents need. Consider how print advertising can anchor a marketing plan:

Lead Generation: Print advertising produces phone calls and email leads from readers (and I like to point out that agents are more likely to get an actual phone call from a magazine—which is a higher quality lead). Homes & Land also generates leads from magazines sent directly to consumers actively buying and selling. We offer direct mail programs where agents can mail magazines to their target markets. Leads are also generated when relocating buyers request a magazine from our 800 number. In addition, magazines are enjoyed by affluent Baby Boomers and retirees, people who can qualify for homes even when credit is tight.

Satisfying sellers: Home sellers get anxious when they don't see any activity. Advertising their home in a quality magazine is evidence that the agent is doing everything possible to market that home.

Winning listings: In a down market agents need more listings than ever because fewer listings will actually close. Advertising in a quality magazine differentiates you from other agents competing for the listing.

Justifying a commission: When home prices decline, home sellers ask agents to cut their commission percentage. This is a way for the home seller to make up the lower sales price. A full service marketing plan that includes quality print advertising justifies a full commission from the sellers (and an additional percentage point in the commission can more than pay for multiple print ads).

Reaching past clients: Advertising in print is an effective way for an agent to reach past clients. Print advertising shows past clients that an agent is still active and understands the demands of today's marketplace. This results in the client referring friends and family to the advertising agent.

Market share: Maybe an agent will not reach last year's production goals. However, in slow times agents can still gain market share from the competition. Cutting back on print advertising may save money in the short run, but it may also cost the agent market share in the long run.

Branding: Many agents have worked hard to establish a personal brand. Why would you cancel your print advertising and interrupt the brand you have already established? And many of your competitors are cutting back and minimizing their presence. Now is the best time ever to stand tall and project confidence. Promoting recent successes, such as the number of homes sold this year, is a great way for you to project a positive brand in a tough market. Print advertising does this very well.

In addition, according to BIGResearch, magazines are the number one way to drive traffic to a website—and this is across all age groups. The last point illustrates an important truth: Print and Internet advertising each have unique advantages. When you integrate a print campaign and an online campaign, you are more likely to engage consumers earlier in the home buying and selling cycle, with a much greater likelihood that they'll contact you. The right choice is not print or the Internet, it's print *and* the Internet. That's what you get with Homes & Land.

