

Ramping up and beating the winter time blues

The holidays and winter is fast approaching and you know what that means. Yes, the market and home sales tend to slow down as home buyers turn their attention to preparing their homes for the family, Thanksgiving dinner and then Christmas. So what can you do to help keep business coming in and level out the ups and downs of a slower market?

TIP #1 Start Now

You should have a good handle on the number of inspections you are doing every week and without much effort you should be able to look at month by month information and even compare the current year's inspections to the prior years. This should give a good idea of when the slowdown trend starts.

With this information in hand you should start your marketing efforts well in advance of the projected down turn. The seasoned marketer knows returns from marketing take time and requires repeating the process. Mailing some post cards or letters and then sitting back and waiting for the business to flow in is one of the biggest mistakes most small business owner make. They think that if they mail out 1000 post card the phone will ring off the hook and when it does not then they brand the process as a waste of time and money. They are absolutely right. Why? Because first direct mail marketing yields a very low response rate and even more importantly they did not conduct follow up campaigns.

Mailing is about branding and exposure and this take time and repeating the process. So plan your attack and coordinate your mailings, repeat the process but not too frequently. Be realistic it will take multiple mailings to make those connections and bring in new business. Don't forget to always include the most important item, your business card. Done right this will yield results.

Tip #2 Answer the Phone

Some of you have office staff or use an answering serve but the majority of inspectors are truly a one man shop. As such, it is not always easy or convenient to answer the phone, but it is critical during slow time to answer each and every phone call. Most home buyers that are looking for a home inspector want the information now and will not wait or even leave a message. They will just go to the next inspector on their Google search results until they connect with one. So always answer the phone even if you're on an inspection. Remember you've already booked that inspection so it's time to book the next.

Tip #3 Take Advantage

Since business is slowing down you should have some extra time to do direct marketing. Don't just assume that because business is slow that the real estate offices will be empty. Take advantage of the fact that most of your competitors are taking some time off and they are not visiting offices. This gives you the perfect opportunity to fill the void at the weekly or monthly meeting. Agents need work too so

the motivated good agents will be in the office prospecting for work or volunteering to answer the phone. These are the agents you really want to connect with and work to build those relationships.

Tip #4 Partnerships

Look for opportunities to network and co-market with other business that complement yours, chances are they are marketing the same real estate offices, lenders and others as you are. So why not share the burden and work together to market the same clients. You may already have a relationship with these companies so getting them to agree to a co-marketing effort should be easy. More importantly they may already have an "in" at a particular office and can get you past the gate keeper. Remember if you don't try or ask it's not going to happen.

Tip #5 Expand your product offerings

Take advantage of this time to look at different products that you could be offering that will bring in more revenue. If you're not offering radon then take a class and get certified and secure the proper equipment. Consider adding pool or irrigation inspections. Look at what your competition is offering and not offering then target those areas that make the most sense and fit best with your business model. Don't forget to announce these new services and even more important ask potential clients if they want a radon test with the inspection or if the home has a pool or sprinkler system that also needs an inspection.

Tip #6 Neglected Tasks

Look at your website and social media efforts chances are you have neglected keeping your website up to date and fresh. Review your social media accounts and post periodically a topic of interest, again here it's about branding and repetition keeping your company name and logo in the forefront will yield results but you have to be engaged and current. You don't need to post every day but once a week is fine. Originally counts so post something original. Resist the temptation to use a service that post for most will recognize this and it gets ignored as internet noise. If you can't think of something to post then make comment on another post. Remember keep it professional not personal.

Tip #7 Contact Lists

Believe it or not the real estate profession is very transient and agents frequently change from one agency to another or start their own company. So if you have not reviewed your contact lists then is a great time to do so. You will be surprised at how much turnover there is in this business. If you notice an agent that used you has changed agencies or started their own business then this is a great time to drop them a note in the mail wishing them well with the change.

Tip #8 Say Thank You

Look at what agents have used you over the past year. Call those that use you on a regular basis and tell them "thank you" and how much you appreciate them and how it's been a great year. No need to ask for business or referrals just a simple thank you is all that is needed. Since it getting close to the

holidays send them a small token of your appreciation, this is a common and accepted business practice and if done with restraint it does not violate professional ethics.

Summary

So, ramp up your marketing now in anticipation of the slow down. Getting the jump on the competition will yield results. Increase your marketing effort and most importantly be consistent. Don't make excuses when the phone is not ringing. You have the tools and time so use them wisely.

Write down your marketing goals and tasks you'll be surprised at how the simple task of writing them down will yield results. Post it where you can see it and look at it frequently. Don't get discouraged if you don't complete them all, you're doing great if you finish half of them.

Set aside a dedicated time each day to work on these tasks. Break them down into smaller tasks that can be achieved in an hour or less. You'll be surprised at how much you can accomplish and the result is will return.

Don't get discouraged as you will not see immediate results. Being consistent and your efforts will pay off overtime. Track your results and don't be afraid to make adjustments or changes to your plan.

Here are some suggestions

- Try to call 5-6 agents a day/week who used you during the year to say thanks.
- Send a thank you card to all the agents who sent you business this year
- If you do office presentation send a thank you card to the broker in charge or the office manager
- Send out a small token of appreciation to your top agents