

A Web Site Information Hub

By Erich Stiegler

Don Reynolds is no newcomer to the world of running a business. His story starts with his wedding invitation store. After seven successful years, his sales started to plummet alarmingly after 9/11. At the same time, he observed that mortgage brokers were thriving, even though every other industry seemed hopeless. He began brokering loans himself. Subsequently, Wells Fargo hired him as a loan officer and in 2005, he became a senior mortgage planner for Great Southwest Mortgage.

Reynolds explains, "Back when I was a loan officer with Wells Fargo, I was generating about \$10 million a year. Our goal for 2006 is to exceed \$30 million, and it looks like we will be able to double that next year, even in a so-called 'down' market. I attribute this success to the improved efficiencies we've achieved by embracing the Web and implementing technology into our loan practice."

The reason why Reynolds has a Web site may be a little different from what people would expect. Rather than only using it to draw in prospects, he also uses his Web site to give better service to his existing clients. Based on comments he receives from his clients, Reynolds concludes that his Web site "conveys that they are working with the right mortgage planner."

The Site

In order to be successful, a company needs the ability to differentiate itself from the competition. Reynolds follows this principle, and now has the ability to market himself in new and unique ways—one of which is with his Web site. This really appeals to Reynolds, because previously it was difficult for him to distinguish himself from the other loan officers. Reynolds updates his Web site him-

self and says, "It's easy to adapt it to what I want it to do, and it's easy for my clients to get to the information they're looking for."

Pleased about how much his business is centered around his Web site, Reynolds candidly refers to it as the "Information Hub" for all his clients and all their financial needs. "For example," he states, "if a client needs a disclosure, I take them to my site. If they want to know what their payment on a loan would be, I show them how to check it on the calculators. If they want to locate recorded documents, they can use my site to get to the correct government agency. Having all this information in one place also makes my life much easier, and my job much more efficient." Reynolds cites other examples, such as no longer having to "overnight" loan documents, since his clients can now print them directly from his Web site and fax them back.

Reynolds strongly believes that his Web site influences and/or touches 100 percent of his business. He is continuously referring people to it. "I'm always training my clients to use it as a resource," he says.

As a prudent business man, Reynolds always looks at cost. He noted that the cost-effectiveness of his Web site is "unbelievable." In conducting his analysis, he compared the cost of his Web site against spending thousands of dollars on magazine ads or a short radio spot; his analysis clearly pointed him towards the Web.

Marketing

Ironically, Reynolds' wedding invitation store, whose plummeting sales caused him to look for a new job, has now become a key component to his first-time homebuyer marketing. He has converted his wedding invitation store into a marketing en-


gine for his loan practice. According to Reynolds, the great thing about all wedding event-oriented businesses is that they are the equivalent to receiving "tomorrow's newspaper today." "Think about how important it is to know who is getting married or engaged," Reynolds confides. "I'm in touch with prospects months before they start to shop for a home and a mortgage. This puts me in a good position to share my abundance of leads with my favorite Realtors. It helps them become successful with leads from me, instead of me begging every Realtor I know to give me a chance at their client's loan."

Reynolds said he continues to build momentum by adding something new to his Web site every month. This keeps it "fresh" and his Web site will continue to provide increasing value to his clients and prospects alike. He also focuses energy on growing his sphere of influence and his network. As part of these efforts he has organized homebuyer and growth-building seminars, and plans to offer an additional retirement workshop in 2007.

"My Web address is actually more prominent than my phone number on the print media that I distribute," Reynolds says. This is very important to his strategy of "funneling" his prospects and clients to his Web site and clearly highlights one of the most overlooked, yet most important key factors of successful Web sites. He also believes that his audience feels safe going to his Web site. According to Reynolds, "There is no threat, no pressure, and they can take their time exploring their options without an unwanted phone call."

Reynolds' biggest challenge with the Internet actually turned out to be a blessing in disguise. He used to worry about whether people ac-

cessing the Web via a “slow” dial-up connection could effectively use his Web site. He has overcome this fear by using an optimized Web site that effectively supports the full spectrum of connectivity speed. In fact, having a fast Web site for a variety of connection types—from dial-up to high speed—has given him another competitive advantage.

“One more piece of advice to a new loan officer,” comments Reynolds “is to ‘quit trying to sell people stuff,’ and just be yourself. If people like you, and find you knowledgeable, they will ask you to help them. With a focus on helping other people—doing the ‘right thing’—money and success are never a worry and will always come.” 



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