

WHAT MAKES YOUR MARKETING WORK?

**It's not as big a mystery
as most people believe.**

by Greg Herder

Looking back over what I've learned about successful real estate marketing the last 20-plus years, I realized there are a few key things every successful marketing campaign we have ever done has in common—whether for an agent, a single office, a large company, or even our own marketing. And here's some insight about successful marketing that will surprise many in the real estate industry: You don't have to crack some mysterious code or be the beneficiary of rare luck. You merely have to apply sound, proven strategies.

Celebrate your individuality

The first common element in all our successful campaigns—and I believe the most important—is that each one focused on a point of real differentiation that was consistent with the agent's (or firm's) personal core values. The funny thing is that clients tend to fight this more than anything else. They tell us they don't want to limit themselves. Yet all the marketing books, research, and our years of experience show that if you don't have this element, your chances for a successful campaign are significantly reduced. The hardest part of identifying core values is looking inside yourself. You must figure out who you are and clarify what you stand for, personally and professionally. Based on what you find, you then have to make some gut-wrenching decisions and recognize trade-offs that most people simply prefer not to make.

Carve your niche

I remember when we started Hobbs/Herder Advertising how difficult it was to limit ourselves to working in the real estate industry. Looking back, I realize it was one of the biggest keys to our success. I know that you will succeed faster by starting with a highly focused, differentiating message that establishes your position in the minds of your clients, and then expanding from there, rather than trying to start with a broad, general appeal.

Facts don't sell

The next common element is that every successful campaign must touch the prospects at an emotional level. This is another thing that some clients struggle with. They tell us they want to highlight facts. They believe that a logical argument supported by facts will win over an emotional appeal every time. No matter how logically we present the evidence that emotions sell and facts do not, they are emotionally committed to being logical. Now don't get me wrong—I believe that every great marketing campaign has just enough facts so that a consumer can justify an emotional decision. This was one of the hardest lessons for me personally to learn and finally embrace.

In the early days of our company, I even wrote some ads that made a logical case about why Hobbs/Herder Advertising was worth the investment. These ads talked about the quality of our professional writing and design staff, the training we gave them and how our systems worked to ensure that they would get a campaign that worked. The problem is that I could never get the ads to emotionally resonate with anyone. Finally, I came to realize that the ads were really a reflection of my personal beliefs about the quality of work we did and the value we provided our clients. It was information that was important for me to believe in, to keep me true to my beliefs and values, but would have been a total disaster as a marketing campaign.

Look at the big picture

Another common element for all our successful campaigns is that they are truly campaigns, not just one ad or one brochure or one piece of direct mail. Over the years, I have been constantly asked, "If you can only afford one thing to get started, what should it be?" The answer is that when you start with a business plan and a basic arsenal of marketing materials, including your personal brochure, logo, ads, direct mail, Web site, and informational reports, I'd say your chances for success are almost 100%. We have found that if you start with only one piece, your chances for success are only 5% - 10%. In fact, I cringe every time one of our clients gets great response from his first few marketing pieces, because he starts telling others it works instantly! Every now and then it does, but consistent success comes from a complete campaign.

Stick with it

The final common element of all successful campaigns is consistency of your message over time. The reality is that it takes time for a marketing campaign to take root and grow. I tell agents the key to success is to develop and follow a one-year marketing plan that puts a differentiated, personal marketing message in front of consumers three to five times per month in a variety of media. It works most of the time. In fact, after 20 years of creating exciting marketing campaigns for real estate professionals, I know that on the rare occasions that it does not work, it's not a failure of marketing. It's a failure of the agent's basic competence as a salesperson.

The good news is that most agents who are willing to invest the time, the money, and the effort in a top-quality marketing campaign have good sales and service skills that enable them to capitalize on the business their marketing campaign creates for them.

I am often asked, "Is this hard to do?" The answer I give is both yes and no. The process is really not hard. The steps to take are clear. Many agents have done it in the past and are doing it right now. The hard part is mental. Making the tough choices about how to differentiate yourself, investing money that you cannot afford to lose, and then waiting for it to take root and grow during that critical first year of launching your marketing

campaign—these are the hard parts. This is where most agents simply fail to act, because in reality, it is easier to do nothing and simply hope that it will work out.

Greg Herder, CRB, is cofounder and CEO of Hobbs/Herder Advertising and is one of the most highly respected figures in North America on the topic of personal marketing in real estate. He has written books, articles, and seminars on the subject and consults with many of the industry's top agents and companies. For more information feel free to contact him.