

Know What Sets You Apart From Peers

To succeed in a purchase market, you must differentiate yourself

By Dennis Black

IN 2017, the ability to stand out from the crowd and not just be another mortgage originator could be the determining factor in your success as you struggle with rising interest rates.

But how do you truly differentiate yourself from all of the other originators who also realize they need to grow their third-party referral bases this year? If you want the opportunity to “thrive and not just survive” in the purchase-market environment of 2017, you have some work to do.

Being unique

The first thing to focus on this year is your current approach to working with Realtors and builders. Are you doing similar things to your competition? If so, why are you doing them? Take a look at your marketing approach and your referral-maintenance call efforts (visits to clients). Are you doing anything that stands out from the crowd in these areas? Or are you still using the infamous “drip campaign” marketing style and phone calls?

If you are doing what everyone else is doing, you will be perceived by potential customers as a commodity. In a commodity sale, the determining factor is price, which is why the rising-rate environment becomes scary to an average sales person.

So how do you not fall into this trap? First, do not use the standard drip-campaign approach to marketing. Nothing is more aggravating to a Realtor or builder than getting repetitive e-mails from someone they don't currently work with. Even if you do work with them, repetition dilutes your brand.

If you search online for “interruption versus transparent marketing,” you will find a

variety of information on this issue. What you will learn is that repetitive and constant e-mails cause customers to “turn off” your message. Transparent marketing, on the other hand, sends far more substantive messages less frequently and is used primarily with existing customers to deepen those relationships.

Maintaining relationships

Once you have changed your marketing approach, it is time to think about mixing up your field presence a little bit. There is a lot of truth to the phrase, “out of sight, out of mind.” A more consistent and methodical approach to customer contact is needed to stand out from the pack. A strong plan has two levels of contact per week with existing customers to keep you in their mind and show your desire to stay the course with the relationship.

Your first level of contact with your customer base should be phone calls on Monday or Tuesday (even if you just leave a voice message). Ask your Realtor and builder partners about how their weekends went business-wise and if there is anything you can assist them with in terms of pre-approvals for their new clients.

Then, you should mix in some second-level contacts by making a field visit sometime between Tuesday and Friday. Pop by your customer's location for a visit. Deliver some marketing handouts or review the status of a loan you have in process with that Realtor or builder. If they are not there, leave a note saying you stopped by and that they should call you to touch base.

This consistent style of selling will reduce resistance to working with you. As this

behavior becomes a pattern, your partners will begin to count on it when thinking about you as their business partner. Lack of follow up is the single biggest reason that relationships fail.

Establishing a strategy

Determining what you bring to the table to help your customers grow their businesses is critical to establishing your unique identity. Many originators simply want to take care of a transaction — secure a loan for a referral. The entire mortgage industry can do that, however. If that is all you bring to the table, you better have a great price or a product that no one else has.

So how can you help the referral partners you work with grow their businesses through your partnership with them? Focus on

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providing support and offering ideas that allow your customer to add one or two more transactions per month with your strategy. Here are a few quick ideas that you can use to provide true value in the partnership.

■ **Offer training on your products.** Show Realtors how your products can help secure new buyers through high loan-to-value conventional loans that can be done with no money out of the borrower's pocket. Demonstrate how to protect sellers by offering to pre-qualify buyers brought to a listing agent to validate buyers are truly qualified before the owners accept an offer. You can even work with a mortgage insurance partner, who can provide supporting material for a presentation.

■ **Provide marketing support.** Demonstrate how you can help Realtors and builders market their inventory through collateral materials for open houses and marketing efforts. Mortgage insurance partners can help here as well with co-branded or even private-label pass-through materials you can offer to your real estate and builder partners.

■ **Offer 24-hour financing support.** Make sure your Realtor and builder partners know you are available to help them sell their homes with quality financial support in the evenings and on the weekends. Success in mortgage

origination is not a 9-to-5, Monday-through-Friday endeavor. You must be available the same hours your customers are working, and if they see that effort on a regular basis, you will stand out.

There should never be any financial charge for your time and effort to Realtors or builders when providing these services. Never forget, however, that your business assistance does have value, so if someone asks if your support is free, your response is critical.

Look them square in the eye and state, "There is no financial obligation for this support, but I do have a business expectation. If the help I have given yields a buyer, I would like to be the first lender who speaks to that buyer." You cannot ask for the loan to be yours, but you can ask for their respect.



A lot of mortgage originators are going to be pursuing the same Realtors and builders this year, so you need to make an effort in all possible areas to show that you are truly one of a kind and not just another member of a large group. The key to succeeding in the coming rising interest rate market is to do the little things right on a consistent basis. More importantly, do not settle for being average in any area, or you will become just like everyone else. Good luck and good selling. ■