

# Go Social the Old-School Way

Hosting events can be an easy — and fun — way to grow your business

By Leslie Delworth and John Noldan

If you're an originator who is ready to increase your production, there's a golden rule you should embrace: People want to do business with people they like. It's really that simple. How does being likable result in a bigger bottom line? That's where events come in.

Getting together with real estate agents outside of the traditional workplace allows you to cultivate relationships. Social media may be a great way to build name recognition, but social gatherings are a tried-and-true method for building long-lasting business connections. So, go wild.

By interacting in a comfortable, laid-back atmosphere, you can get to know real estate

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**Leslie Delworth** is director of events at Guaranteed Rate. She oversees the planning, research and execution of all executive-leadership events. She also leads a team of 10 that is responsible for more than 300 monthly events nationwide. With a degree in graphic design from Columbia College, Delworth is passionate about infusing creativity and flair into each event she plans. Reach her at [leslie.delworth@rate.com](mailto:leslie.delworth@rate.com).

**John Noldan** is executive vice president of national sales at Guaranteed Rate. He is an experienced veteran of the industry who funded more than \$460 million in loans from 2015 to 2017 and has earned the reputation as a knowledgeable and trusted originator in the Elmhurst, Illinois, area. The Benedictine University graduate is a pro at assisting clients with important financial decisions and helping them achieve the dream of homeownership. Reach Noldan at [jnoldan@rate.com](mailto:jnoldan@rate.com).

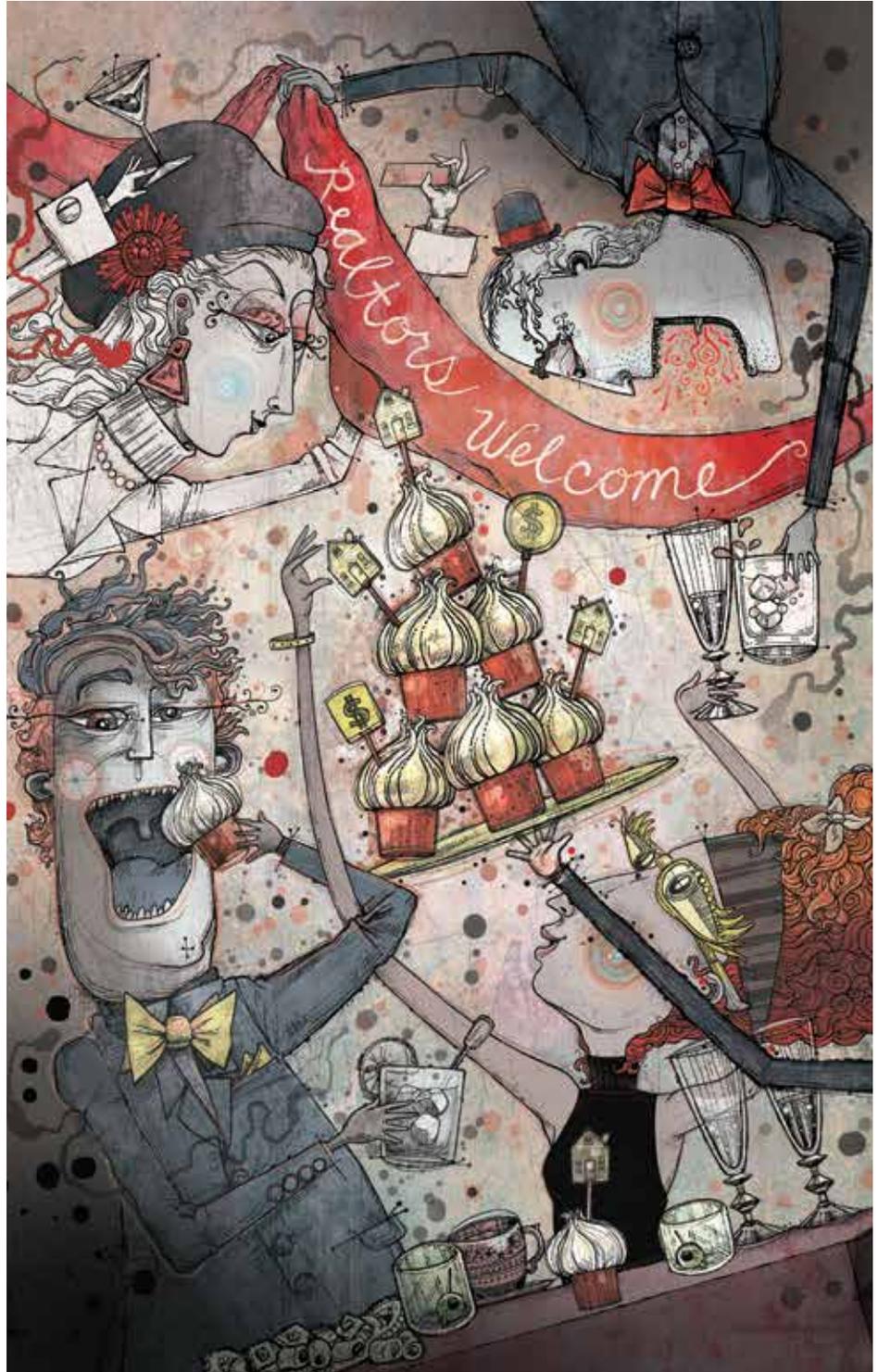


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agents and other referral partners on a more personal level while discussing the value proposition you can deliver to their clients. It's not about the event size or the attendance. It's about making connections, nurturing relationships and letting others know what you're all about.

Hosting events typically involves expenses, but don't let that intimidate you. You can start small and work your way up to see what type of event is best for you. Keep in mind that events create additional opportunities to spend time with referral partners. By dedicating some of your income toward marketing and events, you're investing in yourself, your business, your brand and your future.

Your goal is to be someone whom real estate agents, builders and other referral sources enjoy spending time with and know they can depend on. In short, someone they like. Then, the next time they come across someone who needs help with a mortgage, you may be on their list to call.

### Plan like a pro

Planning events doesn't have to be difficult. Let's take a look at some tips to help get you started.

First of all, do what you like. One key to hosting a successful event is to plan it around something you enjoy doing. If you're comfortable in a certain environment, it will make your event better overall. If you don't like wine, don't invite people to a wine-tasting event because you will be outside your comfort zone and likely won't be as engaging.

Perhaps sports are more up your alley. You could host a watch party for a big game. It's important, of course, to be mindful of your guests and plan an event you are confident they will want to attend. If you stay true to yourself and your interests as well, you will create a more enjoyable event for you and your guests.

You also should start simple. If you're new to events, your first one doesn't need to be an elaborate, expensive endeavor. You can gather a dozen people for happy hour at the

neighborhood pub. Find a place that's easy to access or close to a real estate agency so agents can stop by, if only for a quick visit.

The more events you host, the more your confidence will grow. Don't feel obligated to go all out right away. Get a feel for what works, then determine if ramping up your efforts makes sense.

Third, budget accordingly. An open bar at happy hour can be scary because you don't know what to expect. If you're just starting out and want to keep your costs down, a lot of places will provide you with drink tickets. If not, get creative and make your own with your name and company logo on them. Providing everyone with two drink tickets will limit the amount you spend.

Also, never be afraid to ask for a lower price. Regardless of the price a restaurant or bar quotes you, they want your business. Negotiate. The worst that can happen is they say no. If you're committed to having a monthly event at the same venue, they'll be even more inclined to work with you.

Next, work to ensure a healthy turnout. As you consider who to invite, ask yourself who you're trying to work with — whether that's Realtors, builders or borrowers. Perhaps you want to connect with attorneys, accountants or other financial professionals. Don't limit yourself on who can come. You never know what kind of connections you might make.

Encourage invitees to bring a friend, because that friend could be another Realtor or perhaps someone in the market for a new home. While an e-mail is appropriate for extending the invitation, following up with a phone call can make an enormous difference. Not only will it boost your attendance, but it keeps you in touch with your contacts and provides another way to open a dialogue. You're always looking for a reason to call an agent, so what better way to do that than inviting them to a marketing event?

Finally, once you have event creation under your belt, make it a regular occurrence. You should host at least one event per quarter, if not one per month. Again, events

don't have to be massive, expensive affairs. You can have some low-key, simple gatherings and mix in a more substantial effort every few months.

The Kentucky Derby is coming up and you could host a viewing party at a bar with reserved space. Lunch-and-learn events every quarter are another way to stay in touch with your agents. Catching up over a midday meal while educating them on different financing options also is a wonderful way to show you're someone they can count on.

### Own your event

Planning a successful event is only the start, however. Once you have potential referral partners attending your events, you need to use that social time to nurture those relationships. Get to know them and, more importantly, make sure they get to know you.

To start, soak up the spotlight. First and foremost, you've got to be a good host. The best loan originator will definitely be the most popular person in the room at his or her event. Your goal is to throw an event that helps you achieve that while discussing business and the experience you can provide for their clients along the way. If you do well, you'll grow your brand.

Mixing business with pleasure is the key. Events are meant to be fun for everyone in attendance. But don't lose sight of the overall objective, which is to let real estate agents or other referral partners know why their clients should come to you when they're ready to buy a new home.

Whether it's a Realtor you've known for years or someone you've just met, get to know your guests on a personal level and discuss your company's newest jumbo loan product or a tech tool that makes it quicker or easier to secure financing. This will enhance your relationships and, in some cases, you'll become friends. If you're getting invited to birthday parties for an agent's son or daughter, you're on the right track.

Finally, rely on your team: You've got a massive head start if your company has an

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events team. It's a night-and-day difference to not having one. An events team can take a lot of pressure off you. They know the ins and outs of event planning, which can make the whole thing turnkey for you, and take a lot, if not all, of the work off your plate.

### **Make it happen**

Whether it's your first or 50th event, it's important to be relatable. Getting referral partners and past clients to your events is just half the battle. Show them you're friendly and allow them to see you in a different light. Don't just be a voice on the phone. Be someone agents will like and come to trust.

When that happens, they'll be more inclined to take your calls. They'll come to your future events and, suddenly, you've got momentum on your side. Then, your referral partners will tell other agents about how wonderful it is to work with you, and your business will really start to elevate.

It's a numbers game. The more people you meet, the more loans you close. ■