



A Special Look at It's All About Marketing!

Get Personal ... With Technology

By BJ Bounds

We're all busy. Our society is a rushed society that often leaves little time for the personalized touches that cultivated relationships in the age before computers and e-mail. Those small touches included thank you notes and birthday wishes, handwritten and enclosed in customized stationary, as well as periodic phone calls for a variety of reasons. Selling was personal—not anonymous—and clients bought from those they liked and trusted. Unfortunately, life has gotten in the way of some of the more individual tasks of marketing a mortgage business. But it doesn't have to be over. Now that you have technology, cultivating relationships has shifted in delivery, but it is still as important as ever to “personalize” your business.

Personalizing your communications with current and potential clients is easier than you think, and you probably already have the tools you need to maintain and build the relationships that will help you grow your business. All you need is your loan origination system (LOS) and a Web site. For some activities or materials, you might also want to have Microsoft Word, but it's all in what you choose to do and what works best in your neighborhood.

Market with clicks

The first element of personalized marketing with technology is a customized Web site. According to www.internetworldstats.com, 77 percent of the U.S. population has Internet access, which makes it a great place to start marketing your business—and with easy-to-use Web site templates, the personalization is completely up to you. How much or how little you personalize can be a factor in your repeat traffic. It's a good idea to let your personality shine through so that potential clients feel they know who they're doing business

with. Again, clients are more likely to do business with you if they can relate to you on a personal level.

Think about your own experiences. Does a well-designed site influence your decision to stay there and browse or move on? Your Web site should incorporate information and visuals that work best for you and your intended target market. It should be a source of industry updates, rates, notice of events, neighborhood or mortgage trends—anything that could keep a prospective client coming back. Personalize the site with a video blog or offer live chat sessions.



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Make the right connections

Additionally, your Web site should provide an avenue for prospects to apply for a loan directly and securely. And your LOS should be linked directly to your site so that all application data is transferred into your LOS quickly and accurately to allow you adequate time to process and provide the required disclosures. The more efficient and accurate your data flow during the application process—the more time you have to further build your client relationships. This is where

further customization of your Web site will help.

Your online applications can enable complete mortgage applications, or you can choose to customize your available fields. Customizing your fields gives you the opportunity to contact your prospects for additional information and start a relationship, while offering you additional time to meet disclosure deadlines. By allowing your clients the convenience of online applications and at the same time providing an avenue by which you must have personal contact in order to continue, you show that you value their time, care about their specific needs and getting things done correctly.

Innovate and create

Capturing Internet users is just one way of using your technology to market and build your business. There are other ways your LOS can be used as your favorite marketing and branding engine. It's a veritable goldmine of tools that works beautifully with Microsoft Word to help you design, create and distribute your personalized materials.

Using your LOS in conjunction with Microsoft Word, you can produce creative and affordable marketing pieces that you can use repeatedly and repurpose for different outreach activities. Use the pre-built marketing templates in your LOS to help you get started. Every piece you create can be branded with your logo and any other images or photos you want to use. Using the templates in Word, you can customize and personalize your materials and save them in your LOS as a customized form, letter or label to send to any number of contacts saved to your LOS database.

Consolidate your contacts

The database you use for your business contacts is very important, and it's essential to maintain your complete lists of associates, adding and removing them as necessary. If you aren't using your LOS for contact maintenance, you are missing out on a very useful feature. Rather than storing your contacts in various locations, such as Outlook or a stack of business cards, it would behoove you to make sure you have them all in one place—only in your LOS. If you have multiple users of your mortgage platform, those contacts will be available for them to access for emergency situations when access to other databases may not be possible.

Once your various contacts are stored in your LOS with significant information, such as phone number; e-mail address; personal info such as birthday, family member birthdays, and current mailing address, you are fully armed with the tools you need for marketing your business with the personal touches technology can provide.

Grow your list

If you have a large list of Realtors and contractors that you do business with, by all means create several marketing materials geared toward them. Always ask for referrals. Referrals help build and maintain your pipeline. Think about all of the

business with whom you have contact—from Realtors and appraisers to remodelers, painters, lawn maintenance companies and foundation repair companies—you already have a huge referral base to tap into. If you are preparing your flyers in Word, personalize them further by including information your associates will find helpful. Similar to what you can post on your Web site, providing statistics, loan rates, industry status or predictions can potentially boost your referral rate.

Use your LOS to ask for referrals from former clients as well. You have their contact information—why not ask? Send a follow-up message to make sure they are satisfied with your service and offer an incentive (if you can) for them to send friends your way. When you are marketing and building your business, you must take every opportunity to make contact with your database and ask for referrals. Keep your name in front of them (without being a pest).

Celebrate

Everybody has birthdays. They're very personal, and they're the perfect reason to keep in contact with your clients and business associates. Take some time every month to run a birthday list. Your LOS can filter by birth month so this process should be very quick and easy. Then, tailor your messaging and design for your intended audience.

If you have a prospect who never completed an application, your message can be a combined birthday wish with an offer to get them the best rate available if they are still interested. Current clients, former clients and business associates, such as Realtors, appraisers, etc., can all have customized messages. Personalizing your message by audience is much easier than you think. Once you have the templates created in Word—an e-mail, flyer, postcard, letter, etc.—saving them to your LOS with mail-merge fields is a piece of cake.

Make technology work for you

There are many more reasons for communicating to your contacts that you may have thought of while reading this article. The key is to actually implement your ideas. You have the ability to optimize the use of your existing technology, while maintaining a level of personalization and sincerity that can make a difference.



It's All About Marketing!

Using your LOS, you have the option to mix it up—to choose various avenues of marketing to your database. The templates you customize or create can be distributed via e-mail or regular mail. This is why maintaining your database is so important. Ensuring that you have the appropriate marketing materials is easy—ensuring that your intended recipients actually receive them is not.

If you choose to mail your materials or messages via letter or flyer or postcard—any print medium actually—you can embed mail-merge fields from your LOS database directly into Word. Alternatively, you can print generic materials or letters and mail them using a label printing feature in your LOS. You can also skip the mail-merge feature altogether and create flyers that you can print and distribute personally to businesses or potential clients in your area, which can provide you with ample networking opportunities.

Marketing is all about creating and cultivating the relationships that can help your business grow. If you aren't using the tools you have at your disposal, specifically in the technology you use in your business, you could be left behind. You don't want to be a nameless, faceless window-front in a world of colorful possibilities. Get personal. Use your technology—your LOS—and market yourself in front of the competition.

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added many options to the marketing game, but that's exactly what they are ... options. They add to the choices marketers have to communicate their messages, win new business, preserve existing relationships and compete for market share. Some are more effective and influential than others. However, the fundamentals of marketing have not changed:

1. We need to understand our customers.
2. We need to understand our competitors.
3. Staying on top of consumer and industry trends is non-negotiable.
4. All of us are in the relationship business.
5. The purpose of marketing is to shorten the sales cycle.

Understanding customers

There is still too much chest-beating taking place as companies continue to focus on how fantastic their products and services are instead of focusing on the wants, needs and desires of their different audiences. We cannot forget that it really is all about the customer, not the company. If you find that your focus isn't where it needs to be, consider this idea: Create separate points of entry or unique pages on your Web site for your different types of buyers, such as for consumers, brokers and residential sales associates. They each have unique needs, and once they sense that you understand their needs and can provide solutions to their challenges, it will be much easier for them to make an informed and educated purchase decision.

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Also, consider evaluating your advertising, marketing and online presence to your top three competitors. Do you find that you all pretty much say the same things, just with different graphics and copy? Are you able to identify one or two unique characteristics about your company? If not, you know what to do next. If yes, those are the characteristics that people need to know about you so that they can make that educated, informed decision.

Some marketers choose to look at what their competitors say about themselves and then use that as a benchmark for their own messaging. That can be perilous. It's one thing to stalk competitors, learning what they

are up to and watching them closely. It's quite another to "blend in" to the mix because it's what everyone else is doing. Be unique: If you look like everyone else, you are as good as invisible.

Understanding competitors

You and your competitors are courting the same people—no big surprise. Your competitors are also stalking your customers. This is no big surprise either, but it is something that needs to be kept in mind. You'll need a plan to stay on top of what your competitors are doing, what they are saying, how they are trying to win new business and what they may be saying about you. You may also want to ask yourself two powerful questions: "If I were on the other side of the business, with whom would I do business? Why?" Answering these questions requires a little research on your part, but it may be the best way to know who you are really competing with. It can also provide you with the extra surge of motivation needed to make some necessary changes from within.

The good news is that there are easy ways of keeping a sharp eye on your rivals. The most obvious way is to review their Web site/Web presence and make notes about what they are doing that you admire, as well as where you feel they are vulnerable. Next, enter their name into Google Alerts so that you get e-mail updates every time they make a move or come up in the news. Finally, make note of their presence in the industry trade publications.

These activities can eat up a lot of your time, but that's what eager and willing interns are for. Find the right one for you and insist that he or she supply you with weekly updates, even when there is little, if any, change.

Trend watching

Trends can be broken down into four primary categories: Political, Economic, Technological and Social (PETS). Whenever there is movement in any of these areas, it can have a direct impact throughout the entire mortgage industry.

Our current administration has made some very bold, decisive maneuvers that will have a lasting impact on the mortgage industry. The economy continues to remain "under construction," with some pessimistic (yet realistic) analysts suggesting that the worst is far from over. These political and economic trends are what keep many people at bay.

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Marketing: Remember the Fundamentals

By Scott Seroka

In the 1990s, one of my favorite professional sports teams was the Chicago Bulls because it was during that time when Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen and Coach Phil Jackson led the team to win six championships within eight years.

Near the end of this dynasty, I read one of Michael Jordan's books, *The Jordan Rules*. Since he is recognized as one of the greatest athletes in NBA history, I figured he must have plenty of insightful things to write.

In his book, there was a philosophy that really resonated with me and it has become one that I now share: "Always stick to the fundamentals." Sure, I've heard the phrase many times throughout my life, but when it comes from someone who was the very best at what he did, it takes on a much stronger meaning. So what does this have to do with marketing? Read on ...

Top five marketing fundamentals

Back in the olden days—you know,

about 10 years ago—marketing was still relatively simple. You had your choice of broadcast, print, direct mail, outdoor, trade shows, Yellow Pages and public relations. Marketing was a one-way conversation, whereby marketers told people what they wanted them to know, think and believe. Many Web sites were merely online brochures. Social media was barely in its teething stage.



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Times have certainly changed.

It was several years ago when social media began to really consume our personal lives. At the time, we didn't really understand their full potential, particularly as it relates to how businesses could benefit. Today, we do.

When you combine traditional marketing vehicles with social media, which has opened the door to two-way conversations between people and brands, you can easily understand how anything and everything related to the Internet has completely changed the rules of marketing.

Or has it? Sure, social media has