

With a little 'Rah, Rah!' in last month's article I encouraged you to refocus on (or create) your marketing and business plans for '07. Some may ask, *"Why do I need them? I'm getting along just fine. The last couple years I've done very well; I've socked away some money. Sure, it's a little slow now but it won't last."*

Well, that all may be true. Those of you who have been around a while know that market conditions flex and flow. For those of you relatively new to real estate sales, I've got news for you, the last few years aren't typical. FSBO's were even making a go of it for heavens sake!

As we've seen over the past many months, with the slowing of the marketplace you can't count on overeager buyers, multiple offers, and little (if any) marketing of your listings. It's time to get back to basics and your own marketing and business plans are the basics that can get and keep you on track.

Business planning is like riding a bike; it hurts when you fall off! After an intense year of marketing to our sphere, my family and I experienced one of our best years of productivity. The next year when a family member fell ill and needed our support for eleven months, our marketing efforts waned and our business focus wavered. As a result, we had one of our worst years. Business planning helps you keep on track. Obviously you have to shift gears now and then, but the beauty of a plan is that it helps you maintain perspective and make changes that keep you in line with your goals.

Business plans are nothing new but some of you might wonder about a marketing plan. Why do you need one? Well, there are several reasons: to budget for the growth of your business; to create and maintain consistent messaging; to identify and optimally reach your target market... Just like business planning and bike riding, when you fall off it hurts. Oh, it won't hurt right away, in fact, it may make several months but trust me, it'll catch up with you and when it does it'll hurt as bad as that five inch raspberry your banana bike earned you years ago.

For those that don't have a marketing plan, I see two typical scenarios. There's the phenomenon all too common in our industry in which agents are dazzled by the latest gimmick or succumb the latest fad. Pull out all the ads, flyers, brochures, e-marketing materials, home books, etc. that you used in the last two years. Pull out everything with your name and logo on it. Drag it out and spread it across a large table. Is there any consistency in the pieces? Any commonality? Have you utilized the same color scheme and fonts and design layouts to make your pieces are quickly and easily recognizable to your target market? Have you employed the same, consistent message across all media so that your target audience knows what you have to offer and how to distinguish you from your competition? If not, you need a marketing plan!

Another phenomenon is that of "THE SECRET AGENT." If you have no materials to drag out and spread across the table, you may very well be a Secret Agent. Secret Agents, at best, send out a holiday card or a calendar and do nothing else the rest of the year. They allow eleven months of silence in which their friends, past clients, and prospects haven't heard from them. How do those folks know you're still in the industry and looking for new business? How can you expect them to remember your name and number? Sure, sure, that calendar is right there on their fridge day in and day out; but if you haven't talked with them in ten months and their neighbor, Robby Realtor, has been chatting with them over the fence every weekend, who do you think has built the better connection? Who's top-of-mind and easily accessible? Who are they likely to call when they have a little real estate question that might have turned into your next big sale?

At worst, Secret Agents do nothing at all. They don't have time to create and manage a marketing campaign, they don't have the money to run ads, they're not 'creative' and don't know where to start.

Does this sound familiar? Folks, if you want to sustain and grow your business, you can't afford *not* to do these things. There's a lot of competition out there and prospects have a lot of choices. You've got to keep yourself top-of-mind; the only to do that is to have a plan for keeping in touch. If you have no marketing budget whatsoever, maybe it's as simple as calling everyone in your sphere two or three times a year to visit and to be sure they know you are working hard to grow your business and would appreciate their referrals. Maybe you want to break into a new farm area; you'd better be prepared to canvass the area with material (by mail or by foot) religiously and the more frequently the better. Whatever your plan, whatever your style, whatever your budget, write it down and work that plan!

As always, if this seems overwhelming ask for help, but keep trying! Before long you'll get the hang of it. In the meantime, *hang in there!*

Jo Becker, BA

Jo Becker has eight years of licensed real estate experience. As a former broker, she knows how important, and sometimes scary, technology and self-promotion can be. Jo has provided personalized one-on-one marketing consultation and computer software training to the industry since 2002.

**Call or write for a free monthly eLtr full of helpful marketing hints and computing tips!
503/493-6883; JoByEmail@yahoo.com**

Services include relationship selling tips and techniques, data entry, software application training, custom marketing campaigns, design of collateral pieces (newsletters, flyers, presentation books, etc.), and website content design.

Jo Becker, Copyrighted 2007, all rights reserved.