

Internet Consumers Are Asking Questions—and They Want Answers Now

By John Bearden

RISMEDIA, May 7, 2007-At GMAC Home Services' recent national business conference in South Florida, I mentioned several statistics that caused more than a few people in the audience to take notice:

- 73% of consumers who use the Internet to search for homes expect a call from an agent within four hours, according to the California Association of Realtors
- Of those, 23% expect a call within a half-hour
- Another 21% expect a call immediately

Internet buyers are prepared. They tend to have more money, and they buy faster, which are salient points that our industry needs to hear over and over. Many in our industry fail to understand that Internet buyers want and expect a responsive agent to call them as soon as they show interest in a property.

In fact, the expectation for immediate response is so strong that the vast majority of Internet buyers work with the very first agent who calls them, our research has found. If you don't give them the fast response they expect, then they will give their business to whichever agent calls them first.

GMAC Real Estate is meeting this challenge through a comprehensive series of technology innovations designed to equip our brokers and agents with the latest insight and tools they'll need to attract, capture and convert online leads while providing the online experience consumers are looking for. Key to that goal is ensuring that brokers' leads that come into the company's corporate Web site are immediately directed to appropriate local sites for follow-up.

To help our brokers and agents capitalize on Internet-consumer leads, GMAC Home Services:

- Is increasing the number of links to individual sites to help brokers achieve higher Internet search rankings
- Has created an online directory program to help companies gain preferred positions on Google and Yahoo!
- Introduced the "GMAC Personal Search Promotion" program where every GMAC sales partner can ensure that they can be found, by name, 100% of the time on the major search engines
- Developed a search optimization network in which all GMAC Real Estate companies can participate. We also provide free mortgage calculators and a vast amount of content that brokers can use to create and enhance their individual company sites.

Also available is a wide array of "best practices" for search engine visibility, lead generation and lead management to more effectively compete on the Internet, and more is on the way.

Our industry is on a learning curve regarding lead management because it is really a new business within our traditional brokerage model.

This is one of the reasons we have made a substantial investment in an innovative office, built from the ground up to serve customers. It's our Lake in the Hills operation in the Western

Suburbs of Chicago, and it's a technology-based, paperless office that offers total one-stop shopping, and with a comprehensive and successful lead management system in place.

Ultimately, our goal is to focus on helping our brokers and agents better serve their clients and grow their businesses. That commitment includes heavy focus on the Internet because today's customer is often going to gauge real estate professionals, what they do, and their commitment to service excellence by how they conduct your business in the virtual world.

John Bearden is president and CEO of GMAC Home Services. For more information about GMAC Real Estate, visit www.gmacrealestate.com.

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