

STAR POWER Star-Recommended Nuggets – November 2007  
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## ***Web Marketing System Proves Successful***

It has been almost two years since we introduced our new web marketing strategy, and we are very happy with the results. Everybody is looking to get more sales from the Internet, and we are getting a lot of quality leads through our custom website. For us, finding a marketing company that was knowledgeable on current market trends and could increase our business over the long term was important.

A large majority of homebuyers now search for homes online, and the number grows every year. More importantly than knowing where they're searching is HOW they are searching. Instead of going directly to portal sites such as REALTOR.com®, Number1Expert and Advanced Access, more people are going to Google, Yahoo! or MSN. This way, they are looking for exactly what they want. Search engines have changed the way many people search for properties.

I think the problems with a lot of portal websites is the way consumers search listings. You have to specifically look for these sites and then narrow down your search to a specific area or a specific agent. I can talk about REALTOR.com® and how it gets six million hits a month, but there's a huge difference now when it comes to the role search engines play in buying or selling real estate. We have been able to find the right balance to compete successfully with these sites online.

First, if you don't have a marketing program, you will have problems with getting sales online. Our sales have dropped off with REALTOR.com®, but why is that? We realized that consumers are going to the search engines and looking for exactly what they want so we changed our plan for attracting these buyers.

We found a marketing company that advised us on how to implement a strategy without losing our recognized identity. Once we got the information, we began to optimize the site and the results have been great. We were ranked as the third real estate website in the state of Florida by *Florida Realtor*® magazine last year. Through search engine optimization, our site has 142 real estate keywords specific to our area in the top five positions on major search engines. The number of hits we receive on this website has skyrocketed and now total more than the hits through REALTOR.com® and Number1Expert combined, where we also have personal websites.

What does this do? For example, if you type in "Marco Island Real Estate" on Google right now, our website ranks fourth naturally. That's huge! To be a small, boutique office even as an affiliate of RE/MAX, we are ahead of many big brokerage firms and offices in our area. The key is to be at the top of the search engines. We had the option of using pay-per-click to jumpstart the process, but we decided to go the natural route. It has taken over a year but we are now in a high position on the search engines.

Another aspect of our website that appeals to consumers and search engines is the content-rich information we provide on the site. It's a valuable resource for consumers and they expect to find everything they wanted to know about the area and more. A consumer doesn't care if the branding is good or that we advertise in the community. They want to learn about the area, find out about the

lifestyle, see photos and find uncomplicated searches. They want us to hold nothing back and give it all to them for free. Our custom website does all of those things. We get more hits and more quality leads on our site than we do on our Number1Expert portal site. Our internet sales for the first half of 2007 increased by 500 percent from last year during the same period.

Linda and I are both good writers and we wrote all the content on our site. We took the time to write hundreds of pages of content because we knew it would be important to draw consumers. Not only do consumers appreciate the attention, but the search engines also recognize our efforts. You can't fool the search engines. You can't trick them with generic content, but they will recognize good content. That's the way it should be. Not a lot of agents are good at writing search engine-friendly content, but a marketing firm will know how to write for your area. For a firm to do that successfully, an agent will have to provide enough of the right information. Don't expect copywriters to find everything out through research.

It's important for agents to have a good working relationship with a marketing strategy company. If you have a question, make sure you can work with them one-on-one. Any strong business needs a counselor to help them, especially for agents who are looking to increase their sales online. We've taken Michael Russer's classes, and he says to pay a specialist to do your marketing for you. That's what we've done, and we have been very pleased. I think custom web marketing systems are surpassing portal sites and will continue to do so until something else comes along or consumers change the way they search.

Even with an advanced web marketing strategy, the basic standards in the industry still hold true. Agents get excited about new technology, but sometimes they don't realize that they cannot throw the basics out the window. When all of these things work together correctly, your business will flourish.