

The Real Estate Blog Alphabet



26 Benefits and Best Practices of
Using a Real Estate Blog

by Brandon Cornett

I is for Introduction

I created this alphabet to compile what I feel are the 26 most important benefits and best practices of using a real estate blog. Not all of these entries will apply to every individual blogging scenario, but they all apply to real estate blogs in general. So you are bound to find something useful here that you've never considered before.

About once a week, a real estate agent will ask me if he or she should start a real estate blog. This question is a landmine I respectfully step around by offering the following advice:

You should only pursue real estate blogging if you (A) really like to write, (B) have a passion for teaching others, and (C) have something interesting or useful to say.

Obviously, this answer is meant to refer the decision back to the original asker -- and with good reason. Blogging takes dedication and effort. Anyone who says otherwise probably doesn't have a popular blog. This is why I never answer the question, "Should I start a blog" when someone else poses it.

I spend two hours a day managing my blogs (granted, I have several), and I'm never fully satisfied with them. I feel they can always be better ... more useful ... cleaner and easier to navigate ... more interesting. In my opinion, this is the kind of mentality it takes to publish a quality real estate blog. If this sounds like you, then real estate blogging might be just the thing for you!

A much easier question to field would be, "What are the benefits of publishing a real estate blog?" Here's my answer. The benefits of publishing a real estate blog -- and doing a *good job* of it -- include, but are not limited to, the following:

- An easy way to grow your website / web presence
- A great way to "feed" search engines with relevant content
- Helps you position yourself as an authority
- Helps you provide valuable content to readers / potential clients
- Helps you earn people's trust by demonstrating expertise
- Improves your search engine ranking and visibility over time
- Demonstrates that you're web savvy and "with the times"
- Has the potential to start a dialogue with your audience
- Has the potential to generate leads and business

If you're still with me, and you're serious about making your real estate blog a big success ... let's delve in to the *Real Estate Blog Alphabet* for more tips and benefits!

A is for Authority

Writing about a topic (and doing it well) helps you demonstrate your expertise on that subject. This is true in the real estate industry, and a real estate blog can help you put this idea into practice.

If you use your blog to keep people in your area informed about local real estate happenings (market updates, neighborhood development, etc.), you can position yourself as the authority on local real estate matters. And who better to call when you need help buying or selling than the "town guru"?

Here's a conversation I want you imagine. Two families are talking about real estate prices in the area, and one says to the other, "You know, I found this blog the other day that keeps track of all the real estate stuff happening in town. It's a real estate agents blog, and it's packed with good stuff. I'll email you the link."

Now multiply this conversation times 100 or more, and you can begin to see the business-building potential of an authoritative real estate blog.

Of course, you have to do an exceptional job. There will surely be other real estate blogs in your city or town, so you have to work hard to make yours stand out. You have to make yours *THE* blog to visit for up-to-the-minute real estate information, tips and news.

For tips on doing that, read the rest of the Real Estate Blog Alphabet below...

B is for **Believable**

When was the last time you believed a marketing message? I mean really believed it, upon first read and without doing any further research or investigation?

If you're like most American consumers, you have a natural distrust for marketing messages. Email marketing, TV commercials, magazine ads ... they all say what the company wants you to believe, but do you believe them?

Now let me ask you a tougher question. If you naturally distrust most marketing messages upon first read, what makes your marketing message any different? What have you done to achieve believability (which is the first step to trust, which in turn leads to action)?

Here's another question. If you are relying on traditional marketing to persuade people in your city / town that you're different from other agents -- but those other agents are all using the same tactics -- how can you possibly stand out as being different? Or better? Or more capable of helping?

In other words, what is there in your marketing to give people the first reason to trust you?

Okay. Enough interrogation. Let me offer some helpful advice...

About once a week, someone will contact me about my services, either from reading this blog or my other SEO blog. They will say something to the effect of: "You know, I've been reading your blog for some time, and I wanted to ask about the services you provide..."

Sometimes this leads to clients -- other times, just a friendly conversation. But after many months of receiving these calls, I've learned one thing. People who read my blogs have a certain level of trust toward me before they even pick up the phone and call. That is not something I could achieve through traditional (distrusted) marketing channels.

Here's how it relates to you, and to real estate blogs in general.

If used properly, a real estate blog can make you more believable as both a person and a professional. If you consistently publish quality information to your blog over a period of time, it demonstrates your knowledge, your dedication, and even your personality. It helps people get to know you, even if they only do a quick perusal of your most recent posts. It shows you care about your profession, and about sharing it with others.

Most people do not believe traditional marketing messages. We've been lied to for too long and from too many companies about their products and services. But ... people will be much more inclined to trust a candid, sincere and prolonged conversation. And that's what a real estate blog can help you achieve.

C is for Candid

It's refreshing to speak to your readers in an honest, open manner. In fact, if you do this, they'll be more inclined to speak to you in response. This is the beauty of using a real estate blog -- you can set it up to function as an online conversation rather than a lecture, simply by engaging your readers and allowing their comments.

In this way, the real estate blog can achieve a level of candid and sincere interaction that's just not possible with a regular "static" website.

You could also recycle all of your email communications (with permission from the person on the other end) and use that for blogging material. This gives people a candid look at who you are, what you know, and how you help people. Once again, you won't get that kind of "real life" interaction from a regular website.

In their marketing messages, a lot of real estate agents say the same things about themselves -- integrity, dedication, client care, etc. These adjectives might be fitting, but they're only words in the minds of your audience. On the other hand, when you can show people these qualities (in person and online), you won't have to tell them you possess them. They'll already know.

If you are candid, sincere and professional in the way you use your real estate blog, you can achieve these things and much more.

D is for Direct

Imagine having a direct, web-based communication channel with thousands of home buyers / sellers in your market area. Now imagine being able to publish information through this channel as easily and as quickly as typing an email message.

That's what you get with a real estate blog, a direct-to-consumer communication mechanism.

Granted, in the early days of your real estate blog, you may be writing to an audience of one. It takes time to build an audience. But if you stick with it and acquire a good base of readers over time, you can achieve the "dream scenario" I opened this article with -- you could communicate directly with hundreds or thousands of people in your market area.

This directness is a key benefit of using a real estate blog, and as a marketer I can tell you it's priceless. With a blog, there is nobody to filter your message. No middle-men or intermediaries. It's just you and your readers.

What's the benefit of this directness? For one thing, it helps you break through the traditional barrier of corporate communications. As consumers, we naturally distrust marketing messages. But when somebody speaks to us directly, honestly, and consistently over time, we are much more inclined to trust that person.

If used properly, a real estate blog can help you achieve these things.

E is for Enthusiastic

If you are going to maintain a real estate blog, you will get much further and enjoy greater benefits if you blog with enthusiasm. There are two primary reasons for this:

1. If you blog about something you are enthusiastic about (a particular niche or aspect of real estate, for example), you will be more likely to blog often. As a result, your real estate blog will grow rapidly and thus provide more search engine visibility.
2. If you blog with enthusiasm and energy, people will find your real estate blog more interesting (than if you were half-hearted about your blogging). This will in turn help you grow your readership and foster interaction with your audience through the form of reader comments. So instead of having passive readers, you could enjoy the lead-producing benefits of active participation.

When it comes to real estate blogs, unenthusiastic commentary stands out like a purple elephant. Avoid this by choosing a topic that interests you, and blog about it with energy and passion. In time, this will help you improve your blog's readership, interaction, and general success.

F is for Flexibility

How can you use a real estate blog? Let me count the ways...

1. Provide market updates for local buyers or sellers.
2. Conduct ongoing seminars for home buyers or sellers.
3. Engage in two-way dialogue with your audience.
4. Become "The Source for Local Real Estate News."
5. Collaborate online with local mortgage professionals.
6. Manage projects internally with your team.
7. Increase your search engine visibility with keyword-rich content.
8. Publish online property listings, details, photos, etc.
9. Provide relocation advice for people moving into town.

This is just a partial list I came up with off the top of my head. The point is obvious -- a real estate blog can support just about any marketing or communication objective you can imagine. The technology is simple to work with. The platform is flexible and expandable. The possibilities are infinite.

G is for Google Friendly

And Yahoo friendly, and MSN friends, and Ask friendly...

Real estate blogging is a great way to enhance your online visibility. In this context, "visibility" refers to the ease with which people can find your website online. Search engines are a major ingredient of online visibility, and this is another area where the real estate blog comes into its own.

The way I see it, real estate blogs and search engines are a match made in heaven. Here are three reasons why:

- Search engines like fresh content, and blogs make it easy to produce fresh content on a regular basis.
- Search engines like text links and good navigation structures. Blogs produce these things right "out of the box."
- Search engines like websites that are networked and linked with similar-themed websites. The active, social nature of real estate blogs actually encourages this kind of "neighborhood" networking.

But while search engines like many things about blogs, the burden of ranking still rests upon the blog's author (that would be you). By itself, a real estate blog will not propel you to the top of the search engines, the way some agents seem to think.

You have to be a dedicated and active publisher to accomplish such feats. A blog just makes it much easier to accomplish.

P.S. — If you're *really* serious about blogging your way up the search engine ranks for more traffic and business, check out my step-by-step guide on blogging for search engine visibility. It's featured on the last page of this e-book.

His for Happening

Put yourself in the shoes of your audience for a moment. You're no longer a real estate agent - you're a home buyer researching the local real estate scene. While conducting some online research, you come across two websites.

* One is the website of a local real estate company. It has bios on the company's agents, a few articles on the home buying process, etc. But it's basically a "static" website. It doesn't appear to have any frequently updated information, so you have no way of knowing how old the information is.

* The other website is primarily a real estate blog. It also has a bio on the author, home buying articles and the like. But because it's a blog, it gets updated regularly. You scan the "recent posts" section and find that the author publishes new information about three times a week. The most recent blog post is only a day old, and it offers a current snapshot of the local real estate scene.

If you, the home buyer, could only bookmark one of these sites for future reference, which one would it be? Obviously, the second website is more valuable, and therefore it's worth saving in your Favorites.

This is what I mean by "H stands for happening." This entry of the real estate blog alphabet refers to the current nature of a good real estate blog. With their "click to publish" technology, blogs are easy to update. So you'll be more likely (and better able) to keep a real estate blog current -- more so than with a regular website.

Real estate is a timely business. Things happen fast. If your website is not "happening" enough to keep up with market trends, it offers little value to readers. But if it can keep pace with the market, it is a huge value to readers. A real estate blog can help you achieve this.

I is for Informative

Home buyers and sellers are an information-hungry group of folks. This is especially true of first-time home buyers, for whom the real estate process is new and often confusing.

This is another way you can use a real estate blog to connect with your ideal audience -- by providing the information they're looking for, and plenty of it.

If you use your real estate blog to keep people in your area informed about the local real estate scene, you increase the value of your blog. This has a direct (and positive) impact on the number of readers you will attract, the amount of information they read, the frequency with which they visit, and the likelihood they will contact you.

I think we can agree that these are all good things!

Start by asking yourself what kind of information your ideal audience might be interested in. This might include property listings, statistics on the local market, new developments / neighborhoods, information on local mortgage companies, etc. Then, all you have to do is develop your real estate blog around these topics.

What's the Point?

When you publish your blog in this way, you are achieving several things at once.

- First, by creating an informative blog about local real matters, you will make yourself more visible to search engines for important search phrases.
- Secondly, you will give people plenty of useful information that will keep them on your site longer (which directly corresponds to the likelihood they will contact you).
- Thirdly, you will be establishing yourself as an expert authority on the local real estate scene. People want a real estate agent who is on top of things, and always abreast of changes in the market. An informative real estate blog can help you convey this.

P.S. — If you'd like to learn more about creating an informative real estate blog and driving it up the search engine rankings, check out my e-book on the Triangle System to blogging. It's featured on the last page of this e-book.

J is for **Jargon-free**

When you use a blog to communicate with your audience, you have an opportunity to strip down the traditional barriers of marketing communications and speak to people from the heart.

Most real estate blogs (and business blogs in general) are closely associated with a single author. This makes them an online manifestation of the author's personality and knowledge. Because of this "intimate" nature, a real estate blog can help you earn the trust of your ideal audience. But to achieve this, you have to shoot straight and be yourself.

The best business and real estate blogs are written in the author's true voice, avoiding the use of jargon (unless that jargon is essential to the subject at hand). Don't use your blog to impress people with your vocabulary. Use it to educate people through plain language and sincerity. Use it to inspire their trust and confidence ... and, ultimately, their action.

In other words, corporate speak has no place in a real estate blog.

K is for Knowledgeable

Former Chief Economist for the NAR, John Tuccillo, recently said: "With the expansion of the number of Realtors, the level of competence has fallen to its lowest point ever."

This should worry real estate agents for several reasons, but primarily because it suggests a negative perception that could be applied in wholesale, stereotypical fashion to real estate professionals in general. If real estate industry experts think this way, what's to stop the public at large from developing unfavorable views of real estate agent competence?

Now, I'm not here to tell you that a real estate blog will magically transform the public's perception of you, as a real estate agent. For that matter, I'm not even telling you that you need to change public perception. But I will tell you this -- any real estate professional can benefit from showcasing knowledge and competence, and a real estate blog can help you do exactly that.

Let me offer an example from one of my new blogs. I am selling a new book on real estate SEO, entitled Top Ten Agent. This book reveals the exact process I use to drive real estate websites (like this one) up the search engine rankings. Like real estate, search engine optimization is a knowledge-based service. So I am using the website's accompanying blog to demonstrate my knowledge, and thus make people more inclined to purchase my book. Granted, the new blog is very young ... but you get the idea.

Now, most people who visit your real estate website will want to get straight to the good stuff -- viewing property photos, prices, virtual tours, etc. But when they get beyond that point, and they are deciding whether or not they want to contact you, wouldn't it help if they perceived you as being competent and knowledgeable? Use your real estate blog to create an ongoing base of expertise, and they will perceive you in this light.

L is for Lead-producing

A good blog will elicit a response from readers. Actually, let me back up a minute. A good real estate blog will attract readers through various means (mostly by word of mouth), and then it will evoke a response from those readers.

This response often comes in the form of reader comments left on the blog. But it can also come in the form of direct contact via phone or email. About once a week, I'll get a call or email from somebody who has been reading my blog. Sometimes they just want to talk about real estate marketing ... sometimes they end up becoming clients. Either way, it demonstrates the lead generation powers of an informative blog.

Interaction is the first step in attracting new clients. Think of all the clients you've acquired in the past. They all began with some form of interaction -- a phone call, an email, a seminar, an open house, a chance meeting. If you publish an informative real estate blog and work hard to make it popular in your area, you have one more way to spark the interaction that leads to new clients.

How, specifically, can you use a blog for lead generation?

- You could go a step beyond the blog and create a web forum as well. The blog could then have an "Ask the Expert" button / link on it that would take people to the forum.
- You could encourage comments and make it really simple for people to leave comments (by practicing web usability).
- You could write an e-book on your local real estate market and offer it through your blog, in response for a newsletter sign-up or an email request. (Yes, I said an e-book. Forget about those "Top Ten Tips for Buyers" special reports ... times have changed and they won't generate much response).

These are just three ideas of the top of my head. I'm sure you could come up with more.

So to recap. The first step is to create a real estate blog that is worth people's time and attention. The second step is working hard to attract readers and make your blog more popular than others in the area. The third step is to use your blog for lead generation purposes. Just know that it can be done!

M is for Manageable

I've spoken to quite a few real estate agents who were intimidated by the idea of blogging -- not because they feared the act of writing, but because they feared the technical side of managing a real estate blog.

"I don't know anything about web coding or web development," they would say. But in actuality, anyone can manage a real estate blog regardless of his or her technical knowledge. That's because the blog program does most of the technical work for you.

Sure, it might take a bit of technical knowledge to get the blog up and running. But once that's done, the basic process of publishing content to the blog is as simple as typing an email or a Word document.

How simple is it to manage and publish a real estate blog? Here's the process I'm going through right now to publish this blog post:

1. Log into my Blogger dashboard (this particular blog is powered by Blogger)
2. Select my Real Estate Marketing Ideas blog (the one you're reading)
3. Click the "Create Post" button
4. Give my blog post a title
5. Write the body of my blog post
6. Proofread and add hyperlinks where needed
7. Click the "Publish Post" button ... and I'm done

As with any other blogging program, the Blogger tool converts my typed message into a web page. I happen to know HTML / web coding, but it wouldn't matter if I didn't because the program writes the HTML code for me.

WordPress (another popular program for real estate blogs) requires a little more technical knowledge to get set up. But once the blog is created, you can publish with WordPress as easily as what I've described above. WordPress also has some great features for creating pages and sub-pages, categorizing blog posts, and more.

Collaboration is also made easy through the various blogging programs. For instance, if you wanted to publish a group blog with other real estate or mortgage folks, you could designate each person as an author. This way, they would have their own login

information and would only be able to edit their own contributions to the blog -- only you would have full admin access.

This article only scratches the surface of real estate blogs and their manageability. Once you start publishing your blog on a regular basis, you'll begin to see the full capabilities and possibilities.

N is for **Non-invasive**

Here's a marketing prediction for you. I predict that as the years pass, invasive marketing will become less and less effective (and thus less common in our daily lives). By "invasive marketing," I'm referring to the type of marketing that is thrust in our faces.

Telemarketing is invasive marketing, and we are currently witnessing the death of cold-calling as a viable marketing medium. Unsolicited emails are another form of invasive marketing, and we all know where spam belongs.

Direct mail marketing is one of the last holdouts. Direct mail is a form of invasive marketing that still holds its own in terms of results and profitability. But who knows if that will be the case five years from now.

And then we come to the so-called Web 2.0 "revolution." This is the new social concept of online behavior that shouts "Power to the user!"

Web 2.0 is not a new type of software you have to purchase. It's a phrase coined by O'Reilly, a publisher of technology books. In fact, if you Google the phrase "What is Web 2.0?" you'll find the O'Reilly website at the top of the list, discussing the origins of the phrase.

Here's an excerpt of that discussion: "The concept of Web 2.0 began with a conference brainstorming ... Dale Dougherty, web pioneer and O'Reilly VP, noted that far from having 'crashed,' the web was more important than ever, with exciting new applications and sites popping up with surprising regularity." (Article by Tim O'Reilly on www.oreillynet.com)

How Real Estate Blogs Relate

Business blogs, including real estate blogs, are part of the Web 2.0 approach to online communications. When you create a popular real estate blog and allow readers to comment on it, you are embracing the concept of having an online dialogue (as opposed to a lecture). This is also a great way to attract new business, because people who have "spoken" with you online are more inclined to trust you and contact you.

In other words, you are incorporating non-invasive / conversation-based marketing techniques into your real estate marketing program ... in addition to any invasive techniques you might currently use (such as cold calling).

Just another benefit to using a real estate blog as part of your overall marketing program.

O is for **Operational**

Blogs are great as a communication tool, but that's not by any means the extent of their capability. You could also use your real estate blog for a variety of operational purposes.

Here are just a few of the ways you could use a real estate blog in an operational way:

- You could use a real estate blog internally as a collaboration or note-sharing tool between yourself and other agents (or mortgage professionals, etc.).
- Like any other type of website publishing system, a blog can be put behind a firewall for privacy, thus allowing it to function as an intranet within your company.
- You could create separate sections of your real estate blog for each of your clients, and password-protect them for privacy. This way, you could keep a running tally of email communications, notes and updates about the status of their purchase or sale. They could simply click a link everyday and see your notes and instructions. Easy reference!
- You could create a blog specifically for people relocating to the area (if they're part of your target audience) and keep them informed on local real estate news / conditions.

These ideas only scratch the surface of operational uses for a real estate blog. With their ease of use and platform flexibility, a blog can support just about any online operation you have in mind.

P is for Purposeful

For what purpose do you use your real estate blog? What is your blogging mission? What do you hope to achieve as a result of your real estate blogging effort?

These are all questions you should answer in advance, long before you start publishing to your blog.

Sure, you can just wing it, if you want to. But you will get more from your blogging efforts if you identify your real estate blog's purpose in advance. On top of that, your blog will be much easier to manage if you have a purpose and mission already laid out. Let's look at an example of a purposeful blog.

A Real Estate Blog Scenario

Let's say I'm a real estate agent in Chicago, Illinois. I'm looking for a way to distinguish myself, and I also want to capture more business from the Internet. I hear about the benefits of real estate blogs and decide to launch a blog of my own.

But I don't want this to be just any real estate agent blog. I want it to be special, unique, and attention-getting. So I sit down with a piece of paper and start brainstorming. In order to succeed, my blog has to be useful and valuable to my audience, so I write the word "Daily" on my piece of paper.

It also has to be relevant to my business (to help me build my reputation and attract clients), so I write the word "real estate" down on my paper.

Lastly, I want my real estate blog to be unique and memorable, so I write down the word "angle" on my paper. This tells me that I need a good angle to help differentiate my blog and make it interesting (in addition to being useful).

So far, my purpose statement only consists of a few words -- daily, real estate, angle -- but it's taking shape!

I know my blog will offer daily real estate news and information. But what's my angle? This is where you would delve into your own personality to find out what makes you or your business unique ... or how you might use your blog to be unique.

For the purposes of this scenario, let's say my angle is humor. It's not the first thing that comes to mind when one thinks of real estate, but that could be just the thing I need to differentiate my blog.

So now I have a purpose and mission for my real estate blog. I will create a blog that provides daily real estate information about Chicago, but with a humorous touch. Maybe I'll create "Top Ten" lists in a David Letterman style. Maybe I'll hit the streets with my camera and create neighborhood profiles (with a special focus on pigeon populations).

Obviously, I'm just brainstorming here.

But you can see the result of this brainstorming. I have the beginnings of a real estate blog that will be useful, timely, relevant, interesting, and memorable. Will it make people talk? Very likely. Could it lead to media coverage down the road? Quite possibly. Will people respond to it in a favorable way? Time will tell.

But it all starts with the purpose.

Q is for Qualitative ... and Quantitative

If you publish useful and timely content to your real estate blog, and you do it consistently over a period of time, it will have both a qualitative and quantitative effect.

The Quantitative - The sheer quantity of content you produce will benefit you in several ways. First, it will help you rank higher in search engines, and will help you appear in more searches for a broader range of phrases. If your real estate blog has hundreds of posts / pages of content over time, you will be casting your SEO net much further than with a static 10-page website. The size of a website is also one of the top-three ranking factors for most search engines.

[Accomplishment: search engine visibility]

The Qualitative - The quality of content you produce through your blog will also help you in a number of ways. For one thing, it will help you establish your expertise on the subject(s) your blog covers. It will also keep people on your website / blog longer. Some agents say, "All people want is house photos when visiting a website." But this is shortsighted. Sure they want to see listing photos. But they also want to research the market, and the useful and timely information on your real estate blog can deliver.

[Accomplishment: potential lead generation]

Tips for Real Estate Blog "Q&Q"

So now you know the quality and quantity benefits of using a real estate blog. Here are some tips to help you maximize each of those benefits:

To Produce Quantity:

Create a content plan for blog writing success and simplicity. Set up Google Alerts so you have a constant stream of blogging ideas. Make a publishing schedule for yourself, and follow it as closely as possible. Try to blog regularly ... at least three times a week.

To Produce Quality:

Make sure each of your blog posts can stand alone from a quality information perspective. These posts are part of a larger whole, but each post should also bring value to the reader on an individual basis. When you've completed a blog post, ask yourself: "Does this blog post help the reader in some way?" If not, consider expanding or revising it.

R is for Recyclable

Another great thing about using a real estate blog is that you can recycle your blog content for other purposes, and vice versa. A few years ago, as a marketing writer for a direct mail company, I quickly learned that you never use a written piece only once. You can "recycle" quality content to get more out of your writing efforts.

You can apply this lesson to your real estate blog in a number of ways. Here are some techniques for reusing blog content for other channels, and vice versa.

- You could use email content for blog posts. Think of all the content contained within your business emails -- all the questions you answer, all the information you provide. Why not recycle that into blog content? Perhaps you could use it for a steady stream of real estate Q&A blog posts.
- You could compile some of your blog posts, or maybe just expand on particular post, into a full-article length. Then you could publish this article online for additional website traffic, exposure and search engine benefits.
- You could convert blog posts into material for an online press release ... or publish your online press release onto your blog.

These are just a few ideas of the top of my head. I'm sure you can think of more ways to recycle content from your real estate blog. The end result of this is more exposure, more visibility, more potential web traffic ... and all with less effort!

S is for Straight-shooting

I'd like to ask you to step outside your own shoes for a moment. Imagine that you are a home buyer in San Diego, California (since I don't know your actual city).

One day, while researching the local real estate scene, you come across two real estate blogs published by local agents:

- The first blog offers biographical information about the agent, some generic articles about the home buying process, and little else.
- The second real estate blog showcases current homes on the market, offers information on new neighborhoods being built, and provides useful lists of local mortgage professionals and home inspectors.

As a home buyer, which real estate blog would you be more likely to bookmark, revisit and recommend to others?

If you're like most people, you'd favor the second blog. Why? Because it's a straight-shooting real estate blog full of useful information relevant to your area -- not rambling bios, generic home buying tips, or other "fluff."

The truth is, nobody can say for certain what all home buyers or sellers do online, or how they behave. But when you've observed the behavior of people conducting online real estate research as long as I have, you begin to accept certain realities. One of those realities is that a straight-shooting real estate blog that focuses on useful content will outperform all other blogs in the same market area.

T is for Thoughtful

It's time to put on your thinking cap. (Did your elementary school teachers say that too?) But seriously, we are going to think long and hard about real estate blogging for a moment here.

Why?

Because the more thought you put into your real estate blog, the more effective your blog will be. By "effective," I mean better content, more visitors, and greater overall success. You can achieve these things with your real estate blog, but it's going to require some thought.

Here are some key areas of blogging that require careful thought:

1. The Blog's Purpose

Earlier in this series on real estate blogging, we talked about creating a purpose for your blog. This is one of the first occasions where you'll have to don your "thinking cap" for some careful consideration.

2. The Blog's Audience

In the early days of your real estate blog, you will be writing to an audience of one (yourself). Then your friends and colleagues will pop in. Then the search engines will get wind of it. And before you know it, your audience has grown beyond your expectations. But always remember who your core audience is. Who are you writing to? How can you help them? What do they want and need to know?

3. The Content Plan

It always helps to have a content plan to keep yourself on track. You should think about this in the early days of your blog, as it will make things much easier as you move forward. How often will you publish? What topics / blog categories will you cover on a regular basis? Will you allow guest articles and collaboration? Answer these content questions as early on as possible.

4. The Individual Blog Post

Some agents think of their real estate blog in purely holistic terms, considering the entire blog as once entity. But when you do this, you devalue and deemphasize the individual blog posts. You have to remember that people could enter your blog from one of many entry points -- not always the main page. So each blog post should stand on its own as a single unit, in addition to reinforcing the blog as a whole. Give thought to each and every blog post you create.

U is for Usable

It's a fact of Internet marketing that website usability directly affects website success in general. And the same fact applies to real estate blogs.

- If your blog is easy for people to use (read, navigate, search, etc.), then you'll have better success with reader interaction and lead generation.
- On the other hand, if your blog is difficult to use, you will severely undercut your chances for real estate blogging success.

Real Estate Blogs and Clutter

When you first set up your blog, it will be straightforward and easy to use. Most blogging programs are designed this way "out of the box." But the more you learn about blogging, the more tempted you will be to clutter up your blog with all those nifty (but often unnecessary) plug-ins, add-ons, and assorted bells and whistles.

My recommendations are three-fold:

1. First, don't add anything to your blog that does not (A) improve the user's experience, (B) support your primary marketing goal, or (C) a combination of the two. If you start adding junk to your blog just because you can, you will do grave injury to your blog's usability.
2. Secondly, have a friend or colleague check out your blog and ask their honest opinion about things like neatness, organization, usability and purpose.
3. Lastly, don't assume people are going to hunt for the things you want them to find. If there is an item (or items) that you really want people to find, such as listing info, then give it prominence on your real estate blog and demote everything else.

Remember, your online audience is highly skilled at hopping from one website to another while gathering information. You want to create the kind of real estate blog that they land on and stay for a while ... not the kind of blog that they quickly hop away from. Quality of content is a big part of this, but blog usability is just as important.

Related article worth reading:

<http://www.ceoblogwatch.com/2007/07/26/blog-usability-can-increase-readership/>

V is for Voluntary

The number-one reason to start a real estate blog should be because you want to. If you start a blog for any other reason, you will find you lack the motivation needed to make your blog a success.

Of course, there can be many additional reasons for starting a real estate blog -- such as brand building, lead generation and search engine visibility. But the primary reason should be a good-old-fashioned desire to write / blog / educate / communicate!

I publish several blogs, and I have set up countless blogs for friends, clients and colleagues. I've seen more than my fair share of blogging scenarios, so let me make you this guarantee based on that experience. If you start a real estate blog just because everyone else is doing it, your blog will lack the heartfelt enthusiasm that's a trademark of popular blogs. Blogging will become a chore in your mind, as opposed to something you look forward to.

And then this happens...

- You find yourself putting it off. "Oh, I'll get back to it next week."
- Then your blog begins to become outdated and stale.
- Then it becomes a big hurdle in your mind, a source of procrastination.
- Then you abandon the blog altogether. "Yeah, I have a blog. But I haven't really done anything with it. I don't even remember the password for logging in."

On the other hand, if you meet the number-one blogging criteria of desire, *something like this happens...*

- You find yourself eager to log in and post to your blog each day.
- Your blog becomes a timely resource for readers.
- Before you know it, your blog is large, informative and popular.
- People begin recommending your blog to others, useful as it is.
- An online conversation begins to unfold, and before you know it your real estate blog has begun to produce a regular stream of leads.

Which of the above scenarios you experience will depend on whether or not you really want to blog.

W is for Wise

Previously in this blog series, we talked about the authority that can be gained from a well-planned and properly executed real estate blog. It's worth restating in this post, albeit in a slightly different way.

Real Estate Blog Wisdom

Everyone knows that real estate is a knowledge-based industry. You are not selling products. You are selling your professional insight and experience (hopefully), which can help your clients buy or sell their homes.

Real estate is much like the legal profession in this way. People seek lawyers for their professional knowledge and guidance -- the same characteristics that make people pursue and hire real estate agents.

You can use your real estate blog to demonstrate your professional wisdom in a number of ways. For example, simply by covering your local real estate scene through your blog, you will automatically position yourself as an agent who is on top of things.

But you can go beyond this, if you choose...

For example, you could use your real estate blog to position yourself as the foremost expert in your niche. Do you focus on first-time home buyers? Seniors who are downsizing? Condo buyers? Luxury home sellers? Whatever your niche, you can use your blog to develop yourself as THE agent to go to for that particular field.

Think about the professional websites you visit frequently ... the ones you go back to time and time again for advice on marketing, customer service, or other business topics. What is it about these websites that keeps you coming back? How can you do the same with your real estate blog? The answer is there. You just have to look for it.

X is for **X**stensible

Okay, so I cheated with this particular letter of the blogging alphabet. But a real estate blog truly is extensible and expandable (and you try to find a decent adjective that starts with the letter 'X').

I've spoken to quite a few real estate agents who were leery of starting a blog for the same reason -- they thought they would be "stuck" publishing it a certain way. "What if I decide to change the format or purpose of the blog down the road," these agents wanted to know. "Will I have to start over and recreate the whole blog."

In a word, no.

Blog programs, by their very nature, are designed to be easily expandable / extensible. They are designed to allow the addition of new features at a later date (an exact dictionary definition of "extensible.")

All blogging programs can be expanded, modified, extended and customized. Blogger, TypePad, WordPress, etc.

My SEO blog for agents (<http://www.toptenagent.com/seo-blog/>) is an example of WordPress customization. This blog has been customized to display only a summary of each article on the home page (as opposed to the full articles, which was the default setting). And I have total control over how long the summaries should be, how they should look, etc.

Expanding a Real Estate Blog

So let's say you start out using your real estate blog for one particular purpose, such as home buyer advice. But then later, you decide to create a news channel as well, covering local happenings that are somehow related to real estate. You could do this simply by adding a category for the news stories and incorporating "News" into your main menu.

Actually, you could go about this in many ways, depending on what suits you the best. The point is, your real estate blog can support just about any type of configuration you can imagine. They are designed to be modified, customized, extended, expanded, and otherwise "tricked out."

Y is for Yours

Whether you choose to manage your blog alone, or you invite a team of bloggers to collaborate with you, make sure you have author information somewhere. Aside from the obvious, here's why...

Blogs tend to be associated with an individual author (or several authors), as opposed to a faceless company who hides behind pronouns like "we" and "us." The same goes for real estate blogs. This is why -- right now, at least -- blogs enjoy more popularity than "plain old" websites.

After decades of corporate standoffishness (is that a word?), the general public sees business blogs as a refreshing change of pace.

When you step up and "own" your real estate blog, people will be more inclined to trust both the blog's content and you as a person. And let's call a spade a spade here ... real estate agents, like many service professionals, can benefit from a little extra dose of public trust.

The first step is to create a high-quality blog that is worth the time it takes for people to read it. Without this first "step," everything else is a wash. The second step is to make it clear who is publishing the blog, and how that author is also qualified to help readers.

The first step (quality content) takes some work. But the second step (tying the real estate blog to the author) is quite simple. Just put a small thumbnail photo of yourself in the blog's menu bar, with a link that says something like "Meet the author."

While you're at it, you might want to create a highly visible "Contact me" button as well. That, combined with your smiling mug, will help you capture a few extra leads per week ... provided that you have some blog traffic.

Z is for Zippy

The dictionary defines zippy as "lively and full of energy." I can think of no better traits to apply to your real estate blog. Here's why.

Have you ever been to a business website that literally bored you into hitting the "Back" button? You know the kind of language I'm referring to ... "Our scalable solutions will help you leverage your companies true potential ... blah, blah ... pedantic pomposity, etc. etc."

Well, consumers have the same reaction toward real estate blogs. A real estate blog that is stuffy, pompous, dry or dull will repel readers -- even if it has information they might otherwise have found useful.

When I say to be "zippy" with your real estate blog, I'm not telling you to be artificial or annoying (like a waiter at Applebee's). I'm telling you to have some energy, passion and -- yes -- even some fun with your blogging. You can educate people about your local real estate scene without being boring.

Dull real estate blogs do not get people talking. Nor do they excite or motivate anyone into action. Thus, a boring blog is doomed to failure from the start.

I must caution you on something though. The first thing you have to do is create a high-value blog full of useful content (property listings, home photos, market updates, community news). Once you have that kind of real estate blog, you can inject the personality to make it memorable and enjoyable -- since it will already be useful and informative.

Real Estate Blogging Resources

Popular Blog Platforms

- Blogger - www.Blogger.com
- WordPress - www.WordPress.org
- TypePad - www.TypePad.com

Comparisons of Blog Programs

- <http://www.pcworld.com/article/id,128620-page,1/article.html>
- http://www.ojr.org/ojr/images/blog_software_comparison.cfm

Blog Directories

- Outpost Earth - <http://www.outpost-earth.com>
- Real Estate Blogs - <http://www.real-estate-blogs.com/blogs>
- Inman Wiki - http://www.inmanwiki.com/Real-Estate/Category:Real_Estate_Blogs
- Best of the Web - http://blogs.botw.org/Business/Real_Estate/

Lists of General Blog Directories

- <http://www.masternewmedia.org/rss/top55/>
- <http://www.toprankblog.com/rss-blog-directories/>
- <http://blog.sponsoredreviews.com/?p=47>

Real Estate Blogging Articles

"Real Estate Blogs - A Guide to Traffic Generation"
www.arminyournfarming.com/knowledge/article61.php

"Blog Marketing for Real Estate Agents"
www.webpronews.com/topnews/2005/07/30/rss-and-blog-marketing-for-real-estate

"Blogging for Search Engine Success"
www.arminyournfarming.com/knowledge/article59.php

A Collection of Real Estate Blogging Articles
www.theagentnet.com/blogging/

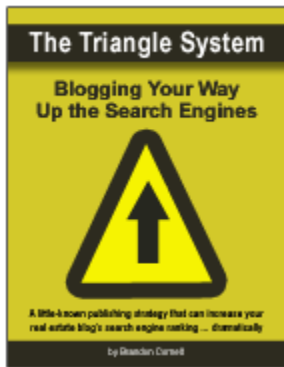
About the Author

Brandon Cornett is a real estate marketing specialist and veteran blogger. His "Real Estate Marketing Ideas" blog is one of the highest-ranking and most popular real estate marketing blogs in North America. Brandon is also the founder of the real estate marketing website ArmingYourFarming.com, which has been educating real estate agents since 2004.

In addition to his real estate marketing blog, Brandon publishes several business blogs such as www.ceoblogwatch.com.

The author can be reached through his website, www.ArmingYourFarming.com.

Bloggging & Internet Marketing Books by the Author



The Triangle System

"A little-known publishing strategy that can increase your real estate blog's search engine ranking ... dramatically."

This e-book outlines the author's three-part approach to blogging your way up the search engines. In this easy-to-follow guide, Brandon shows you how he consistently takes real estate blogs to the top of search engine results.

Available here: <http://www.ArmingYourFarming.com/products>



Top Ten Agent

"How I take real estate websites to the top of search engines, and how you can do the same."

You can spend all your time comparing one SEO strategy to another, which won't produce any results. Or you can choose a proven strategy and run with it, which will certainly produce results. Here's the strategy the author has been using for more than five years.

Available here: <http://www.TopTenAgent.com>



The Real Estate Web Presence

"How real estate agents can survive online in modern times, despite the rapid growth of the Internet."

The traditional real estate website is becoming invisible — crowded out by vast amounts of web content added to the Internet, year after year. As a result, it's harder for real estate agents to be found online. Here's what you can do about it.

Available here: <http://www.ArmingYourFarming.com/products>