



Lead Nurturing Basics for Real Estate Agents

If you've ever started a garden from seeds, you understand the process of nurturing. Preparing the soil to provide nutrition, ensuring proper spacing and planting depth of the seeds, and then watering and fertilizing the seedlings are all necessary steps to get your garden to grow.

Converting a seed to a mature plant is a lot like nurturing sales leads. There's a process and it takes time and patience. Just like every seed is a potential plant, every lead is an opportunity, and just as not all seeds germinate at the same time, some leads take longer to buy or sell than others.

The most effective way to nurture a lead is to become the trusted advisor, by providing the lead with relevant information throughout the home buying process, without being pushy.

Provide relevant information

By now we all know that when a consumer is thinking of buying a home, the first place she turns to is the Internet. Whether she is looking at actual homes or for information about neighborhoods or mortgages, the bottom line is that she is seeking information and, most likely, information only. In other words, the last thing she wants is somebody trying to sell her something.

Put yourself in the consumer's shoes. Even if we walk into a store knowing exactly what we want to purchase, when asked by a salesperson if we need help, the majority of the time we say "No thanks, just looking."

Why do we do that? Sales guru Tom Hopkins swears that it's "because with average salespeople it works. It stops them dead in their tracks." Other sales trainers claim that it's because people don't like being controlled and pressured. Whatever the reason, another "bottom line" is that people resist being sold to.

Internet real estate leads are no different. Some may be ready to transact right away, but most are just looking, and they don't necessarily want to talk to a real estate agent right away. The empathic agent will realize that the lead's initial contact with him is part of the lead's research mission—an attempt to gather information so he can make an informed decision.

Why is lead nurturing important?

Ninety percent of today's consumers start their home search online. So, if you want to capture the majority of the opportunities in your local market, you need to be generating online leads, period. By capturing online leads, you are more likely to reach that lead well before they engage their best friend's brother's cousin's uncle who is also an agent. In other words, many consumers pick their agent simply because that was the only one they knew about.

The reality is that agents shy away from online leads because they have trouble converting them. However, the problem is usually not the lead, it's the agent's lack of understanding as to where the lead is in the buying process. Most agents push the first conversation into sell mode, and what does the lead say? "Sorry, I'm just looking."

An effective lead nurturing plan helps you build a relationship with a potential client over time and keeps you top of mind by providing helpful information throughout their buying journey. If the plan is content-driven it also establishes you as the expert, building trust.

Tools

To effectively nurture your real estate sales leads you'll need the tools to carry out the process. Let's take a look at some of the "must-have" tools to successfully follow up on and nurture leads until they are sales-ready.

Website: This is an absolute must! Home shoppers browse the Web to look at listings. Your website must have an IDX feed, allowing prospects to browse active listings on your site instead of your competitor's. Chad Hyams, real estate speaker, trainer, and voice of reason said it best: "If your website doesn't have an IDX feed, it's a bad website. Throw it away immediately."

Customer Relationship Management system:

Connected to your website, the contact management system allows you to track your prospect's online behavior. Email marketing tools connected to your CRM should include:

- Auto-response emails to respond immediately to new leads. According to NAR, 94% of home buyers rate responsiveness as very important.*
- Pre-built and customizable drip email campaigns. Sixty-five percent of buyers and sellers use the first agent they contact to assist with their home sale. Being top of mind increases your chances of being the agent of choice.*
- Automated listing alerts. Seventy-five percent of consumers who register on an agent's website do so in order to receive listing alerts.**
- The capability to create newsletters containing market data relevant to the lead.

Tied together, this type of system will help you nurture your leads along. By the way, it's also the ideal system to keep yourself top of mind with past clients, and increase referrals and repeat business.

Let's take a look at how this works:

Sarah is considering selling her home and buying in a new location. Like 90% of today's consumers, Sarah starts her search online. Through a quick Google search, Sarah finds your IDX enabled website and browses homes for sale in the Bellevue, WA area for \$400,000.

When she registers to view more listings, your CRM automatically responds to her with a message thanking her for visiting and letting her know she is signed up for listing alerts in Bellevue in her price range.

You will then determine which pre-built drip nurture campaign has the most helpful information for Sarah. This will include information about the home search process, how to find the ideal neighborhood, and anything else that might aid Sarah during the home buying process.

Sarah will receive one of these emails every day, every week or every month—you can determine the frequency.

You might also add her to the list of prospects to which you send a newsletter every month.

This drip, drip, drip keeps you in the front of Sarah's mind whenever she thinks about buying a house. The power of your CRM will also let you know when Sarah is actively browsing your website, so you can contact her at the exact moment she's behind her computer looking at homes.

There is a huge opportunity out there for agents who have the tools and knowhow to effectively nurture online leads. Market Leader is the only company in the industry that provides agents with Smart Lead Technology that includes all of the tools you need to capture, nurture, and convert today's online consumer. Visit www.marketleader.com for more information.

*2012 NAR Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers

** Market Leader/Hebert Research Study