As we ring in 2013, many people will spend some time thinking about their New Year's resolutions. Some pledge to join a gym, eat healthier, or travel more. But what about your business? The new year is a perfect time to think about what you want out of the coming months.

While there are many aspects of your business that would be great places to focus, why not spend your time and energy in the next few months focusing on something that will impact your success throughout 2013 and beyond: building your lead pipeline.

Why now? According to Market Leader research, typical consumers think about the possibility of buying or selling a home for six to 12 months before becoming active clients. This includes about 12 weeks of active searching. That means that the sooner you find and engage qualified leads, the sooner you’re likely to close sales.

“It’s a numbers game,” says Katrina Benton, team leader for the Come Home Anchorage Team with the Keller Williams Realty Alaska Group. “The leads I have going into the new year are the leads that I have to plan for. I need so many leads to have so many appointments, to have so many listings or buyer’s contracts, to have so many closings.”

In her business, she’s found that the average buyer starts researching online about six months before they close on a home.

Joe Bornstein, broker/owner of Florida’s Rock Springs Realty points out that every day is a good day to start filling up your pipeline.

“I consider myself a farmer,” he says. “If I don’t plant my seeds today, I’m not going to have any crops—meaning commissions—60 to 90 days from now. You have to constantly be planting seeds, generating new prospects, and filling your pipeline, so that there’s a steady flow of revenue coming into your business.”
So what are the best ways to build your pipeline?

CONSIDER THESE 5 TIPS:

**Be at home in today’s online marketplace.** Today's real estate consumers are searching online, whether they're looking at listings, researching agents, or just looking for initial neighborhood and demographic information. Because of this, agents need to be comfortable marketing and communicating online. If a consumer has contacted you through your website, a social media site, or via email, resist the urge to pick up the phone right away. Take cues from the way they are communicating with you.

“I respect an online buyer’s privacy,” says Bornstein. “I don’t try and get in their face and sell them. Instead, I take a very service-centric and information delivery approach.”

When agents deliver valuable information in an unintimidating way, leads will feel more comfortable when it’s time to move on to the next level of their home buying or selling process with you.

**Faster is always better.** Did you know that 65% of buyers and sellers use the first agent they contact? And, most consumers spend only one day interviewing agents, and only interview one agent? When it comes to converting leads, the early bird always gets the worm. Challenge yourself to respond to new leads as quickly as possible. If you don’t, you’re just increasing the chances that they’ll move on to the agent who responded first, instead of you.

**Work your existing leads.** While you’re busy acquiring new leads, don’t forget to work the leads that are already in your database.

“Every day, I ask myself whom I should re-engage with,” says Benton. “I’ll look at my contacts and see who has been online in the last 24 hours. Then, I’ll send those people an email and check in.”

Sometimes, when a lead first enters your database, they’re just not quite ready to buy or sell. But, that doesn’t mean they won’t become active in the near future. Don’t let inactive leads slip through the cracks.

**Embrace technology.** Acknowledge that there are only so many hours in the day, and invest in technology solutions that make acquiring, tracking, and following up with leads quick, easy, and automated.

“I don’t actually spend a lot of time on the computer,” says Bornstein. “The technology is there,” says Bornstein. “I think that people just lack an understanding of the tools that are available at their fingertips.”

Innovative technology solutions ensure that your time is spent doing what you do best—engaging with clients, showing great properties, and closing deals—while still helping you stay on top of new and existing leads.

**Be Persistent.** Cultivating new leads, engaging your database, and turning leads into clients takes discipline, daily hard work, and time. Don’t get discouraged with the process.

“It seems like agents post five Craigslist ads, they don’t make a million dollars, and they give up,” says Benton. “A lot of people focus on the 95% of leads that don’t turn into buyers, when they should really focus on the 5% that do.”

Equip yourself for year-long 2013 success by dedicating some time to building your pipeline now. By spending time acquiring new leads, responding to inquiries quickly, and cultivating dormant leads already in your database, business will be booming this coming year.