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## 6 Essentials for a Powerful IDX Website

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What is IDX?

If you have a website that displays listings, chances are you are using Information Data eXchange (IDX). IDX is the way that your MLS formats listing data so that you can pull it to your website and display listings from your MLS. IDX policy requires that every user in a certain MLS use the data in the same way so as not to give any unfair advantage to any one user.

However, not all IDX websites are created equal. What someone does with an IDX feed can make all the difference between having a website capable of generating leads and having a “billboard in the desert.” (Remember, billboard in the desert = bad.)

In this paper, I’ll discuss six components of an effective IDX website. These can mean the difference between having a website as a real source of potential business and being another frustrated customer paying for something that doesn’t turn a profit.
What is the purpose of your website?
If you didn’t immediately answer “generate leads,” then you might want to read “Six Essentials of a Successful Real Estate Business.” (OK, I haven’t written that yet, but leads would be #1.)

The purpose of your website should absolutely be lead generation for your business. That’s the goal of an IDX website.

Real estate consumers go online for three reasons:

**Home values**
They want to see how much their home or their neighbor’s home is worth. This is why Trulia and other automated valuation sites get tens of millions of unique visitors a month.

**Listings**
Your IDX has listings available for consumers to visit.

**Real estate information:**
This is a big bucket that basically covers everything else. There are millions of reasons someone could be searching for real estate information online. Maybe visitors want to know how to apply for a loan, how to get the house ready to sell, or what “curb appeal” means.

Consumers do not go online to see your awards or get a feel for how many designations you have. In fact, most online consumers have no idea who you are—nor do they have any intention of learning about you. They want what they want. Someone getting ready to buy wants listings.

With that in mind, you need to include the following features on your IDX website. You can find online solutions that offer some or all of these components.
1. Custom URLs for landing pages

A pivotal part of having your own IDX website—where consumers can find listings—is your ability to attract visitors. Two common examples of how real estate agents attract visitors are writing blog posts about things in your market and creating Craigslist ads. Both of these strategies are much more effective if you can drive traffic (interested buyers) to a very specific place on your website.

Let’s look at landing pages with custom URLs in relation to a blog post. Say I’m writing a blog post about “homes for sale in Anchorage with a barn.” This “long-tail” content uses phrases someone might search for when looking for a specific type of home in my market. That way, it’s easier to attract potential customers who may take action on their home search.

If I follow best SEO practices for my blog post, I have a better chance of getting my post to rank in the search engines. When someone finds that post, I need to be able to link them over to my website and land them on an exact page that has listings they expect. In this case, what would those listings be?

You guessed it! They would be: “homes for sale in Anchorage with a barn.”

Here is an example of a URL that will put us on a page with homes that fit this description.


When I wrote this, there were 27 homes matching my inquiry (see image below). My ability to create an exact URL matching the query my potential customer would search allows me to give them what they want much faster and with more precision, thereby increasing my chances that they will do what I want—share their contact information.

The fewer clicks you make someone take when they are on your website, the more likely
they will take your desired action. In this case, that action would be that they become a
prospect by giving you their name and email address (at least) and possibly their phone
number and physical address (at most).

If your website is not capable of generating custom URLs, the best you can do is to link
someone to your home page or the search page on your website and hope they decide to
take the 5-10 clicks necessary to do their own search for “homes for sale in Anchorage with
a barn.”

When driving people to your website, your goal is to take them to exact places. Never leave
it up to them to navigate your site. Based on where they are coming from, you should be
able to determine what they want. In our example, they were coming from a blog post we’d
written about “homes for sale in Anchorage with a barn.” I know what they want and I know
where to point them on my website.

2. Lead capture tools
At the beginning we asked you the purpose of your website. Your ideal answer should have been to generate leads. So then it makes sense that one of the essentials of a powerful IDX website would be lead capture tools.

At some point, you have to ask for contact information. In order to do this, you need something compelling to exchange for their info. But make sure that you're not asking for their name, address, phone number, mother's maiden name, social security number, and bank account data.

The art of convincing someone to exchange their contact info for continued access to your website is a delicate balance. Start by giving them a taste of what they are going to get prior to asking them to register or give you their email address. One strategy is to show them a few listings. That way, they'll understand what they can access if they decide to register. You should clearly lay out that value on the page.

On this first page, ask for as little information as possible in an effort to get something from them. Then, in subsequent prompts, ask for additional information (like a phone number). While many people are willing to give up their email address, fewer are willing to leave a phone number, especially from the outset. Having an email address gives you a chance to communicate, investigate, and learn more about them (gotta love Google). Then, by layering on the requests for additional information, you'll ease them into giving more complete contact info.

Buttons like “schedule a visit” and “get preapproved” are great for lead capture. But many people visiting your website aren’t ready to schedule a visit. (For a great look at the “lifespan” of someone searching for real estate, check out the Home Buyer Journey.) If that's the case, you need to have lead capture opportunities that provide value for someone a year away from buying—such as, delivering new listings with automated listing alerts.
3. Automated listing alerts
Automated listing alerts ensure that potential clients who are using your website to search for listings are notified every time something meeting their criteria hits the market.

Any time we talk about automated listing alerts, we always hear someone say, “Yes, I have that—my MLS does this.” However, there is a major difference between your MLS and an IDX website.

When you send something from the MLS, the person on the receiving end gets only the properties from that search. What happens if they want to do some more of their own digging? The MLS listing alerts are generally a dead end. If they get an email that has two properties in it, that’s all they can look at.

Automated listing alerts that come out from your IDX website, while calling attention to particular properties, also allow the person receiving them to easily navigate back to your website to look for more homes.

This same email from the MLS may have given them every piece of information about the property, with no way for you to know if they were interested or not.

Given that one of the tools of an effective website is your ability to see what a person is looking at (we’ll get to that), being able to drive them back to your website is a primary component of converting a prospect into a client. The more information you have about what they want, the easier time you will have tailoring what you have to offer.
In addition, property alerts should make it really easy for someone to reach out and contact you as the agent.

Someone who receives a property alert is likely to spend a decent amount of time on your website. This visit can signal to the search engines (think Google) that your site is a good resource.

4. An integrated CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system

Your CRM is the tool you use to manage and communicate with prospects.

Having an integrated CRM means that your IDX website and your CRM speak to each other so that you know what visitors are doing on your website. Ideally, your CRM will show you what your prospects have looked at on your website, properties they have saved, notes they have left on certain properties, and when they come back to visit your website again. This insight can infinitely increase your chances of converting a prospect to a customer.

Think about calling a prospect who has registered on your website. What would you say if you knew nothing about why they were on your site? It wouldn’t sound as good as if you knew what interested them.
If you knew nothing, the opening line would sound something like this: “Hi Brenda, this is Max, from XYZ Realty and I see that you registered on my website for information about real estate in Anchorage.”

If you know what she was looking at on your website, the conversation can be much better: “Hi Brenda, this is Max from XYZ Realty and I saw that you were interested in a three-bedroom home in Anchorage. The particular listing that you saved when you were using our website will be hosting an open house this weekend. Would you like to schedule a time to see that home prior to the open house? That price range is hot right now in Anchorage and many homes are selling in the first week on the market. This home just came on the market two days ago.”

If you were able to see that Jane had looked at 12 houses on your website and every house was in the $140,000 to $220,000 price range, you would have a pretty good idea of what Jane is looking for. If there was one house on the website that Jane had viewed five times, there’s a good chance that the house stood out to her. You could use this when trying to reach out.
If Jane disappears like many Web leads tend to do, or never responds to your attempts at communication, you can see when she ultimately re-emerges and comes back to your website. Many Internet “lurkers” will spend long periods of time researching their next move. They may start over a year in advance of actually wanting to speak to an agent. Your ability to know when their behavior changes—when they start to pick up looking again—can be the difference between you landing them as a client and dismissing them as just another looky-loo.

5. Customized content
We talked earlier about your website being a billboard in the desert. You don’t want this to happen. In order to make sure that Google (or any other search engine) will show your website in their search results, you need to make sure that your site includes unique, relevant content.

Sure, you want your website to have listings so that consumers can find what’s currently available on the market—but what if your website has the exact same content as your competitors? Since every agent can pull the same IDX feed that you are pulling from the MLS, it stands to reason that many websites in a given market have identical information on them. In this case, Google isn’t going to look very favorably at your website if it’s the same as hundreds (or thousands) of other sites. Because of this, it’s important that you can add your own content.

In any given market in the United States, you are likely to find three websites dominating the search results. Trulia, Zillow, and REALTOR.com will generally hold the top positions for a variety of the most common phrases. Searches for “homes for sale in Seattle,” “Seattle real estate,” or “houses for sale in Seattle” will normally return the big three in some order. Replace “Seattle” with your own town and you will likely see the same thing.

So how do you compete?
By creating content on your website that is more “hyper-local,” you have a better chance to get your own website to rank in the search engines.

For example, San Antonio agent Jerry Newman has included pages on his IDX site that offer information about specific areas of San Antonio. Someone looking for homes for sale in Country Retreat at Alamo Ranch, a popular subdivision in San Antonio, will find Jerry’s website at the top of a Google search.

Because Jerry can create custom pages on his IDX, he is able to target long tail search terms and drive very specific queries to his website. When buyers access his site from the search results, Jerry can then provide them with relevant information about that particular area of
For many real estate professionals, customized content is the only chance to compete. Larger sites have millions of dollars and more resources than the average agent.
What they don’t have however, is the local knowledge about very specific places in your market. By combining that expertise with a website that allows you to create custom pages with unique content, you can make sure consumers can find you when they start to get serious about where they want to own their next home.

6. Tracking and analytics

Knowing what’s happening on your website is important as you decide what efforts are worth continuing and what would be better left on the cutting room floor.

Being able to track and analyze data from your website can help you in two ways. The first, we discussed above. With an integrated IDX website and CRM (to manage our leads) you have greater visibility into what your prospects are doing when they visit. The second is to know how effective your own marketing efforts are in driving traffic to your website.

Wouldn’t it be nice to know if that Craigslist ad you wrote actually generated visits to your website—and if any of those visitors ultimately became a lead for your business?

If you knew that a certain ad was bringing visitors to your site, but none of that traffic registered as leads, you’d be able to dig in and figure out why. Maybe your ad includes a link to an area that doesn’t provide the information they want.

If a Craigslist ad for “Homes for Sale in South Anchorage under $250,000” was both driving a good amount of traffic to your site, and resulting in high numbers of leads, it would make sense to create similar ads for different areas of your market and potentially for different price points.

Analytics can tell you which blog posts are driving consumers to your website every month. That way, you can write similar posts for different areas of your market. Let’s say the post about “Foreclosure Properties for Sale in Eagle River” is doing a good job of driving traffic; you might consider a similar post about “Foreclosure Properties for sale in Chugiak (a neighboring town).”

Your ability to measure how effective your marketing is allows you to get rid of the things that aren’t working and double your efforts on the things that are getting results.

Many real estate professionals have little idea if their website is even getting any traffic, let alone where it’s coming from and if that traffic is converting into leads for their business. This information is vital if you intend to make the most of your website.
Were you paying attention?

If you want to be successful with your online marketing, and generate prospects who ultimately become clients, these six essentials are not negotiable.

Anyone who has had success with online lead generation and converting those leads to closings will tell you that the investment they made in their IDX website was a key component in that success.

*If you would like to learn more about Market Leader’s IDX website solution, please visit www.marketleader.com or call 888-820-4778.*