Print and online marketing: using an integrated strategy in an online world.

There was a time when every marketing need could be met with a shiny, full-color brochure, flyer, poster, or billboard. Marketing budgets were flush with money for these products, business was booming for commercial printers, and countertops at open houses were filled with acres of colorful collateral.

As the Internet gained steam over the last 10 years, it became easier and easier to create your own marketing campaigns and get your message across online. In the 21st century, we're now inundated with a multitude of options like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Craigslist, brokerage and individual agent websites, banner advertising, and the list goes on. In fact, there are so many options that it can be confusing and overwhelming, even for the most tech savvy among us.

Print's biggest detractors argue that hard-copy marketing materials are too expensive to produce and distribute. On the flip side, there are many agents that perceive online marketing too time-consuming to take on. But the successful real estate professional finds a balance—that happy medium of cost-effectively communicating to consumers with the right message at the right time.

Many people consider their print and digital efforts to be entirely separate from one another. This is a mistake. Make your print and digital campaigns part of a comprehensive strategy. Use a CRM system to make sure you're sending your most qualified leads a mix of targeted, time-sensitive initiatives. Also, consider leveraging your print creative for use in your digital campaigns. You'll be developing a specific aesthetic and brand across many channels while saving money on new design and copy.

Consider these best practices for integrating both print marketing and online communication tools into your overall marketing strategy.

**Print Marketing Strategies:**

**Be targeted about your messaging and audience.** Paper, printing, and postage are expensive. Don't waste time and money sending blanket mailings to your whole town or neighborhood. Choose a specific area of expertise or a message you want to convey, and then find the right audience. For example, if you specialize in foreclosures and short sales, develop a postcard explaining your success in that niche, and then send it to an ultra-targeted list of consumers who are looking for a bargain property, interested in investment properties, or have purchased distressed properties in the past.

**Be deliberate when choosing the type of print collateral you will use.** Recognize that not everything needs to be printed. Some of the most successful pieces to print include business cards, stationary or letterhead, and informative, attractive brochures. Business cards are still the go-to networking tool. Stationary and letterhead are important for adding a personal touch to your communication with clients and prospects. Lastly, a beautiful tri-panel brochure has enough space for lots of text and big photos in a small amount of space.

**Share the cost.** Most likely, you already have good business relationships with title companies, mortgage brokers, home inspectors, or other non-competitive vendors in your area. Consider developing a monthly newsletter that features these partners and split the production and distribution costs—you'll save money and generate new leads at the same time—everybody wins.

**Find someone else to do the heavy lifting.** Many real estate professionals have stopped buying advertising space in magazines—you'll notice this when you pick up almost any publication and see how much thinner it is than it used to be. But, one thing that magazines have going for them is that the publisher has already spent lots of money cultivating the prized key readership. When you find a publication whose audience fits your key demographic, don't hesitate to take out an ad. The publisher is doing the work for you. As an added bonus, with fewer ads in most magazines these days, yours is less likely to get overlooked!
Invest in powerful design and messaging. If you are going to spend actual dollars on print advertising, make sure you’re creating quality pieces. Consider hiring a professional graphic designer and copywriter or proofreader to work on your marketing collateral. You’ll end up with smart, aesthetically pleasing pieces that get your message across.

Be budget conscious. Shop around. With the decline in the use of printed materials across many industries, print shops are eager for your business. Most printers offer great deals, especially for new customers. You upload your final design, and they print and ship your collateral. Most have weekly, if not daily, specials.

Cross-promote yourself. Include contact information for your website, email address, Twitter feed, or Facebook page on your printed materials. For many consumers, this is how they would prefer to contact you.

Track your results. Social media and websites make it easy to track your site visitors and ROI. Don’t let this data go unnoticed just because you’re using print collateral. For example, set up a single property website or virtual home tour with analytic capabilities and send out a print campaign that directs people to that site specifically, or your main website. Use the data to keep track of traffic on this site. You’ll immediately know how successful your campaign has been.

Online marketing strategies:

Launch a lead-capture website. If you’re a motivated real estate agent, you need a personalized website to strengthen your brand and capture more leads. IDX technology allows visitors to easily search and view MLS properties without leaving your site—giving you a competitive edge in your local real estate market.

Stand out with user-friendly marketing templates. Today’s agents don’t need to be graphic designers to stand out from the competition. Cutting-edge online marketing tools help you create and edit polished greeting cards, postcards, flyers, and newsletters for email or print marketing—with just a few clicks.

Win business by blogging. A blog is a popular type of interactive website that makes it easy to post information and updates online while encouraging comments from visitors. Target the content of your blog to your particular niche—your neighborhood, for instance. Build rapport by sharing photos, neighborhood news, and market statistics.

Start a Facebook page. Facebook can be a powerful source of new business for you and a quick way for consumers to share your real estate information. Use this massive social media site more effectively to promote your business, share listings, and tap into millions of buyer and seller leads.

Post properties on Craigslist. Millions of consumers visit Craigslist each month, making this free classifieds site one of the most effective marketing and lead-generation tools for real estate professionals. With Craigslist, you can post a new listing along with a link that takes visitors directly to the property on your lead-capture website.

Send out e-newsletters. Online newsletters are simple to design, and you can send them monthly to your contacts—highlighting local market data, insider tips, and useful strategies for buyers and sellers. It’s a great way to establish yourself as a local expert.

Showcase your listings with virtual tours. Using text, photos, and music, you can easily take prospective buyers on a beautiful “virtual tour” of any home listing. Different design templates help you make every home and every tour unique.

Purchase pay-per-click ads. Pay-per-click advertising is a cost-effective way to target your audience and bring traffic directly to your site through Google, Bing, and other search engines. Work with an established vendor that will guarantee a certain number of leads. The best thing is that you’ll only pay when someone clicks your ad and visits your website.

Set up automated campaigns. Launch targeted, automated email campaigns for your entire database or specialized groups—first-time homebuyers, holidays, birthdays, and more—the latest “set it and forget it” technology is ideal for real estate professionals who want to save time and money.

Printed marketing campaigns are not becoming obsolete, to the relief of agents everywhere. And while online marketing may seem overrated to some, it is becoming an increasingly influential part of your overall marketing and branding strategy. When careful attention is paid to the medium, the message, the audience, and the intended goal, both print and online marketing can peacefully coexist, combining to be a powerful part of your business strategy.

Market Leader provides real estate professionals with powerful marketing solutions designed to help them gain the competitive edge. To learn more, contact us at 1-888-820-4778 (agents) or 1-877-732-0698 (brokers).