

GENERATE AND TRACK SALES WITH THREE TECHNOLOGY TRENDS

by Dave Clements, Lasso Data Systems

Since the dawn of the personal computer, there has always been a technology gap between those who easily learn and adapt the latest tech for their business and personal use, and those who remain a few steps behind on the technology curve.

“If you look at the leadership of most developers or builders, these are baby boomers in their early fifties, and they did not grow up with technology,” explains Leighton Collis, founder and managing partner of [Liquid Ad](#), a full-service marketing services agency focusing on customer intelligence, psychographic profiling, and workflow analysis. “When they were coming up, faxing was ‘hot,’ and I don’t mean that as a criticism. Technology can be a black box they don’t understand. Real estate development is not a tech-driven pursuit; information technology is largely misunderstood and sometimes feared. The reality is that the buyer has dragged us into this world where we have to move people from digital fantasies into the real world, and if we don’t do that, we don’t make sales.”

Relying on old technology often deprives your sales and marketing team of the latest tools and resources available to improve communications and increase sales. And while old technology is commonly assumed to be cheaper technology, that isn’t always the case. In fact, there may be significant cost savings associated with upgrading to the latest tech, especially when the cost of maintaining and supporting old technology is factored in.

Here are three up-and-coming technologies for real estate sales and marketing that should be on the radar of any forward-thinking executive:

1. Customer relationship management software. In a market downturn, the most important leads available to a sales team may not be the ones walking through the door each weekend. They may be the leads that walked in two weekends ago or even two months ago and have continued to track the project through e-mails and the community’s Web site.

Effective lead tracking is the process that allows sales agents to monitor a potential buyer’s progress through the sales cycle, and customer relationship management (CRM) software is the critical tool that makes lead tracking and nurturing possible. The old tech model for lead tracking typically involves a series of Excel spreadsheets which grow progressively more complicated and difficult to modify as projects continue to sell. In many cases, tracking leads in such a cumbersome way acts as a deterrent to the sales process more than an advantage, taking up agents’ valuable time.

With the right real estate friendly CRM software solution, sales leads can automatically be tracked providing a clear direction to sales agents on what their daily follow-up steps should be for maximum results. Those solutions with integrated e-mail distribution abilities allow additional levels of tracking related to which leads are opening which e-mails, and what they’re doing with the e-mails once they hit the inbox.

Ultimately, CRM software is a technology that helps to focus and direct the sales team on those leads that are most likely to pay off with signed contracts down the line.

2. Traffic-driven home directory Web sites. Directory Web sites designed to consolidate information about new home communities and provide a one-stop resource for potential buyers are nothing new to the Internet. However, the latest trend involves a new model for these types of Web sites, in which profiles on the site drive traffic to the community’s Web page, instead of collecting leads that are then distributed back to the builder.

“The traditional way of doing things on the Internet is that a site shows pictures and floor plans, and gets as much information as possible, and they want you to fill out a form that they will then pass on to a builder in the form of a lead,” says Jim Adams, CEO of NewHomesDirectory.com, an online directory devoted to connecting new home buyers with builders and developers. “We want to generate traffic, and that boils down to a different philosophy, which is that consumers are more comfortable giving that info to a builder where they will be spending their money. I think in the earlier days of the Internet, giving out that information wasn’t as big a deal; now I think more people are skeptical about giving their information to a third party.”

As part of an overall marketing strategy, an online component is an essential element. Listings on directory sites that drive traffic or leads can provide a low-cost, high-return investment of ad dollars—with costs that can be as low as hundreds of dollars a month; a single sale can more than cover the expense involved.

3. Web site optimization. The days are long over when it was enough to put up a decent community Web site and wait for the buyers to find it. The proliferation of online resources for new home buyers and of high-quality community Web sites means that community Web sites have to be fully optimized for maximum visibility.

The first stage of this evolution in site development begins with search engine optimization (SEO), a technique used to ensure that a site shows up as high as possible in the search rankings of Google and other engines. Beyond SEO is where the latest trends are emerging—techniques for not just improving a Web site’s search engine ranking but for gathering data on Web site users and correlating that data to specific leads for a project.

“In the old days, our most valuable prospect was someone who’d returned to the display home a few times,” says Leighton Collins. “With today’s technology, we can find the online return visitor to the project’s Web site—we can see what each visitor is looking at, how many times, and what their demographics are. Most importantly, we find out why they’re in the market—we used to be able to manufacture urgency, and we can’t anymore. The way our programs work, we can find out what the buyer’s urgency is.”

Coupled with CRM technology, Web site optimization and customer intelligence can enhance the lead generation and tracking process. Stir in listings on a traffic-based Web real estate directory, and you can be well on your way to ensuring your sales and marketing strategy and toolkit reflects the latest and best technologies available.

***Dave Clements** is CEO of [Lasso Data Systems](http://LassoDataSystems.com) and is responsible for the direction, strategy and overall operations of the company. He has been a trailblazer in technology, marketing, sales and operations for 25 years, and is renowned as an innovator, consultant and top executive in both the U.S. and Canada. He can be reached at dclements@lassodatasytems.com.*

For more information about this item, please contact Tamsin Ayre at 800-368-5242 x8673 or via e-mail at tayre@nahb.com.