

POWER

**Podcasting
allows you to
maximize the
potential of your
most valuable
marketing tool:
yourself.**

by Matthew J. Ferrara

Let's face it: everyone is marketing online these days. Direct email, group newsletters, websites and blogs bombard consumers from every corner of the Internet. New technologies make it easy to blast email templates to ten or ten thousand consumers in the blink of an eye. Agent websites pop up faster than spam, as website template-houses crank out thousands of homepages every day. What's an agent to do when a Google-search for real estate in their area ranks them just one-of-more-than-ten-million sites currently available?

Enter podcasting. It's one of the few marketing tools online that guarantees your message is truly distinct. While others are stale drip-

marketing drivels, your podcast can highlight the most important element in personal marketing: yourself. Podcasting is one of the few ways to put your personality online in a way to which consumers can relate because it's just like an online radio ad.

First, some numbers: 20 percent of buyers this year will be over the age of 55. The average seller will be about 47; and the largest segment of homes will be bought and sold to Baby Boomers. These are important numbers. Good marketing involves segment marketing – matching the message and medium to the audience. However, until recently, agents have had few choices of medium. Most agents employ text to deliver their message via website or email, to all segments. So while their content changed – different pages for different

audiences – the delivery still depended upon reading. And if we know one thing about marketing to Baby Boomers, it's do not make them read.

How do we know this? Well, take the REALTOR's favorite pastime: sticking labels on postcards. What's the historical rate of return for this activity? Less than one percent of recipients respond. What matters isn't so much that some of us are still doing it (they'll learn, eventually) but the reason why postcards don't work. Text-based advertising requires too much "attention" by the consumer to be effective, especially in small doses (i.e., one postcard per quarter). This same challenge occurs online, where text on a website cannot "sell" the message during the average attention span of mere seconds. Essentially, when the consumer knows it is mar-

keting text, they scan it very quickly.

So how do we overcome the “text challenge” with online marketing? Simple: read it out loud. And that’s essentially what a podcast is – your message in the form of an audio recording. Visitors are already used to audio marketing from decades of radio advertising. They are more receptive to audio marketing because they don’t have to do any work: just listen, even while multitasking (hopefully looking at your listings). And unlike radio ads, podcasting online is fast, easy and free.

For starters, you need to make a recording. Do this in three steps: First, pick a topic. It could be a “news” update on the market or an interview with a past client who enjoyed your services. Consider topics you can discuss in about ninety-seconds to three minutes. Next, write out the script: Use simple words and direct language. Short sentences work best when read out loud. Eliminate any words that are jargon, like “MLS” or “PMI” that all listeners won’t understand. Finally, record your message.

Now, the third part – creating the recording – will take a little practice. You’ll need a good headset – preferably an USB headset/microphone combination for the best clarity and noise-cancellation. You will also need software to record and edit your message. A quality program that’s inexpensive is TotalRecorder Professional (totalrecorder.com). It makes recording and editing easy by showing the sound wave on screen and providing straightforward cutting tools to remove mistakes. Producing the file in multiple formats, including the MP3 format for online listening, can be done under the File/Save As... menu. In fact, with so many output formats, it’s easy to produce your recordings for emailing, online listening, upload to sharing services (like iTunes) and even creating high-quality CDs.

Creating short recordings should

take about 15 minutes; about five minutes to record the message and 10 minutes to edit and produce. The next part – putting it online – should take seconds. There are three options for most agents: The first is placing the file directly on your website. If you have a custom-developed website, this involves uploading the file to your web space, then creating a hyperlink to it on one of your pages. This could be a two-minute job, if your website allows user-editing. Or, it could be cumbersome so (or not even possible without programming knowledge) that you’ll look at the next option.

The second approach to sharing your recording is to place it on a “sharing” site – like PodBean.com. These websites are like “libraries” of recordings by thousands of users. Most podcasts are categorized into “topics,” much like videos on YouTube. Accounts are usually free and can store nearly unlimited podcasts. Sites like PodBean offer inexpensive ways to share your recording online, but they aren’t highly customizable. Your page will look fairly simple and unglamorous. So send people to a recording directly by referencing its hyperlink from your website, an email or signature file. Either way, visitors can stream the recording online or download it to a computer or iPod for offline listening. As an extra benefit, storing your recording in these directory sites can generate some traffic for you as visitors perform “searches” for similar topics to your content.

The third choice – which combines the personal promotional element of the first and the ease of storage of the second – is to simply upload your recording to your blog. Creating a blog entry is extremely simple: it’s just like word-processing online. Most blogging systems, such as Google’s Blogger or the real estate-specific RealTown.com blog let users create

an entry using a variety of formats: text, photos, audio and video recordings. The benefit is that one entry can use multiple delivery formats to hit multiple marketing segments at once. You could publish the “transcript” of a recording using text and accompanying it with an audio recording for people who prefer simply to listen. Or eliminate the text entirely, but add some graphs or photographs as supporting materials to the recording. If your blog is already receiving visitors, adding podcasts will increase the time they spend on the site while listening, increasing the chances they’ll see your listings or services. For new blogs, adding recordings is a great way to “hook” visitors with some pizzazz. For some users, creating recordings might even increase their weekly blog postings – especially for slow typists.

Perhaps the best part of podcasting is the uniqueness it brings to your marketing. Recordings add a personal element to marketing. It’s you, talking about issues that you know about, using your voice, reaching across the web in a personal way. Certainly, video would be the next logical choice; but for many visitors, hearing a friendly voice may be more than enough. And unlike email or website templates, your recording is unique because only you can create it. In an era when so much Internet marketing looks “just like everyone else,” the podcast may be the best thing yet to personalize your site, enhance your message and add your welcoming presence to your marketing online. **MAR**

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