



Grassroots Marketing: Back to the Basics

By Lezlee Liljenberg



Let me begin by saying “I LOVE MARKETNG!” I realize marketing is not everyone’s favorite cup of tea, but if you can narrow down the road you are traveling, you can be more successful in your marketing endeavors.

At the end of each year, I take time to evaluate my past marketing efforts to determine what is working and what is not. This is essential because Allstate often changes its focus from year to year and as agents, we must modify our strategies accordingly. This is really no different from any other company; the difference is that it is our marketing dollars at stake. With that said, I take time to review my

marketing tactics and decide if I should keep them or eliminate them.

For example, maybe you have been spending money chasing low-cost renters policies. But your year-end review tells you that the cost of your marketing efforts is much more than the return you’ve realized in new sales. This is an indication that you need to shift your marketing efforts to more profitable lines of business, such as commercial. Sure, selling renters policies is still a quick and easy EB sale, but it may not be worth your time and effort to spend your marketing dollars to pursue this line of business when there are more profitable options available. In

other words, accentuate profit makers and eliminate the money losers that are dragging you down.

This year, as I sipped wine and reviewed my past efforts, something dawned on me. With being so busy putting out fires, dealing with staff and keeping clients happy, I neglected the Grassroots Marketing Strategy that had built my agency from scratch to \$1.2 million in less than four years. Even Allstate loved it! In fact, they sent me on trips to teach the basics to other agents. So as I pondered over what I could write about to help other agents achieve success in their agencies, I decided to share this marketing idea with you.

Form a Plan

Most agents agree that referrals are a great source for writing quality new business. The key here is that your referral source thinks enough of you to recommend you to others – what better endorsement can you get?

What can you do to nurture these all-important lead generators? First, determine the top referral sources in your area. The best way to accomplish this is to set a monthly schedule and visit them on a regular basis. No matter what, be sure that you stop by the top three real estate or mortgage offices each Tuesday morning. The hardest part will be sticking to your schedule, but remember that if you want consistent results, it is imperative that you stick to the plan. If, for some reason you “fall off the wagon” and miss a week, make sure you get right back to following your schedule. Your consistency will be rewarded.

Research Groups and Organizations

You may visit some event or network-

ing group and know immediately that it is not for you. Drop the group and save your time and money. If you are unsure, go a few times to see if you feel at home with the group. If you join an organization remember these pointers:

You will not get business immediately, so don't let this discourage you.

If it seems like it is not working out, then trade it for another organization.

Always remember you are not married to the group.

Involvement

Become a leader as soon as you can. This puts you front and center. I can hear the excuses now... "But I don't like speaking in front of others." Or, "I am not extroverted." Or, "But, I am not comfortable with this or that." It is time to get out of your comfort zone because these excuses will not get you more business; they will only serve to inhibit your growth as a successful agency owner. If you have these fears there are remedies. Consider a Dale Carnegie course or join Toastmasters International. This step will take a little courage and some time and effort, but the results could far exceed your expectations. If this is too big a step, then consider becoming the treasurer or secretary, which will expose you to the group, yet limit your speaking time. I use the word "expose" here in the most positive manner, so please do not go out and do something silly that includes drinks and a table.

Being involved and interacting with the group at this level is much more productive than just throwing money at an event or sponsorship. Being seen (and heard) at the group's meetings and functions is crucial to getting referrals. The more you are seen, the more business you will cultivate.

If you can't attend, send a representative of your agency. In my case, people would come up and say, "Lezlee, you are everywhere!" It was true and after I thought about it, I realized that I needed to do it again because it works. There were even other Allstate agents who got frustrated with me because I was "everywhere." Some of them would stay away from organizations that I was a part of because they said I was "taking

the business." That is ridiculous! There is plenty of business out there for everyone and people gravitate to different personalities. So if the group allows it, get three Allstate agents into the fold, and be a "force to be reckoned with." By teaming up, you may be able to force out the major players from other insurance companies.

Remove the Ball and Chain from your Staff

Find an organization for staff to join. Obviously, there are different types of staff; some that can effectively market and some who are best left in the office to perform administrative functions. This is not to disparage those who remain at the office because they are the glue that keeps everything together. They complete the paperwork properly and perform other functions that keep the office humming along. Those staff that can handle the marketing end, however, will love the freedom and trust being offered, which builds morale. Go with them in the beginning to demonstrate how to network and help them feel at ease. After a couple of meetings, set them free.

Set expectations for them, such as collecting at least three business cards at each meeting and have them share their conversations with you. Whenever you

are all together at one event or party, your modus operandi should be to **DI-VIDE** and **CONQUER**. Too often, I have watched two or three employees huddle together rather than working the room to gain referrals. This is a waste of time and money. They can talk in the office all day long, so huddling together in networking situations should be banned during these events.

Everyone – including and especially the agency owner – must be making new connections. There is no greater training tool than "leading by example," which can only be accomplished when the agency owner jumps into the trenches with his staff, get his hands dirty, and works the crowd.

We must all remember that this is called **NetWORKing**, not **NetSOCIALizing**. That is why it is called "work." These are not meant to be la-di-da social affairs with no purpose; you are there to accomplish something and that is to build relationships, gather referrals and close business.

Start back at the roots and grow from there. And always be sure to thank your referrals in some special way! **Ef**

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