

Real estate brochures build business

by Ed Gillespie

Brochures are effective real estate marketing tools, but only if they are well designed, properly prepared and, most importantly, placed in the hands of potential buyers. Unless those hands are motivated to dial your phone number, you can't even start thinking about selling a property.

I'm astonished at the frequency with which real estate firms work diligently to prepare and print brochures only to have them collect dust in a musty closet. An advertising budget can't help you unless you put the dollars to work, and a brochure can't benefit you unless you prepare it effectively.

To create a truly effective brochure, you must consider the basic ingredients: preparation/planning, control/design, and circulation/distribution.

Preparation/Planning

It's essential that you get your inventory of properties in order before sending the final copy to the printer. You must prepare your copy for the printed page as precisely as a grocery store owner aligns display shelves for a consumer. The principle is the same; the only difference is that the pages of your brochure are your aisles and your shelves are stocked with property listings.

Write to existing clients to let them know what you're doing to market their properties and to give them a chance to change the asking price or terms before the brochure is printed.

Re-write any ads that have been appearing in newspapers for any length of time. A person looking to purchase property reads ads regu-

larly, so you should strive to push this person's "hot button" by writing creative ads.

Be sure that your ads stress the benefits of ownership. Every television, radio, newspaper, or magazine ad you've ever seen or heard is trying to sell the benefits of owning a product. You're wasting time if you write a limp laundry list of property attributes; even the most creative buyer falls asleep when real estate people try to take the easy way out.

A professional brochure works for you around the clock, every day of the year . . . if it is done right and positioned correctly in the right places. Here's how to accomplish both.

If you plan to use photographs, make sure they are quality ones. Don't take photographs that inadvertently include trash cans waiting on the curb to be collected or the junk car Junior is trying to resurrect. Take the photo when the lighting is good and in the appropriate season; all properties look better on a sunny day when their surroundings are lush green and cheerful, not when the day is cloudy and the ground is covered with snow (unless the property is in ski country). Photos draw attention to a property, but you must be careful about using a photo so small that the reader must search for a magnifying glass and ask for other opinions of what is represented.

In short, stock your shelves carefully and be prepared for business when your store opens and customers start wandering through the aisles.

Control/Design

Follow these basic guidelines to control and design your next brochure.

Front Cover: An attractive front cover says "TAKE ME" to the potential buyer. Using more than one color and giving the word "FREE" a prominent position are perhaps the two most important ways to achieve eye-appeal; put them to work for you. The cover should always proudly display your company name and logo.

To make sure that potential clients don't feel that they have already read it, noticeably change the cover every time you print a new brochure.

Headings: Effective headings help the potential client read your brochure selectively. You may want to segregate properties by locations or by specific features such as one bedroom, two bedrooms, four bedrooms +, business opportunities, recreational income property, raw land, and so forth. Most readers are unwilling to accept a challenge to search for their objective.

Page Numbers: When a potential buyer phones your office, page numbers can make it much easier for a sales associate to tune-in on the specific property. A two-part page number (e.g., 20-85) also comes in handy in case the query comes from an ad in a year-old brochure, a common event.

Phone Numbers: Make it easy for the buyer to know where to contact you. Putting your phone number on every page or at the end of every ad will cost next to nothing and make your number convenient to the potential buyer.

Dates: Never put a date on your brochure and never be trapped into thinking that a brochure outlives its usefulness. If a person phones you about a property which appeared in last year's brochure, the worst thing that can happen is that you must say that you sold the property, but that you have an ample new supply of similar properties.

White Space: After you have your copy laid out and set by the printer, use the remaining blank area to tell about your office and available services. You may want to insert a special section to reach an altogether different market. For example, a "We Have Buyers" or a "We Have Immediate Need For" section might well attract new sellers and help you fill gaps in your inventory.

Return Cards: The value of reader return cards can be demonstrated by the number of magazines that use them to help build subscriptions. You can use them to obtain all types of critical data. These postcards find their way home faster when readers do not have to address them or hunt for a stamp, so you'll get better results by printing your return address on one side and investing some money to acquire a postage paid permit number. You'll be surprised at how many cards return and at how long they return after the brochure is printed. People tend to save brochures and read them at their convenience, so you may find yourself receiving cards for years after printing.

Track Records: You should measure the effectiveness of your brochure by recording each response to it. We simply add the letters BR to

the end of the office code number for each property to let our sales associates know that a call resulted from the brochure. When we compile our list of identification numbers given by prospects, it's easy to check off the BR's and calculate the percentage of inquiries resulting from the brochure.

Circulation/Distribution

You can spend considerable time, money, and effort to prepare a super brochure, but this input will mean absolutely nothing if it doesn't get into the hands of a potential client. Here's where the hardest work — and the biggest payoff — comes in.

Indianapolis 500 drivers don't spend *their* time, money, and effort on their cars only to decide on race day that they don't want to enter the

competition. Similarly, your big day comes when the brochure is ready for the public . . . so be ready to race!

Brochure circulation and distribution, properly delegated, needn't be an annoying chore. In our Escanaba, Michigan office, for example, we assign sales associates the responsibility for maintaining key locations in town: gas stations, restaurants, motels, the Chamber of Commerce, tourist attractions, airports, bus terminals, grocery stores, and other centers of community activity.

The owners and the managers of these locations usually welcome our brochure displays because they know we are promoting the community, and when the community grows, so do their businesses. If you want to develop even greater rapport with the distribution outlet owners, you might consider using a page or two in your brochure to advertise *their* businesses; they will be more inclined to promote you when they know you're promoting them.

Upright racks customized with your logo and name are the best receptacles for your brochures. Inexpensive cardboard racks come in all shapes, sizes, and colors, and they also provide a wonderful place to advertise that magical word "FREE."

To encourage sales associates to maintain a full supply of brochures at their assigned locations, we allow them to staple their business cards to the brochures; this gives them the opportunity to receive a call directly from a potential buyer and increases the likelihood that the distribution racks will stay full.

Trade shows offer another excellent opportunity for distribution. We always print enough brochures to pass out at our booths at the State Fair, the Kiwanis Sports Show, and other local, regional, and state shows that attract large crowds. A very basic

Seven Benefits Of Brochure Advertising

- 1.) A brochure puts you in touch with potential buyers.
- 2.) Serves your sellers by letting the public know what properties are for sale.
- 3.) Allows sales associates to acquire new listings and extend contracts on existing ones.
- 4.) Permits your firm to promote in a highly visible way.
- 5.) Indicates to future sellers that your firm is an aggressive marketer.
- 6.) A brochure allows you to introduce your staff and explain your services.
- 7.) A brochure makes your phone ring!

principle is that the more interested people who see your advertising, the greater the potential for a sale.

Awareness Factor

Another way to get the brochures out is by running ads in major metropolitan (out-of-town) newspapers to let readers know where they can phone or write for a FREE brochure on property available in your area. When people request the brochure, mail it to them promptly and follow-up with a telephone call within a reasonable amount of time. This also lets your buyers know that you are advertising the sales of their properties in *other* market areas.

And don't ever forget to show the sellers your brochure and make sure they know precisely what you are doing to market their properties. You might want to send them a list of the distribution outlets to emphasize that you are promoting the sale of their property at various locations both in-town and out-of-town. Sellers frequently feel that brokers do little more than advertise in the local newspaper. Not many of us in the real estate business have escaped a

phone call from a seller complaining, "You're not running my ad in the paper often enough." Sellers call because the newspaper is their only visible means of knowing that you are actively marketing their properties. It's to your benefit to educate them about your various advertising techniques.

My firm has used brochures effectively for many years; they can work for you if you take the time to prepare them carefully and get them into the hands of potential buyers. Remember, the only thing separating an ordinary brochure and a great brochure is care and concern . . . yours. □



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