

New Projects Show that KCRAR Speaks Its Customers' Language

Summary

Responding to rapid growth in the area's Hispanic population, the Kansas City Regional Association of Realtors® created a Hispanic Diversity and Outreach Task Force. The Association accepted the recommendations of the task force to translate 39 standardized contract forms into Spanish, launch a traveling homebuying seminar in Spanish, and educate its members in developing and improving business relationships with Hispanic clients.

Background

The Kansas City region, which includes both Kansas and Missouri, has seen the Hispanic population double over the past 10 years. The Kansas City Regional Association of REALTORS® (KCRAR) now serves a population that is 17 percent Hispanic, a percentage that is expected to continue to rise. But home sales have not risen significantly among Hispanics: less than 49.5 percent of Hispanic families in the Kansas City region own their homes, a rate below the national average for Hispanic homeownership. Hispanic families are a significantly underserved market—in fact, KCRAR estimates that they represent a potential increase in regional home sales revenue of over \$12.6 million.

What the Association Did

At the 2004 NAR annual meeting in Washington, D.C., Cristalle Bozarth, community outreach and government affairs manager for KCRAR, attended a diversity meeting and received a copy of the Diversity Toolkit. She read it on her return flight, saw how much the Hispanic population was increasing in other areas, and when she arrived home did some research on her own area, unearthing the statistics detailed above.

Bozarth assembled a task force consisting of 12 REALTORS® (a mix of Spanish and non-Spanish speakers) and representatives of community organizations, including the Kansas City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, El Centro (the Hispanic community center), *Dos Mundos* (Kansas City's bilingual newspaper), and St. Aloysius Catholic Church (the largest Hispanic church in the region). The Hispanic Diversity and Outreach Task Force meets monthly, and has set four goals: Spanish forms, homebuying seminars, marketing, and REALTOR® education.

Spanish forms: In a June 2, 2004, *Realty Times* article titled "Speaking Spanish to Hispanics Pays Dividends," Lew Sichelman wrote, "Hispanics are more uncomfortable



than any other ethnic group in handling business transactions in English, according to a study of homebuying attitudes.” Yet none of the real estate companies in the Kansas City area provided Spanish forms to their agents. KCRAR saw that becoming the sole provider of such forms would help its members and at the same time make membership in its association more attractive. The Association decided to translate 39 standardized contract forms into Spanish, which cost approximately \$9,000.

Homebuying seminars: The Task Force noticed that homebuying classes offered in Spanish were only available in locations convenient to a small segment of potential clients. Once the forms were translated, KCRAR launched a traveling Spanish-language homebuying seminar, now held in five area community colleges (the seminar is also offered in English and American Sign Language). The seminar features a homebuying guide and directory of Spanish-speaking title agents, inspectors, and other important contacts in the homebuying process. California’s Southland Regional Association of REALTORS® has given KCRAR permission to use its Spanish handbook as a template.

Marketing and REALTOR® education: KCRAR set aside funds to publicize these new programs to REALTORS® and to the community at large, in the hope of attracting both new homebuying clients and new KCRAR members. It will provide a new benefit, educating REALTORS® about how to develop and improve business relationships with Hispanic clients.

In all, these efforts took roughly half of Bozarth’s time and a budget of about \$7,000 from the Association in 2004.

Outcomes

Standardized forms were translated in early 2005, and Bozarth reports that REALTORS® were excited to have them. It now translates 11 of its most important forms and provides them in bilingual (English and Spanish) versions. “I’ve presented this to different groups of REALTORS®,” she says. “They weren’t aware of how much this population is growing, so it’s been a real eye-opener for our members to learn about this expanding market.”

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