

# Web Marketing

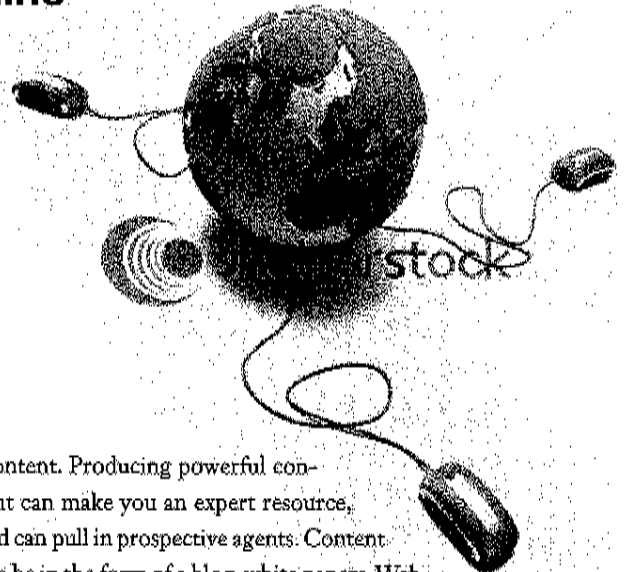
## 5 Ways to Advertise Your BGA Online

BY LORRIE THOMAS

**M**arketing is all about maximizing relationships. Relationships are built by generating awareness, distributing information, making a connection, closing the sale, and offering great customer service. When marketing is done well, satisfied agents become a new awareness channel, and the success cycle continues.

Maximizing relations sounds simple in concept, but the reality is that the rules of marketing are constantly changing. Many of the old rules still apply, but the Web revolution has produced fresh ways of thinking about promoting your firm to agents. Here are five innovative ways to use the Internet to market to agents.

1. Leverage your assets online. This sounds simple, but assets are often overlooked and underused. What makes your company great? Do you have experts? Do you have the ability to educate and inform? Do you have good writers? Think about your team's unique abilities and put them to work to position and sell the value of your BGA. The rules of Web marketing are all about producing powerful content. Content draws agents in and sells. Search engines are the No. 1 way that people begin to look for products, services, and information. What do search engines need in order to put your Web site high up on their pages?



Content. Producing powerful content can make you an expert resource, and can pull in prospective agents. Content can be in the form of a blog, white papers, Web site text, webinars, podcasts, video, etc. Think about the value you can provide to your prospective agents, and leverage your team's unique abilities to toot your own horn.

2. Tap the power of social media. This is the era of Web 2.0, and it is all about the power of mass collaboration. Agents are searching for information online; they are part of professional networking groups; and they are talking, collaborating, and sharing. You need to become a part of their online experience by using the same tools they use. Do you have a LinkedIn profile? Are your privacy settings set to public so you can come up more easily in search engines? Is your BGA on Wikipedia? Can you build a private community for your agents on Facebook where you educate, offer information, and connect? Have you considered adding a blog to your Web site to facilitate conversations with your current and prospective agents? Do you have an authentic voice and style that would lend itself well to a weekly podcast where you offer valuable tips that agents would listen to and share? If you answered no to all of these

questions, you need to take action right away to get yourself up-to-date with the latest marketing technology.

3. Be visible. Ninety percent of Web users start with search engines when seeking products, services, or information. Check the major search sites — is your BGA appearing in the results? You can add your company to Google Maps, Yahoo Local, YellowPages.com, and Superpages.com for free, increasing your ability to be searched for and found. Produce a press page on your Web site and write news releases about your company that you house on that page. Search engines can index the releases and send them to free, online press wires. It's great for visibility and credibility.
4. Go back to marketing 101. Leverage the most powerful marketing tool — great customer service. Get over the “we” mentality; for your agents, it's all about “me.” Your marketing copy can't communicate, “We are the leading company” anymore. Those are the old rules. Instead, think from the agents' perspective. All they want to see is what's in it for “me.” Rethink your message, tell them what they get when working with you, and offer them value. Good marketing is all about showing great value.
5. Get going with “word-of-mouse” marketing. Your best custom-

ers are your current customers. It takes so much more time to bring in new business versus taking care of and growing old business. Help your agents help you. Make it easy for them to forward information to other agents, ask them to evaluate you on your yellow page reviews sections, capture testimonials for your Web site, and remember the power of producing great content. Insightful blog entries will get forwarded, emails will get redistributed, and useful content will pull in agents searching for information online. Word-of-mouth marketing is the best form of marketing, since it is a personal endorsement. Today's time-crunched nation has us sharing the good word via mouse clicks, which is word-of-mouse marketing. Be Web ready.

The old rules of marketing will never go away. Great customer service, word-of-mouth marketing, public relations, and promotions still apply. Just remember that the future of marketing is online. There is no better time than now to employ the old rules and repurpose them for the Web to win big.

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