



# Connect!

REAL RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IDEAS



## Go a step beyond communication and appreciation.

by CHAD RUEFFERT

FOR REAL LONG-TERM SUCCESS, IT'S TIME TO ENGAGE YOUR CUSTOMERS.

I have a new favorite word. The word is “ENGAGE”. It has multiple meanings, but each of them is tied to the other in a way that makes it a powerful set of instructions for exactly what type of interaction you should be having with your customers if you want to build lifetime loyalty and endless referrals.

Customer engagement goes beyond communication and into conversation. Engagement requires a deeper commitment and reciprocity from your customers than a basic business relationship does. And engagement implies a long-term commitment to your interaction.

The primary definition of “engage” is to “occupy, attract or involve someone’s interest or attention.” When you engage your customers, you’re doing more than communicating to them. Instead, you’re attracting their interest. It’s the difference between sending out an email with the latest generic market statistics or creating a personalized analysis of their own home. The statistics may be ignored, but the personal nature of the second option will definitely occupy their attention.

A second definition of “engage” is “*To entangle or entrap. To attract and hold by influence or power. To deal with, especially at length.*” Since your customers are your most valuable business asset, you should be doing everything you can to defend those assets from attack by the competition. You need to use your influence and power to bind them to you in a permanent way. Too many real estate professionals are focused on the NEXT customer rather than on entangling their current and past customers in such a way that they can never escape. “Realtor for life” should be the goal of every real estate agent, and the driving mindset behind all relationship marketing efforts.

A third definition of “engage” is “*to induce to participate or to provide occupation for.*” This one is especially important to your future success. When you truly engage your customers, you’re convincing them to be an active participant in the success of your business. They are working on your behalf. You should be incentivizing and obligating people to actively provide you with repeat business and referrals. Real estate professionals tend to be somewhat

passive in their efforts to generate referrals from their past customer and sphere of influence. But an engagement is a reciprocal arrangement. So long as you continue to add value to their lives, your customers will be more than willing to return the favor.

There’s really nothing new about the concept of customer engagement. In 2008, Forrester Consulting defined customer engagement as “*creating deep connections with customers that drive purchase decisions, interaction, and participation, over time.*” The marketing analysts say that an engaged consumer has an “*instinctive impulsion to reciprocate.*”

Take a look at your interactions with your past customers and sphere of influence. Are you talking TO them or are you truly ENGAGING them? Make it your goal this year to attract their interest, hold their attention, bind them to you, and make them instinctively want to reciprocate your attention with repeat business and referrals.

*Chad Rueffert is the president of Braintree Marketing, and the co-creator of From Your Friends Relationship Marketing for Realtors.*

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