

## **Marketing Without Real Estate Agents**

By Dennis Robitaille

I will be the first to admit that it is difficult for a new inspector to obtain enough business without the assistance of real estate agents. Although, now in MA, every inspector is equal from a marketing standpoint, since real estate agents are prohibited from directly referring inspectors. Inspectors who work in the best interest of their client do not have to look over their shoulder worrying about what the agent thinks and can concentrate on performing a beneficial service for their client, the home buyer.

There are many things a new inspector can do to market his or her services to avoid the dependency of agents. Unfortunately, it may take a year or two for the marketing to produce profitable results. This is some of the advice I give to new inspectors who want to work without real estate agents, most of these suggestions, I have used myself with success.

**First, forget about the advertising hype you saw that home inspectors can earn \$1000 per day. As a new inspector you should be prepared for:**

1. Days without work.
2. To spend a lot of money on advertising your business.
3. Work very long and hard hours.

**One of the first things to do, if you haven't already done so, is to create a web site for your company.**

A well done web site is one of the fastest ways help steer prospective clients to you. You can reach more people with more text for less money than any other advertising media. Seek out professional assistance in building your site. Do a search for "home inspectors" and a search for "(your state) home inspectors". Look at the top 10 returns. Get some ideas from these sites.

**To build for the future, the following should be considered.**

1. Join your local and regional Chamber of Commerce.
2. See if your local cable TV station offers any type of programming geared towards consumer protection. If so, offer your services, if not, suggest such programming to the station management.
3. Drive around your neighborhood checking out houses for exterior problems, such as aging chimneys, roof defects, poor grading, etc (whatever is visible from the street or sidewalk.) When you come across something put a card hanger on their door knob (or anyplace the owner will see it, except don't put it in the mail box) that has an informational letter telling the homeowner what you saw while driving/walking by. In the letter suggest they visit your website for further information. The letter should also tell them that you are trying to build your inspection business by word of mouth, without soliciting real estate agents, and that if they know anyone in need of an inspection to please pass along your name. Include a brochure and some business cards.

4. Look for "open houses," drop off a brochure to the homeowner or mail one out. (Many of these sellers will be buyers as well.)

4b. Send post cards to new home purchasers offering warranty inspections.  
Send post cards to every house you know of that is for sale (FSBO or otherwise.)  
Most of these people will be potential inspection clients for other properties.

5. Produce a monthly or quarterly newsletter.

a. Send it to every attorney in your area.

b. Send it to the addresses on the open house advertisements.

c. Ask your clients if they would like to be e-mailed a copy of it.

(Keep a database of your client's e-mail addresses.)

6. Look for "for sale by owner" magazines, place ads in them. Be sure to state that you work independently of real estate agents.

7. Conduct homebuyer seminars. Invite an attorney and mortgage person to join with you in the presentation. You could rent a hotel room for it, or you could obtain a hall from a civic organization. If you don't belong to any clubs, maybe a friend does. Your hometown / city may also have a first time homebuyers program that might give you the opportunity to make a presentation.

8. Write a column for the newspapers (such as "ask the inspector") it may cost you a few dollars, however, if it is not too self-promoting they may run it for nothing.

9. Billboard, benches and bus stop sign advertisements.

10. Your inspection vehicle should have your company name, phone number and web site address on it. (I use to use the magnetic type.)

11. Go to your City/Town Hall and get the address of people that just took out marriage licenses, and the ones that just got a divorce. Do a mailing to those people.

12. Offer to do "free" inspections for friends and relatives to start building up your client base or offer free phone consultations for first time buyers looking to avoid buying a problem house. Turn every friend and relative into a salesperson for you.

13. When you get paying clients, turn them into salespersons for you. (I like to think of my 6,000 plus past clients as my sales force.) Take a look at my own client comment page: <http://www.ablehomeinspection.com/clientcomments.html> In addition to getting testimonials reward them for referring your service. Send them movie passes or gift certificates.

14. At the conclusion of the inspection, give your clients a useable gift. (Such as "how to operate your home" book, by Tom Feiza. You can purchase these books in bulk for as little as \$6.00 each.)

15. Keep your name in front of your past clients. When you come across an article on the internet that your past clients would find informative / helpful pertaining to their home, e-mail them the link to the site. (People have become a bit intolerant of unsolicited e-mail, so I would limit this to fairly important articles and would limit the number of e-mails to no more than 2 per year.) If you have the time, print out the article and mail it. There is always at least one good article every year in major newspapers pertaining to home ownership. (My business was started before the internet, so I did a lot of mailings and it was very helpful.)

16. Let everyone know that you believe it is a potential conflict of interest for real estate agents to refer home inspectors. Let the home buying public know that you do not solicit real estate agents for client leads. Being a member of IHINA (<http://www.independentinspectors.org/>) is one way to get you recognition from the educated homebuyer.

17. If you are a true believer in the inherent conflict of interest between real estate agents and homebuyers, make yourself available to the news media to tell the story. (My name has showed up in newspapers across the country.) If inspectors really want to get out from the grip of real estate agents, they could work to pass legislation like the MA home inspector licensing law, which went into affect 5/1/01. This new law automatically amended the real estate agents licensing law, (<http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/112-87yy.5.htm>) prohibiting agents from referring home inspectors.

18. Don't reject real estate agent referrals. Just don't let the source of your business influence how you do your job. A small percentage of real estate agents appreciate honest, full disclosure type home inspections without the sugar coating. You will also discover that agents who don't refer you, calling you for their own home inspections or for their family members.

Of course your ultimate success depends on how hard you study and learn in the field. After more than 24 years of inspecting I usually learn something new every month.

P.S. One of the many benefits of getting away from agent referrals is that you will have more control of your fees and be able to charge appropriately (more) for your services.

P.P.S. If you have any marketing ideas which have proven successful, let me know and I will update this file.

Good luck,

Dennis Robitaille  
Director IHINA  
<http://www.independentinspectors.org/>