

First contact strategy for real estate professionals

The importance of making a good first impression is a highly regarded principle in our society. Whether you're making social connections at a party, interviewing for a new job, meeting colleagues at a networking event, or heading out on a first date with a potential romantic partner, first impressions set the tone for future encounters. But when it comes to making connections with future real estate clients, first impressions are more than just important–they're crucial to your success.

In the real estate industry, much time is spent focusing on the strategy behind building your brand, finding leads, negotiating, and closing sales. But what about the part in between finding leads and negotiating sales? What about the period of time when you've already found the lead (or the lead has already found you), but you haven't yet started building the relationship?

Making a first impression with potential clients is so much more than just returning phone calls and cleaning out your inbox. Your first impression can help a potential client start to trust you, establish you as an expert in your local market, and secure your role as his or her real estate professional.

Your first contact strategy has one vital consideration: how quick and relevant is your response? Consider these tips for a successful first encounter with a future client:

• Respond quickly. Between social media, online shopping, and information at the push of a button, today's consumer expects fast, efficient service. The quicker you respond to an email, phone call, text, or social media message, the more likely you are to convert that lead into a client. Consider the following:

- **86% of leads feel** that **response time** is "extremely important" when deciding on their real estate agent.[1]
- **96% of internet home buyers** expect a real estate agent to contact them **within four hours** of their online inquiry.[1]
- The **first** real estate agent **to respond** to a lead increases conversion **238%**.[2]

67% of leads go unanswered entirely, so being the first agent to respond to a potential client tells them that you are attentive, organized, and driven.

• Pick up the phone whenever possible. Unless you are with a client, don't let a call go to your voice mail. Many consumers won't leave you a message, and will move on to another agent if you don't answer their call right away.

• Respond in the same way that a lead contacts you. If a contact sends you an email, respond via email. If he or she sends you a text message, text back and then suggest a phone call. If someone reaches out on the phone, call back. People reach out to you in the way that is most comfortable and efficient for them, so respect their choice when contacting them for the first time.

• Make sure leads know how to get back in contact with you. Along the same lines as the above tip, give leads multiple ways to get back in contact with you–by phone, text, email, or social media.

• Prove your value from the very beginning. Before you contact a lead, have all relevant information in front of you. Prove your value and expertise from the very first conversation. Leave your lead with information he or she didn't have before the call–market trends, school district information, a listing detail, or other valuable materials.

• Have your own list of questions. Your potential clients will likely have a list of questions for you. But, make sure you have questions prepared for them. What are you looking for in a home? What makes now the right time for you to buy or sell? What are your must-haves? Are you a first–time buyer or seller?

• Consider that there may be multiple decision makers. In most real estate transactions, there are multiple people tasked with making a decision, whether it's a couple, family members, parents helping their child buy a first home, or friends buying a vacation property together. Make sure you know who is involved so that you don't overlook important parties.

• Respect their schedule. Yes, your potential client is looking to buy or sell a home. But they also have other things going on in their lives. If you pick up the phone to call a lead and he or she sounds busy, ask, "Can I call you back at a time that is more convenient for you?" Then, always call back at the agreed-upon time.

• Be patient. When a contact reaches out to you, it doesn't always mean he or she is ready to buy or sell today. In some cases, it takes over a year for a lead to become active. But, that doesn't mean you should brush them off. Still take the time to answer their questions, build the foundation for a relationship, and nurture the lead. Consider it an investment in your future business.

• Enter leads in your CRM (customer relationship management/contact management) system. Once you hang up the phone or click send, take the time to enter your new lead into your CRM system, if they aren't in it already. Keeping track of every single lead in a CRM system keeps you organized and helps you nurture leads until they're ready to do business.

The way you approach and handle a first contact tells your future client a lot about the way you do business. Remember that you're not just selling a home, you're selling a relationship with you.

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[1] Survey conducted by California Association of Realtors, quoted on idxcentral.com The Insider, *Increase Your Lead Response Time*

[2] LeadQual, *Rapid Response to Internet Leads Drives Conversion*

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