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 **A Little Marketing Here and There**
By Dustin Harris, The Appraiser Coach

“When the time to act comes, the time to prepare is past.” This was a phrase I heard several times as a youth and it stuck. I can’t say I have always followed this advice but I can tell you that it is a sound principle. It is human nature, of course, to procrastinate. However, it is one of the worst things you can do when it comes to marketing and promoting your business.

Appraisers who have been in business for more than a few years will relate to the fear that sometimes comes when the work slows down. The appraisal business is a cyclical animal but sometimes the slowdowns last longer than we would like or have planned for. After a few weeks of fewer orders than normal, we start to feel anxious and wonder if it will last. Sometimes it does last, at least for a period of time. It is during this slowdown that we wish we had more diversity in the types of assignments we do. The time to work on marketing your business is not when things slow down. At that point it’s a little too late. Of course, the time to market your business full throttle is also not when things are busy. So, when is the best time to market your business? The correct time to market your business is all the time. The key to sustainability is a slow and steady approach to your marketing efforts.

Many want to do less AMC work and more non-lender type assignments. The problem is that we often do not do the necessary legwork in preparation for such work and end up in a challenging and scary situation when our bread-andbutter turns stale. Here are five things we should be doing on a regular basis to attract non-lender work and ensure that the ebbs and flows of the business cycle are minimized—even when we are so busy with lender work that we can hardly keep our heads above water.

**Have a Website**
I once heard that over 40 percent of all appraisers do not have a website. Based on my interaction with appraisers across the country, I tend to believe this statistic. In the information age, having a great website is essential! Potential customers find professionals using Google. Not only should you have a website but you want to use it to set yourself apart from your competition. In the appraisal industry that does not mean that you are competing with IBM or Coca-Cola. Rather, take a look at your competitors’ websites and just make yours a little bit better. Some of the key ingredients to having a successful website include personal videos, testimonials from satisfied customers, and a blog. Many business owners get stopped in their tracks because they believe that the videos and other elements on their websites have to be the best of the best. They don’t. They just need to be both professional and personal. You need to connect with your potential customers.

**Have a Regular Blog**
Having a blog is a key component to having a highly successful website. Setting up and maintaining a basic website is fairly simple and does not take much time. However, writing and posting a regular blog takes a little more effort. It is worth it! Again, take a look at your competition. Do they have a blog on their website? Chances are, the answer is no. Talk to any professional web designer today and they will help you understand the importance of a regular and active blog. If you want to get to the top of Google search results (and trust me, you do) this is a key ingredient. Don’t worry if you’re not the most eloquent writer—the point is to get yourself out there. We’re not going for a Pulitzer Prize. You simply need to write about the items that your potential customers want to hear about. How do you know what’s interesting? Pay attention to the questions that you are asked in your inspections, by real estate agents, and those calling on the phone or contacting you by email. These are the same questions that would likely be asked by others and probably deserve attention on your blog.

**Network**
Networking as an appraiser is different but no less important than networking as a salesman or other professional. The key is building a list of potential customers. Email addresses are the gold currency of today’s marketing giants. Social media is important but email addresses are paramount. There are many ways to gather email addresses but I encourage that you do so legitimately. No one likes to be spammed. How do you get potential customers to give you their precious email address? It is not as hard as it sounds. It all comes down to one question, “may I have your email address?” Ask it of Realtors, homeowners, and any other warm body that could potentially be a future customer. Set up and use an email system, for example MailChimp, that allows you to manage these addresses and distribute your articles and other helpful information on a regular basis. At our office, we ask for the client’s email address over the phone while we are setting up the appointment. Indicate that you have a short informative email that will help them to prepare properly for their appraisal inspection. At the same time, ask them for permission to put their email address in your system and send out periodic articles that relate to the local real estate market. Very few will tell you no.

**Speak**
Most customers will not hire you until they trust you. They want to see you as the local expert. One of the fastest and most effective ways to become the local expert is to just tell people that you are. Do this through periodic speaking engagements to real estate offices, and clubs like Rotary, Elks, or other related venues. You do not have to be a powerful and talented public speaker in order to present (though it obviously helps). Toastmasters is a great option for those of you who want to hone your public speaking skills, but simply getting out and practicing regularly is probably your best bet. When someone hears you speak, they automatically assume you are an expert in the field. Whom do you think they will go to the next time they need an appraisal service? Allowing yourself to be seen is crucial in building your brand and establishing yourself as the go-to appraiser in your area.

**Offer Creative Products**
Of course, the sky’s the limit with what you can do in marketing. Don’t be afraid to try something new. Direct mail, billboards, radio ads, and other traditional marketing sources can be expensive, but if done right can be very lucrative. Again, your goal is to stand out from your competition. You want to be the face of the appraisal industry in your particular area. When someone needs an appraisal service, you want to be the first name they think about. Be creative. A member of my Appraiser Dream Team recently put together a bucket full of unique and unusual items that she takes around to various professional offices on silly holidays, such as “National Kiss Your Mother Day.” It may sound like a cliché, but people remember quirky things like this. Have fun with your various marketing ideas.

**Conclusion**
Marketing is not easy but it does not have to be a drag. Find what you are good at (maybe it is speaking or writing or coming up with fun ideas) and make that the focus of your efforts. Think of it like exercising. If you are doing something that you hate, it is not likely that you will be in it for the long haul. Find something that you enjoy and make that the focus of your efforts. Similar to exercise, marketing does not do much good if you spend a whole day at it only once a month. The key is consistency: small, frequent steps. Don’t get stuck in the slow-down slump. Start today to expand your business with unique products and services that will help even out the cycles. Do not wait until you are slow and in fear before you take steps toward building your business. One big marketing blitz will likely not cause much of a dent in your volume. The key is slow and steady. If you want to find success in your marketing efforts, do a little here and a little there so that your name is constantly on the minds of your potential future customers.

**About the Author**
Dustin Harris is a successful, self-employed, residential real estate appraiser. He has been appraising for nearly two decades. He is the owner and president of Appraisal Precision and Consulting Group, Inc., and is a popular author, speaker and consultant. He also owns and operates The Appraiser Coach where he personally advises and mentors other appraisers helping them to also run successful appraisal companies and increase their net worth. His free podcast can be listened to on iTunes and Stitcher. He and his wife reside in Idaho with their four children. He loves playing in the outdoors and watching movies indoors.



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