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10 Tips to Increase Client Reviews

When planning a vacation online or shopping for a new hair stylist, do you read customer reviews? If so, you're not alone. In a 2014 survey by BrightLocal, 88 percent of surveyed consumers said they trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations in most cases; of those, 32 percent specified that they place that degree of trust in online reviews as long as there are multiple reviews to read. Of course, buying or selling a home is a lot more expensive, time-consuming and complicated than a vacation or haircut—and with longer-lasting repercussions—so lender reviews from past clients are even more important to have.



You can bet that in this digital age, potential clients will look you up online to see your reviews; getting those reviews should be a key objective in your overall marketing plan. Be deliberate and consistent in your process and you can get more reviews to attract leads and build your business.

Prepare yourself – and your clients – for the “ask”

Some lenders simply forget to ask for reviews; others are shy about making the request or they spring it on the client immediately after the papers are signed. Planning ahead can solve for those shortcomings and not only get you a client review, but get you the kind of review you want.

1 - Focus on where you want future business to come from

Before approaching clients for a review, think about what kinds of business you want. For instance, if you'd like to work primarily with buyers seeking their first mortgage on a home, focus on getting reviews from your past buyer clients rather than those who have only refinanced. Don't be afraid to guide your client toward the type of review you want; as long as you request only accurate and honest information in the review, there's no reason your client will object to providing one.

At the same time, it's possible to have reviews that are too narrowly focused, which may unintentionally exclude you from consideration by some otherwise good potential clients. In general, try to get a diverse selection of reviews from borrowers.

If you're just starting out, aim to get at least five reviews. Having too few reviews makes it easy for potential clients to pass you by in favor of a lender with more substantive feedback. When possible, identify 20 past clients you know were happy with your work and ask each of them for their review.

2 - Plant the review seed early and mention it often

Being asked for a review should never come as a surprise to clients, so let them know that you'll be requesting a review and that you're going to do everything in your power to earn their five stars. Remind them that reviews are a big part of how your business grows, and mention it again while you're working together. Asking for reviews might seem like a "me thing"—and to an extent it is— but reviews are a powerful tool for attracting leads and growing your business, and there's nothing wrong with letting clients in on that fact.

Be thoughtful about how you ask for a review

Recall when you've been asked for a review and whether you chose to write one. Chances are the appeal was specific to your experience, explained why the requestor valued your feedback and made it easy for you to submit your review. When you're ready to ask clients for a review, do so in a way that will make them most receptive to your request.



3 - Keep it personal

Doing an email blast to past clients is the absolute worst way to get a review. It's way too impersonal and easy for them to ignore. The second worst way to get a review? Sending out a canned email in which you copy and paste the text and change out the "Dear John." Don't forget, these are past clients you're approaching. They likely appreciated your work and are prime candidates to give you a great review, so give your request the gravitas it deserves. Respect your clients enough to send them a handwritten note or personal email. You took the personal approach with them throughout their home loan process; why stop now?

4 - Don't strive to get only five-star reviews

If you have six reviews, and each one is five stars, the contacts who read them might become skeptical. They will probably think you simply asked good friends and family to rave about you online—which may cause potential clients to question your authenticity and experience. Let your clients know that you want their honest and fair opinion about their satisfaction with you and the services you provided, and that it's OK to give you fewer than five stars.

5 - Make it easy

Many consumers find it difficult to come up with an original review on their own because they have to jog their memory about what they liked about you or how great the transaction was. Anticipate this and provide them with some ideas. If there were any "hero moments" during the process where you went above and beyond, jot them down in your email as well. Not



only are you making it easy on these clients, but you're also able to manage the message.

Keep in mind that sites such as Zillow will require your client to sign in or set up an account to post their review. (An account is needed to validate the review.) To help make posting a review to Zillow easier, send your client a link to your Zillow request form. If your client doesn't have an account, give them specific, clear instructions about how to set one up. Again, the easier you make it for them to give you a review, the more likely you are to get one.

6 - Offer a thank-you

When your clients sit down to draft a review for you, they're doing you a favor, so show your appreciation. After they've provided a review, offer some helpful information about refinancing or other advice that would be applicable to their situation.

Ask at the right time

The best way to get reviews in your hand is to "strike while the iron is hot," meaning at closing or soon thereafter. Sometimes, however, that opportunity gets away from you. When you're working with a client, the relationship can be intense for weeks or months. You're talking, texting or emailing frequently, sometimes multiple times a day. Then escrow closes and the momentum starts to fade. Moving day arrives and you're completely out of their thoughts.

7 - Capture the client's excitement as soon as possible after closing

Did you get clients the deal of the year? Were you able to help them overcome a major obstacle? Ask for their review when you close. Don't be shy about highlighting something amazing that wouldn't have happened without your help.

When these above-and-beyond moments occur, it's not uncommon for clients to go out of their way to say you saved the day or express their delight with the process or with you. When you hear it, stop everything and ask them right then and there if you can "pocket their comment." Get it in writing, in real time. For one, it's a real, live and legitimate comment. Second, the client is happy with you and would be more than willing to document their satisfaction. When the client agrees to give you a review, follow up immediately.



8 - If you don't get a review soon after closing, follow up!

After closing, clients might feel overwhelmed by everything they must accomplish in the immediate future and forget to do your review in the flurry of packing and moving – be patient and call them one to two weeks later, check in, and ask them for a review.

If you have to make additional requests from unresponsive clients, wait a week or two after your initial communication. If you don't hear from them after a reasonable period, leave it alone for now, but don't forget about them entirely; you still want their review.

Some lenders will use an anniversary to reach out to the client and make the ask. It's an opportunity to reconnect and it softens the perception of you being a pest. Most clients will have an "Oh, shoot!" moment and then do their review. Using any anniversary date as an excuse to contact them will work—for example, to see how things are going or to ask what home improvements they've made so far—and the client won't feel like the only reason you're bugging them is for a "self-serving review."

9 - Mine your database

Identify past clients who never got around to giving you a review and put them on a drip campaign. Remind them how important reviews are to your business and make it easy for them to provide their own by providing a direct link to your Zillow request form.



10 - Plug reviews in holiday cards

Holidays are a great time to keep in touch with past clients. A simple handwritten note goes a long way. At the bottom of the note, thank the ones who have provided you with a review and ask those who haven't done so to take a moment and write one.

No matter how long it's been since you asked past clients for a review, you can always use your request as a way to reconnect with them, update them on the market and stay on their radar. Don't forget: The more often clients hear from you, see your name or witness your success, the more visible you are. Everybody loves a winner and happy clients might be more than willing to publicize their association with you.

I've got some reviews; now what?

Space out the reviews.

Don't post all your reviews at the same time. Potential clients can spot this, and they'll assume you were somehow behind this sudden and contrived appearance of multiple reviews. Instead, shoot for getting a handful of reviews posted over the course of a few weeks. Make it a part of your marketing plan to add a new one every few weeks. The more reviews you have that are

spread over time, the better. Not only will potential clients see the content of the reviews, they'll also notice how many you have, how long they've been up and when each one was posted.

Always respond to negative reviews as soon as possible.

Even the best-intended, most professional lender might receive a less-than-stellar review from a dissatisfied client. You can be sure other potential clients will give that review a close read. If you receive a negative review, respond to it quickly. Present your side of the story professionally and tactfully; be careful not to appear as though you are criticizing or deriding the unhappy client. If possible, offer a solution to the problem or make some other goodwill gesture to the client.

Summary

Getting reviews should be an integral part of your business; never be afraid to ask for them. It's much easier to ask a satisfied client for a review than to ask a prospective client to work with you. Most clients will be pleased to help you out and some even expect to be asked for a review. Be on the lookout for good review content and capitalize on kind words the minute you hear them. If your clients are happy with you and the services you provided, chances are they want to see you succeed, and their positive review is yours for the taking. It's the kind of powerful marketing that money can't buy.

