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How to be an Online Lending
Leader in Your Local Area

Given the Internet's wide reach, it makes sense to build a strong online lending presence. In the mortgage industry, however, failing to focus on your immediate area can adversely affect your business and keep local borrowers from coming to you for their mortgage needs. To connect with clients in your area, it's important to direct some of your online lending efforts toward your own local market. Here are five steps you can take to become the leading online lender in your market.

Target leads in your local market

One of the keys to a successful lending business is targeting online borrower leads in your proximity. You are competing with other lenders in your market for these leads, but there are specific tools that can give you an edge. For example, Zillow Group Long Form sends potential borrower contacts directly to lenders in the buyer's area, ensuring that you get quality leads as soon as they come in. If you are on Long Form and your competitors are not, those local contacts will come to you, giving you the competitive advantage in your market.

Keep your website accessible and updated

If you want to drive local traffic to your website, it needs to be easily accessible and contain relevant information about your local market. Make your site more discoverable with shortened URLs and keywords that correspond with local borrowers' searches.

Generating traffic is not the end goal; you want your site visitors to stick around, so give them a reason to stay by keeping the most pertinent and valuable information on your home page. Current mortgage rates for your area, mortgage news and updates, and your company blog and social media links are great pieces of content to showcase up front. Providing this information demonstrates that you're a valuable source for local mortgage and market information and encourages visitors to utilize your website as a primary mortgage resource — and possibly even share it with friends and colleagues.

Once you have a stream of visitors coming to view your rates, information and news, be sure to keep your site updated. Displaying current rates and news might seem like a no-brainer, but it's also important to improve and update your website as a whole. Experiment with different calls to action (CTAs), site content and design elements to keep your site interesting for returning visitors and improve your search rankings. You don't need to start from scratch each time; maintain a balance between keeping your content and structure consistent but also fresh and interesting.

Optimize, optimize, optimize

You've built a nice website with valuable information — now you need to start targeting the right audience so visitors and potential clients can find it. Ensure your search engine optimization (SEO) is up to snuff by targeting specific keywords that you know people in your ZIP code will be searching for. For example, if you live in Kansas City, you'd want to target keywords like "Kansas City real estate," "Power and Light District homes" and other local terms your clients might search for.

Keep your keywords relevant to your business; you don't need to include things like local sports teams or restaurants, as those search terms are being used by too broad of an audience. While you want to reach a large audience, focus your efforts on attracting consumers who are likely to be interested in your services.

You also want to be sure that every title, page description and block of copy is using language that will make sense to site visitors while increasing your ranking in search.

Be the conversation starter in your local market

Starting and maintaining a blog can be an effective way to reach more borrowers looking for localized content. Posting once or twice a week about different mortgage trends in your area, mortgage news and how it affects local borrowers, and business updates and milestones is a way to convey valuable information to current and potential borrowers. When optimized for SEO, it also increases the chances that people who aren't currently visiting your site will be able to find it when searching for something you might have written about.

Social media is another way to talk about different trends and happenings in your area, and it provides you with an easy point of access to engage and communicate with people near you. By utilizing a company Facebook page and Twitter account, you can not only see what's trending and participate in those conversations, but you can also promote your own content, directing those who are participating in trending conversations to your site.

While your blog and social media channels should increase traffic to your site, you also want to make sure that traffic goes both ways. In case someone visits your site before viewing your Facebook page, include links to your social media channels to give visitors a gateway into the greater mortgage conversation in your area — with your company at the epicenter. By providing valuable content for local users, you're creating more avenues for engagement and interaction with your business.

Gather reviews and testimonials from current local borrowers

When a borrower is beginning their search for a lender, they will almost certainly look at customer reviews and testimonials. It's easier than ever for a customer to go online and share the experiences — both good and bad — that they had with a company. Getting current and former borrowers to write reviews and testimonials about their experiences with you can be a huge step toward improving your local online lending presence.



To improve your chances of getting a review, make the process easy. Plant the idea of writing reviews early and often, and let borrowers know how valuable they are to the future success of your business. When a borrower has a good experience, telling them how much their feedback helps your business grow and improve is a great way to encourage them to write an honest review. And finally, respond to all of your reviews quickly, whether it was positive or negative. Following up with a simple thank you, or asking a customer how you could have made their experience better, improves your relationships with clients and shows prospective borrowers that you strive to provide excellent customer service and follow-through.

Summary

What are the keys to becoming an online lending leader in your ZIP code?

- Build an easily accessible website with updated and relevant content
- Optimize that content and website for the best possible SEO value
- Curate blog and social media content that gets people talking and marks you as a conversation starter for all things mortgages in your area
- Get reviews and testimonials from current local borrowers.

By taking these steps, you become a valuable resource to local borrowers and potential clients, furthering your reach in your community and increasing your value.