

Drawing sellers to a home-raffle site

A reader looks to gain exposure for her online real estate business. July 9, 2008.



Yvette Brown, New Start Concepts Management, Bronx, N.Y.

I started a small business that raffles houses online. How can I get exposure for the Web site?



By Christina Crapanzano, Fortune Small Business contributor

Dear Yvette: Before you attempt to direct more traffic to your Web site, you need to make sure it's not a dead end. When *FSB* tried to write back to you using the contact information you provided on your page, the e-mail boomeranged back to us.

Randy Spina, the chief solutions officer at [Affordable Marketing Solutions](#) in Bridgeport, Conn., says it's paramount to give customers access to you online. "As it stands, the site seems unfriendly - there's no business address, your name isn't there, and neither is your e-mail," she says. "To the average consumer, this seems suspicious - even if you get hits, you won't get inquiries or bids."

According to Spina, you also need to beef up the information you provide on the site - since the concept of auctioning houses is relatively new, you should be thorough in explaining the process and the benefits.

"Some of your competitors' sites give more background on how the concept works," she says. Make sure your page answers the obvious questions: Why should I raffle my house? Why should I do this instead of going to a realtor?"

Once you've cleaned up your page, you'll be ready to invite guests (think of it as a housewarming party). Todd Brabender, president of [Spread The News Public Relations](#) in Lawrence, Kan., says you can pursue publicity by approaching local media outlets. But before you contact them, be sure to have your selling points - the unique qualities of your business - ready.

"I always tell my clients, 'It's nice to have diamonds, but if you keep the diamonds in your pocket, no one knows you have diamonds,'" he says.

Spina says you should also investigate how easy it is for potential customers to find you. First, look at your organic ranking - where your site shows up in search engines when you don't pay for services to boost your rank. Once you know where you stand, there's a number of ways in which you can improve your placement. Spina suggests taking a look at your Web statistics and finding the keywords that are used most often to bring up your site (your Web hosting company should be able to guide you through this process). After you've learned these keywords, she says, use them - put the phrases all over your Web site, especially on your home page.

Another way to optimize your search-engine placement is to expand your list of meta tags, or phrases and words pertaining to your Web site's subject matter. You can locate them by clicking "view," then "source" on the menu bar when your site pops up. Search engines currently use tags such as "mortgage-free home" or "winning a property" to find your site. Spina also suggests adding "real estate" and "real estate bids" to the list.

"Remember, putting up a website is like opening a storefront," she says. "It takes two steps - you have to get the customers into your store, and then give them the information they want when they get there."