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## A Change Will Do You Good: Win More Business From Your Web Site



### Win More Business From Your Web Site

*Does your Web site need a boost but you're too busy to do it? Real Estate Internet guru Allen F. Hainge steps in to help one sales associate avoid missteps and get set up to win more business from the Internet.*

After 15 years of contracting television production crews for shows like "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" and "On the Road" with CBS's Charles Kuralt, not to mention working with some big-name athletes and stars, Ron Smiley sold his company and moved to Florida to play golf and go sailing.

"I got bored, and wanted to get back into a profession that was similar — where you meet different and interesting people," says Smiley. "I got my [real estate] license about 10 months ago, and I've been working steadily ever since," says the sales associate with ResortQuest Real Estate (formerly Priscilla Murphy Realty) on Sanibel Island.



After two years of Florida retirement living, Ron Smiley got bored and then got busy in real estate. "Now, I need 48 hours in the day" he says.

Before:  
Template Web site: \$400

After:  
Half-page real estate magazine ads in feeder markets: from \$200 to \$300

Virtual assistant: from \$20 per hour  
Lead-generating service: estimated \$200 setup, \$80 per month

3 Contact Management Programs

1. ACT! 2005, Best Software — \$229.99 (packaged or downloadable), (877) 501-4496; <http://www.act.com>

2. AgentOffice® v7.0, FNIS — \$399, (800) 996-6547; <http://realestate.fnis.com>

3. Top Producer® 7i, Top Producer Systems Inc. — \$34.95 per month, (800) 444-8570; <http://www.topproducer.com>

#### 4 Virtual Assistants

1. Anna Baron  
<http://www.TheVirtualLink.com>  
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(972) 359-9655

2. Kim Hughes  
<http://www.KimHughes.com>

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#### Heard on the Wires

"Our goal should be to serve everyone; if we do that, the money will follow. As a Realtor, I go above and beyond what's expected for both the buyer and the seller. That's why I will proudly be a limited [service] broker because the almighty dollar is not what we should stand for.

**Phyllis Rodrigues**  
Affinity Realty Services LLC  
Lake Worth

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need 40 hours in the day," he says.  
"Steadily" is putting it mildly. Smiley's schedule is growing so full — he recently had three sales within three days — that he feels there simply aren't enough hours on hand to accomplish everything.

Smiley did manage to slow down long enough to develop a simple, generic Web site ([www.ronsmiley.com](http://www.ronsmiley.com)) after he saw the real estate technology solutions at the iHouse™ exhibit at the National Association of Realtors® (NAR) convention last fall.

Smiley's iHouse Web site is a "template" site, meaning that it uses one of the company's preset designs that allow him to change the content or add pages at any time. "I know my Web site is a beginner's site, but I had intended to go up to a custom site when I could afford it," he says. He also says that he has no idea how to drive traffic to his site and that he wants to know how to get a higher ranking in the search engines. "In the last three months I've gotten about 1,500 hits a month," he says. "I'm computer literate, and I know how to run programs like [Microsoft] Publisher® to make postcards, brochures and advertising, but I'm very weak when it comes to my Web site. I want it to be better."

### Enter the Expert

Smiley consulted with tech expert Allen Hainge, who explains that search engine optimization isn't very productive and, therefore, won't be worth Smiley's investment. "Put it on the back burner for now," he says, "because it would be very expensive to hire a search engine expert." He says the topic came up at a recent summit of the nationwide CyberStar® group he founded (top real estate sales associates who attribute their success to the appropriate use of technology), and everyone agreed that direct promotion was far more effective than any search engine.

Before upgrading the current site, Hainge advises, Smiley should look on the Web sites of very successful sales associates for features he likes. "Depending on how far you want to go with a Web site, you can add more [to your template site] or pay up to \$4,000 for a custom site." Smiley's best bet, Hainge says, is to first devise a system that will help him open his existing Web site to more viewers. He says that the traffic on Smiley's site is good, but that there's much more he needs to do to take advantage of the visits. Here is Hainge's action plan for Smiley:

#### 1. Advertise in Feeder Markets

Hainge recommends that Smiley personally promote the Web site at every point of contact with potential clients and customers. For example, start analyzing from what feeder market his buyers are coming. "I think it would be worth the plunge to take out an ad in a magazine in one of your feeder areas," he says. "[Take] at least a half-page ad (or a full page if you can afford it) with a screen grab or photo of your Web site main page and [a phrase like] 'To see house values in Sanibel Island, visit ...' and list your Web address. Use the top third or half of the ad page to say, 'Here I am; here's a Web site that tells you everything about moving to Sanibel Island.'"

#### 2. Make Your Web Site Sticky

"A template site gives you lots of information, but it's very sterile," says Hainge. "A Realtor Web site is much more than real estate. [On your site] there's not much 'you,' and very few calls to action." Hainge says that Smiley will get more out of his site by making more connections with visitors — making it "sticky."

"You should have a call to action on every page," says Hainge. A call to action could simply be a very visible link that gently persuades the site visitor to contact you, according to Hainge. "Let's say, for example, that on your splash (or main) page, you say something like 'Free Relocation Package' or 'Ron's 10 Tips for Making a Better Home Purchase,'" he says. "They can click on it and then give you their name and e-mail address (don't ask for a lot because the more they have to give, the more likely it is that they'll click off).

"Your [current] relocation page isn't that great," adds Hainge. "When I click

e-mail: [Kim@KimHughes.com](mailto:Kim@KimHughes.com)  
(903) 569-6763

3. Cathryn Jones  
e-mail: [reassistant@comcast.com](mailto:reassistant@comcast.com)

4. Jeri Winkler  
<http://www.secretassistant.com>  
e-mail: [Jeri@secretassistant.com](mailto:Jeri@secretassistant.com),  
(315) 482-6819 or (315) 767-3248

Source: Allen Hainge

on 'Relocation,' you've got stock stuff there, but you can get more out of it by personalizing it and making it sticky so that people will go there and bookmark it." Smiley can boost his Web site's stickiness, says Hainge, by adding more information about himself and about the Captiva and Sanibel areas. By sharing some of his personal interests, Smiley can create a connection with his site visitors. "Spend time on your 'Contact Ron' page," he adds. "A photo or graphic would help. Talk about yourself: Bass fishing in Florida is guaranteed to increase your income by at least four times," jokes Hainge.

### **3. Conform to the "Web Site Cycle"**

Next, Hainge encourages Smiley to use a three-step Web site strategy that one of his client-students came up with a few years ago called "the Web Site Cycle." "First, you need a good, deep, consumer-oriented Web site," says Hainge. The same informational content used to make the Web site sticky also makes it consumer oriented.

"Second, you need to set up a system for immediate follow up — either do it yourself or set up auto-responders," says Hainge. "When someone replies, you put [him or her] into your database according to what type of prospect he or she is, so that you're able (on an ongoing basis) to contact that person." Hainge suggests using one of the online vendors that allow you to compose your messages and set up a sequence of when you want them to go out.

The third and final ingredient in the Web Site Cycle, Hainge says, is giving prospects a reason to visit your Web site every month. According to Hainge, this is typically done with a newsletter, but it can be anything — paper or electronic — that brings visitors back. For example, publishing a monthly column on the Web site can provide reasons for visitors to return. "Tie it all together," says Hainge. "You get your database clicking and once a month do an e-mail [personalized by group] to everybody in your database. It says what you've got in your monthly column (a little teaser) and then provides a link to the column."

### **4. Organize Contacts**

Hainge recommends that Smiley get a Web-based contact management program, such as Top Producer 7i. "This version of Top Producer had a lot of bugs at first, but they've ironed it out," he says. "You're going to need something to effortlessly follow up on the prospects that you're generating." He recommends that Smiley use the program to generate action plans, categorize his leads as either hot or cold, help him set up the tasks and remind him when he needs to contact someone. "Most [prospects] start looking at Web sites four to six months before they're ready to move or list," adds Hainge. A database will help prevent Smiley from losing touch with prospects who might contact him today via his Web site even though they're not going to be ready to buy for several months.

### **5. Hire a Virtual Assistant (VA)**

Since Smiley is getting busier every week, Hainge recommends that he consider hiring a virtual assistant — a real estate technology assistant who works part time and remotely (even in another state). "Your hourly wage is probably pretty good right now," says Hainge, "so look at getting a virtual assistant for about \$20 per hour. A good one can step right into your [real estate contact management database] for you, bring action plans to you and organize things." The assistant can run Smiley's database, update and add content to his Web site, handle e-mail follow-up, take care of his mailings and marketing campaigns, and even handle his transactions from the assistant's own computer. Moreover, a virtual assistant is an independent contractor, not an employee as a personal assistant would be and, therefore, is responsible for paying his or her own taxes, etc.

"The virtual assistant who runs my company lives in Texas," adds Hainge, who lives in Virginia. Smiley might even be able to get some tips from his virtual assistant's other clients. "He or she may be able to call another client and say, 'Ron's not in your marketplace; would you mind sharing your postcard campaign with him?'" says Hainge. "Your hands should never touch a keyboard."

"As you're telling me all of this, I see the greater need to have a virtual assistant," says Smiley. "If I have to do everything myself, I might as well be a Web master," he laughs.

### **Meet the expert**

*Allen F. Hainge is a nationally recognized real estate speaker, trainer and author of "Secrets of the CyberStars®: Making Money with Today's Technology." He is founder of the Allen F. Hainge CyberStars, a group of high-tech real estate professionals around the nation. This summer, Hainge is slated to moderate a panel of CyberStars during the Florida Association of Realtors (FAR) Convention and Trade Expo. Visit his Web site at <http://www.CyberStars.net>.*

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