



What nobody teaches Realtors: why some ads work and others fail

By Laurie Moore-Moore

Recently an agent told me, “I think I’ve finally written the perfect ad for a four bedroom/five bath home and I plan to use it with every four bedroom/five bath home I list.” This agent was guaranteeing her listing would drop to the bottom of the desirability list, because in a competitive market, a generic ad rarely generates much more than yawns. Yet many agents write brochure copy, website copy, and ad copy that makes their listings sound just like competitive listings.

Instead, use the number one rule of home marketing:

Every home has a story and it is the listing agent’s job to tell that story in a compelling way.

What nobody teaches Realtors

Before we jump into a discussion of a how to find and tell a home’s story, let’s review a few important advertising principles that are rarely shared with Realtors. Keep these ad truisms in mind.

- Five times more people will read your headline than will read your body copy.
- The purpose of the headline is to capture interest and keep the prospect reading.
- Good long copy outsells good short copy (especially if the reader isn’t familiar with your product).
- Copy in all capital letters is too hard to read, ditto for small type sizes.
- Big blocks of copy should be broken with interesting sub-headlines.
- Target your copy to specific prospect groups for better results.
- In real estate, the more high quality photographs you use, the better.
- The photographs should reinforce the story the words tell.

Think of real estate marketing as storytelling

Finding the story starts with making a list of the positives and “negatives”

One of our Institute for Luxury Home Marketing members with a lakefront listing asked me to help him identify the story to tell. We began to list the positive and negative characteristics of the home. The house offered great views of the lake and in addition to a huge price reduction, the home had a moveable bedroom wall which opened at the touch of a switch to allow the platform bed to slide forward overlooking the lake. Now that’s a unique feature! Here’s a possible headline and subhead and a few words of copy to pull the reader into the ad and separate this home from others.

Your offer to buy must come with this promise:

“I will appreciate the sweeping lake views,
I will open the master bedroom wall and sleep under the stars,
I promise not to gloat too much over the \$445,000 price reduction!”

If you're looking for a lake house and \$850,000 is in your budget, don't consider buying until you've seen this home. Nestled into the hillside with lovely views of Lake Whitney, this four story, 3800 square foot custom home offers lakeside living with all the extras -- including a unique master bedroom! Own this home and imagine opening the master bedroom wall and watching the bed and its platform roll out under the stars. Settle in for the night in the moonlight. How romantic! (etc...)

Note that I've put “negatives” in the subhead above in quotes. That's because sometimes what you think about as a negative feature is the very thing you want to use as your story hook – a reason to buy. Here's an example. While there may be other homes for sale at this lake which had turned into a mud puddle due to a severe drought, if you use this copy approach you are probably the only agent turning the low level of the lake into a valid reason to buy. Continue the body copy with the wonderful inside features of this home.

Buy before the rain returns!
The price of this lakefront beauty
will rise with the level of the water

The rains will come, buyers will rush back to the lake, and home prices will rise even faster than the level of the lake. Now's your chance to make the buy of the year. The water level may be low, but so are interest rates.

Enjoy this home's fabulous *inside* features today. After the storm clouds gather, you'll love *outdoor* lakeside living. Bring your suntan lotion, water fins, jet ski, and party boat – you'll need them. (etc...)

There are other listings just like mine

But wait, you say. I've listed a new a downtown condo and there are four others for sale with the exact floor plan. How can it be unique? List all the positives and “negatives” and you'll find something to highlight. Let's say your unit faces the building next door while the others have nice city views. The price has been adjusted because of the lack of view. Suddenly the “negative” can provide a reason to buy – value. You might take the following approach...

Willing to trade view for value?

Enjoy a downtown condo in a premium building
for 10% less than your neighbors paid for the same unit
(and you thought you couldn't afford this address!)

You'll enjoy the same premier address, wonderful floor plan, upscale kitchen with espresso bar, concierge service, valet parking, professional gym, library, and party room as your neighbors do. But you will have paid less. They may have a better city view, but you can use the dollars you saved for wonderful window coverings and still put money in the bank! (etc...)

Don't waste a headline by using the street address

Creating compelling headlines is more challenging than doing what most agents do, using the street address instead of a real headline. It's also much less effective. Unless the address is the most important thing about the home (1600 Pennsylvania Ave. for instance), use the street address elsewhere in your copy. Which headline is more likely to generate interest – “7432 Johnson Drive” or “Just featured in Architectural Digest...yet only \$750,000.” Will a reader be more likely to want to know more for “1030 Edgewood” or “Small house, small price, BIG yard!”

Don't be afraid of long headlines or long copy. If it's good copy, it will be more effective than short copy. Yes, really. Ad research backs this up. Do break long copy into short paragraphs and use sub-headlines to help tell the story. You can use long copy online if you format it so that it is reader friendly. Obviously your MLS descriptions have to be short. But don't use MLS blurbs elsewhere instead of good selling copy.

You should be getting the idea. Effective marketing is part storytelling. Your challenge is to find the stories in your listings and tell them well. Luxury agents who've attended The Institute for Luxury Home Marketing's *Certified Luxury Home Marketing Specialist* (CLHMS) training know that I think Austin real estate professional and advertising guru Stan Barron writes some of the best copy and takes some of the best photos in the business. He's put his step-by-step guide to taking (and editing) great real estate photos and some of his best real estate headlines and copy into a workbook and DVD. I like it so much I asked him to let us make it available on our website. www.LuxuryHomeMarketing.com.

To adopt this approach to writing, look for what makes your listing different, find a benefit in that difference, and then work to tell the home's story in an interesting way. After all, that's your job!