

## **Situation**

Like all home builders faced with less sales, lower traffic and reduced margins, privately owned Central Florida home builder Highland Homes had to cut budgets in 2008. The directive to cut the marketing budget came in September/October 2008. As they made the necessary cuts, they focused on ways to preserve Highland Homes branding, Web site traffic and traffic to their models. Highland Homes' biggest cut was with print advertising - going from full-page, four color weekly placements to quarter either half page, or black and white placements."

Highland Homes first hired mRELEVANCE in January 2008 to assist with the ongoing challenges with keeping their Web site live. The mRELEVANCE team, led by Mitch Levinson, rewrote the entire site, optimized the site for the search engines and was in the middle of making site updates and changes at the time of the budget cuts.

Because of this strategic partnership, Kathie McDaniel, Broker, MCSP, MIRM, Director of Advertising and Marketing for Highland Homes turned to mRELEVANCE to help evaluate and strategize with next steps. Highland Homes kept a strong online presence with listing ads and banners in many places, including the local papers. In fact, one of the builder's top referral sources of traffic to its website continues to be the online ads with a local daily paper.

## **Tactics**

Seeing the opportunity to maintain brand, build online reputation and enhance Highland Homes search engine marketing, mRELEVANCE launched a social media campaign. The goal was to increase keywords and referring URLs for the Highland Homes' Web site and the social media campaign was much more focused on social media optimization than social networking.

Campaign tactics included building a blog for the builder, use of external blogs, rebuilding their Facebook page and other social networking, online public relations and social bookmarking.

The blog launched as the news section of their main Web site. It contains community news, events, information on sales and individuals within the company. The blog targets homebuyers. It allows Highland Homes to connect with the target audience and helps Highland Homes achieve the overarching goal of building an online reputation as well as enhancing search engine marketing.

Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Youtube and ActiveRain increased exposure within those communities.

Facebook is primarily used to connect to buyers in a new way by promoting interaction. For instance, Highland Homes is currently running a contest which invites potential homebuyers to visit two of their homes at The Greens at Hidden Creek. After visiting the home they are asked to share their favorite home with Highland Homes by writing about it on the Highland Homes Facebook wall. Ultimately, one person will win a \$100 gift card. mRELEVANCE believes interactive opportunities such as Facebook contests will lead to better relationships with their customer's online.

Similarly, Youtube is used to connect with current and future Highland Homes customers. The Highland Homes Youtube channel contains virtual tours of various home plans. Currently eight videos are posted and they have been viewed hundreds of times. Having a presence on Youtube continues to build Highland Homes an online reputation.

Like Youtube, ActiveRain is used to connect, this time focusing on individuals in the real estate business. For example, real estate agents, builders, contractors, etc. Through ActiveRain Highland Homes shares information about projects, community news, and sales.

Finally, Online public relations sites served to fill the SERP results with positive news. Social Bookmarking and email marketing support the entire campaign.

## **Challenges**

The biggest challenge Highland Homes faces is getting the public to interact. Although the home builder is present on many social media site, getting feedback/interaction from their prospects and homeowners is challenging. Highland Homes is continuously changing their approach and looking for the best way to engage in two way communication.

## **Results**

Highland Homes' experienced great results soon after the launch of the campaign. mRELEVANCE evaluates the results by running a monthly tracking report. This report is for the main Highland Homes Web site, but has sections of information about blog traffic. The report shows the areas where their marketing spend is working and those that are less effective. This business intelligence allowed them to make informed decisions of how to adjust the budget.

### **Results: Short Term**

Just three months into the campaign Highland Homes saw great results for the social media optimization of the Web site.

The highlights of the social media campaign are as follows.

- A 20% increase in keywords
- A 25% increase in referring URLs
- A 26% increase in overall web traffic
- A 53% increase in internet leads
- An 13% increase in conversion - internet leads converted to contracts

Best of all Highland Homes wrote 56 contracts in December 2008 and 69 in January 2009. (Their best month in 2008 was February, when then wrote 63 contracts. A typical month in 2008 averaged 35 contracts.)

### **Results: Long Term**

Almost a year later Highland Homes is still enjoying great success from the campaign, and it is hardly over, some of the successes include:

- A 35% increase in overall web traffic
- A 93% increase in keywords
- A 76% increase in referring URLs
- Averaging roughly 60 contracts per month in 2009 (with 69 being the strongest in January)

With the help of mRELEVANCE, Highland Homes will continue to engage with individuals online. They will continue to strive toward reaching their goals with a good social media plan in place.