



Fluid Communication: A Key for Success for REO Agents

By
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A few years ago it was not uncommon for an REO Listing agent to carry in excess of 100 active listings with 50 or greater properties in pending status – I am cautiously optimistic that those days will return. Even with the best systems in place, REO listing brokers understandably found it challenging to handle the volume of calls and e-mails that would be generated with each property ... not including the e-mails from highly stressed asset managers. Buyers' agents would call, e-mail, text or come to your office with their questions in the hopes they will find a breathing person with whom to talk and ask questions.

Many of us feel the same frustration with the increasingly growing number of automated answering systems commonly used by banking institutions, governmental agencies, retail stores, school districts and other entities. All the caller wants is a person to talk to so you repeatedly hit "0" until you get

a human on the phone. Those of you who have participated in a short sale – good luck trying to get someone on the bank's side on the phone. The computer-generated voices enforce the feeling that you are working with a faceless corporation devoid of an individual with whom you can ask questions, resulting in aggravation for the caller.

One of the most common complaints REO listing agents receive from the buyer's agent is perceived lack of communication. Many REO listing brokers place on the MLS detailed procedures for making offers on their distressed listings that delineate the steps and required documents for placing an offer and if the buyer's agent would just follow these steps they would most likely have a good chance of either getting an offer looked at or an e-mail response of acceptance or denial.

Although sometimes inhibitive to the fluidity and ease of a transaction, some of the MLS REO offer procedures instruct to "email only" with specific instructions "not to call." Consequently, it is difficult for a buyer's agent to get someone on the phone or a returned call in a timely manner. A larger number of buying agents find the online offer system process overwhelming, challenging and even confusing. Consequently the end result is a frustrated buyer's agent who finds it necessary to complain to the local real estate association, state associations or even the DRE.

In an effort to address this challenge I have outlined five communication techniques that, with minimal effort, will help avoid frustrations by cooperating agents on distressed transactions:

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- 1. Answer the phone, but handle your incoming calls effectively.** The best way is to answer your phone. Avoid the natural desire to chat and get to the point in a polite manner. Limit the call to 1-2 minutes. You can hire an answering service or assign an agent to take calls by forwarding the calls as needed. Do your best to make sure the buyer's agent has the opportunity to speak to someone as this will make you stand out as an REO listing broker.
- 2. Set up an automatic e-mail response system** that notifies the buyer's agent of receipt once they submit an offer and....
- 3. Return all business-hour phone calls within 12 hours.** Set up a message system that concisely provides the buyer's agent with sufficient information and explain that they will receive a quicker response if they e-mail, but make sure that the call is returned within a timely manner if the caller requests a call back.

- 4. Streamline and simplify your online REO offer submission system.** Some of the online offer procedures are even overwhelming for a veteran agent. Try to keep the offer simple (a checklist for complete offer packets can help) and use a counter offer to get the additional requested documents addendum or disclosures. Your goal is to obtain the highest and best offer so be clear and simple in your REO offer submission system.
- 5. Be a good listener.** Once you get the buyer's agent on the phone do your best to be a good listener, but do not let them ramble on. Take control of the call and remember that often the buyer's agent wants to vent as they may be frustrated that their offer was not accepted. Use analogies or common examples to help facilitate understanding. Use 'active listening' and ask clarifying questions. The goal should be to set up a good relationship with the buyer's agent. This will help to avoid complaints and will set you

apart as an REO broker with whom agents prefer to cooperate in business.

The current real estate market is still fraught with uncertainty, but what is certain is that there are still thousands of non-performing loans and a back log of homes in default. Short sales have proven to be marginally effective and government programs designed to assist home owners in default have had dismal results. All indications are still pointing to foreclosures as the most effective way to handle properties in default. Even though the tidal wave of foreclosure did not hit as expected, the inventory is still there and someone will need to sell them. The big question is when, and will you be ready? ☺

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