

**Don DeRosa's**

# *Real Estate Investing for The Real World*



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## **Marketing For the Rest of Us, Part Two: Reaching the Crowds on the Cheap**

*I couldn't wait for success, so I went ahead without it. Jonathan Winters*

Last month I began a two-part series on marketing, and I focused on some inexpensive ways you can market to highly focused groups. Those methods included business cards, direct mail, and print advertisements in small publications.

But what if you want to reach a larger crowd? Do you have to take out a full-page advertisement in a glossy business magazine? Hardly. You can reach a big audience even if you're not able to spend a penny – as long as you're willing to do some work! This month I'll talk about some methods for reaching the general public that cost very little.

First, though, let's review a very important point from last month: *You are marketing yourself every time you do something that someone else sees.* Make sure what they see is good! Treat people fairly and with kindness, and do what you say you're going to do. You'll be rewarded with referrals and return business, and it won't cost you a dime.

In the meantime, continue to market yourself in two ways: Target fairly small groups (for example, contacting people in foreclosure) with the methods we talked about last month. And then, to make sure you've got all your bases covered, cast some advertising "into the wind" to see where it lands. In other words, aim at least a little bit of your marketing efforts at the general public.

Not so long ago, the "gold standard" in cheap advertising was the classified section of the local newspaper. However, it now costs at least \$160 to run a real-estate classified ad in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Somewhere along the way, newspapers apparently figured out that they had a monopoly on classified ads and started raising their prices.

Fortunately, the big-city newspaper is no longer the only game in town – and for that, you can thank a guy from San Francisco named Craig Newmark. Craig started an unpretentious little website that has become a worldwide phenomenon. Which brings me to the first cheap-advertising method...

[www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org). Nearly every major city in the world has a craigslist site now. It has become the Internet's most popular classified section, and it's absolutely free. I encourage you to take a look at it, not just because you can post ads there, but also because it has a "for free" category where you can find all kinds of good stuff for renovating or furnishing houses!

The only trick to using craigslist is to re-post your ad every few days. That's important, because each ad category is organized chronologically and most people only look at the most recent ads. If you don't repeat your ad, you won't get many calls. Create the ad in your word-processing program, so you can just copy and paste it into a new ad every couple of days.

It makes sense here to talk just a little bit about what makes a good ad. When you're looking to buy houses, keep your ad simple: ***"I buy houses. Fair price, fast closing. Call Don at 555-555-5555 for information 24/7."*** Make sure that your ad isn't identical to anyone else's, or the reader will think it's a duplicate and won't call. Also, use your name in the ad – it helps build credibility and it's the first step in creating a personal bond with the seller.

“Minor” newspapers. If you'd feel better seeing an ad in print, think about running an ad in a smaller newspaper that is widely read. The ad quoted above would cost just \$48.40 in *Creative Loafing*. Or run an ad in an ethnic, religious, or other specialty newspaper. Of course, ads in smaller publications won't reach as many people as an ad in the *AJC*. For that reason, consider running a short-duration ad until you know you'll get a decent response.

Web sites. Another way to get the word out to a wide audience is by creating a web presence for your company. You can create a web page for free if you don't mind allowing banner ads. However, I don't recommend this, because the ads will irritate the heck out of your visitors and it costs so little to maintain an ad-free web page.

At its very simplest and cheapest, creating a web site involves three steps: first, reserving a domain – that is, “taking dibs” on a unique web address that no one else can use; second, signing up with a web-hosting company that will basically give your web site a place to “live”; and finally, creating and uploading the computer files that make up your web site.

If you're willing and able to build the files yourself, all this can cost just a few dollars per month. You don't even have to learn HTML because you can create a very simple, but decent-looking, web page in Word if you're willing to take some time. But if you're going to do this, be prepared to spend some time learning how to do it right. A badly designed or malfunctioning web site will do you more harm than good!

What if you don't think you can design a decent web page yourself? Does that mean you have to pay a web designer thousands of dollars just to get the web page up and running? Not at all. You can buy pre-made professional designs about \$100 as long as you don't require exclusive use of the design. (FYI - You can go to my web site to link to a web site provider and get free set-up). You may want to pay someone to help you get your website up and running, but that's a small expense compared to the cost of a custom design.

Of course, you have to get people to visit your website. That means offering content that changes on a regular basis and that's truly useful or interesting. Those pictures from your trip to Hawaii may interest your mother, but they won't bring in much business!

Blogs. If you're feeling really adventurous, one way to bring traffic to your site is to create a blog. A blog (which is short for weblog) is simply an online journal. Many professionals find blogs valuable for creating interest in their services. There are many good real-estate blogs. Some are specific to investment. Some just have listings. Some are more personal.

You can start a blog for free on a site like [www.blogspot.com](http://www.blogspot.com). But how do you get people to read it? First, make the content interesting to the people you want to reach. Leave out the pictures of your cat (except once in a while, perhaps) and instead give people information they can really use. Second, change the content frequently. Make sure you post new, interesting entries at least once a week. Twice a week is even better. And finally, if you want people to visit your blog, visit *their* blogs. Post positive comments on the ones you like and link to them on your website. Make sure they can find you. They'll visit you and over time, word will get around. Keep in mind, though, blogging is a long-term project. Don't even start unless you're willing to give it six months to a year to build a real following.

A little less technology, please! If all this technology-speak is making you nervous, never fear. You don't have to be a computer geek to market cheaply to a wide audience. How about writing an article for publication in a real estate newsletter? If even that sounds too ambitious, how about writing a letter to the editor of your newspaper about real-estate news?

If writing isn't your thing, how about a speaking engagement? You can create speaking opportunities in the darnedest places. Watch the newspaper for up-and-coming city ordinances that might affect your business. When they do arise – and they will – go to the public hearing and speak up. Or join a chamber of commerce and volunteer to speak at a monthly meeting.

Too shy? Do volunteer work for the political candidate of your choice. Help build a house for Habitat for Humanity, under your company's name. Put on a shirt with your company's name on it and go coach your daughter's little league team. Or just wear a big name-tag while you hand out water at a 5K run!

Okay, okay, maybe now I'm stretching. The point is, there are as many ways to market as there are real-estate investors. Even if you don't have a penny to invest, there are ways to get your name out there. Examine your talents and resources, choose a method, and go for it!

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*Don DeRosa* was recognized as one of the nation's top 21 real estate investors in the *New York Times* bestseller *The Millionaire Real Estate Investor*. Don, who is a full-time investor, trainer, and mentor, offers a complete system to build and run a thriving real estate business. For more information on *Building Wealth with Real Estate*, visit [www.donderosa.com](http://www.donderosa.com).

Synopsis. Marketing is an essential component of your success. Reaching a broad audience can be expensive, but it doesn't have to be, as we show in the conclusion of a two-part series on marketing basics. You can place an ad on craigslist for free. If you're computer savvy, you can build a web-site or even start a blog. If you'd rather go low-tech, look for speaking, writing, or teaching opportunities. There are as many ways to market as there are investors. Keep looking and you'll find the methods that fit you best.