



Roanoke Regional Home Builders Association Buy Now Campaign

Research: In the tough real estate market of 2007, the Roanoke Regional Homebuilders Association (RRHBA), a non-profit organization active in supporting the local home building industry, was facing a decline in home and property sales and new prospects. The RRHBA, made up of 450 member firms representing 28,000 employees across the Roanoke area, researched industry trends showing that many potential buyers were reluctant to buy due to misconceptions of the economic conditions and a lack of understanding of the benefits of the current environment. Despite the negative perception damaging the industry, RRHBA experts knew that potential buyers were actually facing incredible advantages due to low interest rates, a dip in housing prices and a large variety of inventory. The challenge would be to communicate this message effectively. The RRHBA board proceeded to investigate logistics of implementing a PR campaign for the association centered on a “now is the time to buy” theme. A Media Plan Sub-Committee was formed to develop the campaign made up of marketing specialists from five builders, including Christopher Finley of The Willard Companies, a real estate development firm based at nearby Smith Mountain Lake. The committee audited other affiliates in markets who conducted similar campaigns including Atlanta, Richmond, Tidewater and Houston; explored available resources offered through the National Association of Home Builders; and polled other regional associations taking initiatives at the time, including the Roanoke Valley Association of Realtors and the National Association of Realtors.

Planning: After establishing the message that now is the perfect time to buy due to low interest rates, high inventory and other favorable real estate market conditions, the committee began to concentrate on developing the campaign’s multi-media promotion, reach and frequency. The planning committee set a goal to initiate as much press publicity as possible through the campaign. The first step was to plan a three-month advertising schedule that would run mid-March thru mid-June in newspapers, on the radio, on television and cable, on billboards, and through circular inserts. The committee added the launch of a new website to the agenda as a platform for ongoing audience interaction and a constant contradiction to negative real estate news. The second step was to create and finalize attention-grabbing strategic messages responding to specific real estate fears of potential buyers. Third, advertising headlines needed to offer newsworthy concepts to journalists and organization leaders in order to generate further publicity.

Execution: The heart of the new campaign “Buy Now, Roanoke” was the simple headline, “It’s a great time to buy a new home.” Ads strategically labeled real estate buyers as “Smart Shoppers” to communicate the importance of being market-savvy. Each ad included financial and real estate buying tips such as “How to pinch a penny,” “Where to find the best bargains,” and “Why now is the best time to buy.” The campaign revolved around a push to the web site, www.BuyNowRoanoke.com, which featured investment statistics, location information, inventory descriptions and FAQs for potential homebuyers. The site also linked to the Roanoke Regional Home Builders Association where buyers could find lists of participating builders and realtors. Members were also encouraged to place a “Buy Now Roanoke” reciprocating link on their own home pages.

To support the campaign message the committee made outside resources and links to credible articles available. They publicized market fundamentals showing the advantages for homebuyers due to low interest rates, a strong selection of homes, competitive prices, and numerous incentives. The committee was able to secure donation of some of the creative design and billboard placement involved in the campaign.

Advertising Costs & Overall Budget \$20K:

- Roanoke Times Newspaper ads, 30 online banner ads and 84K impressions at Homes.Roanoke.com – \$7,017.50
- Cox & Comcast Cable buys – \$4,057
 - 2,190 spots [:30] on various networks
- Q99 & WFIR Radio – \$3,480
 - 112 spots[:30 and :15]
- Website – \$2,000
- REMAX, Long & Foster, Home Search and Real Estate Book Magazines – \$900
 - 12 display ads

Evaluation: Most significantly, the campaign generated interest that resulted in free press including the following:

- “Today’s the Day, 8 Great Reasons to Buy a Home Right Now” article and cover feature in the March/April issue of *Roanoker Magazine*.
- A panel discussion on WFIR’s “Evening Edition” which invited call-ins from listeners and facilitated commentary from local real estate and financial experts regarding the current real estate market opportunities.
- 12 live remotes with AM 960 News Talk Radio featuring member testimonials touting the “Buy Now” message at the 2008 Home Expo
- News coverage from local CBS network affiliate WDBJ7, including video of the broadcast online
 - “Morning Show” news coverage
- Digital Billboard throughout Roanoke – \$0 [donated]
 - 240 spots every 24 hours
- RRHBA membership placed “Buy Now Roanoke” links on their home pages

The campaign’s success was also measured in reach, website traffic, data from the Multiple Listing Service (MLS) and home sales. The BuyNowRoanoke.com website generated the following amount of unique visitors during the peak of the “Buy Now” campaign: 6,967 in March, 5,511 in April, 3,115 in May and 2,867 in June. Realtors associated with RRHBA reported an increase in property buying interest throughout the Roanoke area as a direct result of the campaign. These results indicate a highly successful campaign, eliminating some misconceptions and generating a renewed interest in the viability of home purchases in the current market.

