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Real estate agents testing new ideas

Christina Estes

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When the Valley's real estate market began slowing, Mary Ann Michaels started moving. Not away from the challenge, but toward new ideas.

"What better way to see a neighborhood than after hours?" she asked.

Michaels and her MCO Realty partner, Natalie Varela, started Thursday night open houses in Fountain Hills. Besides freeing up potential buyers' weekends, they also get a better sense of the neighborhood by driving "home" right after work.

For Bob Stahl with West USA Realty, it's all about his number.

"My 800 number is toll free and each house gets its own extension," he explained. "They hear a message recorded by me about that house and at the end of the message they have the option of having an information sheet faxed over to them or they can dial zero and can be connected to me."

Even if the caller chooses not to press zero, they likely will hear from Stahl. The call captures people's phone numbers.

"I usually try to call them back within the hour and see if they have any questions," he said.

"The key words are relationship and referral," explained promotional products expert Jim Gordon.

Gordon's company, NorthStar Identity, specializes in marketing and promotions for real estate professionals.

"All my clients are in touch with past clients and business associates on a regular basis," he said. "They use promotional products to keep their names in front of clients."

Gordon's seasonal items include calendars, Halloween bags, flags on July Fourth and Valentine's Day roses with realtors' names and logos imprinted on petals.

"They also send out practical items, such as auto sunshades, tape measures, coffee mugs, first-aid kits, notepads and, of course, pens," he said.

Re/Max Integrity Realtors agent Sheri McBroom buys into Gordon's philosophy. She not only relies on promotional products, she throws promotional parties for her clients.

"I have two to three parties a year," she said. "One is a cosmic bowling party. I also have a barbecue. I supply everything for both events."

Treating clients like friends and family works for husband-wife team Chuck and Nicki Pousson.

"We build relationships with our clients," Nicki said. "We send birthday cards to every

client and their children, along with anniversary cards and home anniversary cards."

Reach Christina Estes at christina@trustexpert.com

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