**Finding Deals Using Your Unique Niche**

By M. Jane Garvey

Many real estate investors and landlords work in a competitive environment, chasing the same deals. More and better deals and tenants go to those who get there first. Naturally, in certain markets and economic conditions, it can be really difficult to get there first. When you happen to be first in the door and are prepared to act quickly you may get a great deal, but a lot of time, money and effort may be wasted in the process. You can choose to continue to participate in the race and try to be faster, or better, or you can go straight to the finish line by working smarter.

Creativity is a big help in making the most of your prospecting efforts and money. You want to be talking to sellers who don't have a flood of mail or door-knockers offering to buy their homes. To do this, you need to stop chasing the same deals as everyone else. You need to start developing a unique approach where there are more opportunities to succeed.

Look for the deals that are not on "lists", or at least not the most popular lists. Talk to list providers and you may quickly find out that 50 other investors are buying the list you were intending to mail. You can bet that not all of them will follow through, but you still will have a lot of competition.

If you decide to use "the lists" anyway, you need to do something unique. Door knocking is one thing that very few people do, so that may work in your market. Many people, only send one mailing to a list, so following up on a mailing will distinguish you from the crowd. Using a unique type of mailing piece might get your mailing open when others aren't. Trust me, in some markets the yellow paper with red fake handwriting is being used by many others - so it is no longer unique. I suggest that you send something useful that the owner will want to keep. This works particularly well if they are likely to be considering selling at a later date.

Personally, I would rather use techniques that don't involve lists and mailings. I would rather spend the time and money developing sources of repeat business.

Developing relationships with people of influence is always a good choice. There are people that you can meet who will refer sellers to you. Meeting attorneys, accountants, funeral directors, bankers, insurance agents, and others in a setting like the local Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, or other civic organization will allow you to build a relationship that lets them know what you do. Treat any customers they refer like gold, helping them in any way you can. Building a reputation for your great business practices and integrity will help you develop even more referral sources as word spreads.

Your unique niche will have people seeking you out. If you are willing to take on deals that are being ignored by other investors, you can be the "go to guy", even at your local investors' association. For instance, if you buy hoarder houses, houses with foundation problems, houses with drainage issues, drug houses, houses on busy streets, fire damaged houses, or properties with other unique problems you can set yourself apart, and set yourself up for success. Let real estate agents, and other investors in your area know that you are willing to take on a particular type of problem and you will start getting referrals. Treat everyone right in the process and the referrals will continue.

The number of ways to find deals is as endless as your imagination. The unique approaches we have talked about here are the tip of the iceberg. Take some time and brainstorm ideas that might work in your market, with your interests, resources and skill set in mind. The great thing about doing something different is that you will often be the one that gets the deal - because you are the only one the seller is talking to. This allows you time to put together a truly win-win deal that will enhance your reputation within the community.