



## THE LAST WORD

# Tracy Ashfield

## Be Active in the Community to Grow Your Business

By Tracy Ashfield  
ACUMA



There is no shortage of great marketing ideas in this issue of the *Pipeline*. You'll note some are "high tech" ideas while others talk about what we have called "the basics" for years.

The strategies may be different but the message is the same. You cannot—and should not—count on your members and potential members to just "walk in the door." Not literally or figuratively. It ain't gonna just happen; you gotta work at it.

Growing your business means getting out there and promoting your credit union as a homeownership resource. It means trying some things that might be out of your comfort zone. Don't expect everything to be a winner. The only way to avoid a "fail" is to not try anything! But sitting back and doing nothing nets you zero.

Over my years of working with credit unions I have had the privilege to see some really successful growth strategies. Not all have been about marketing. Some have been rooted in below-market pricing or offering a unique niche product.

Both can result in delightful spikes in volume, but that's what they are: spikes.

The long-term growth of your mortgage program requires a consistent, multi-faceted marketing strategy. That strategy needs to be supported by well trained staff as Pat Sherlock's article in this issue so clearly reminds us.

Yes, products and price matter, but marketing is a key component in your efforts to get the word out about how good you are at providing home loans (and

why a prospective homebuyer should consider you).

### REVIEW YOUR MARKETING PLAN

Now, at the start of a new year, is a great time to look at your marketing plan.

**1** First and foremost, consider the relationship between your credit union's mortgage lending leadership and your marketing leadership. Are the lines of communication open? Are you working collaboratively to create a plan?

I often hear that marketing only "gives" mortgages one month in the marketing calendar to spread the word about what the credit union offers homebuyers. Everyone has time and budget constraints, but much can be done on a small budget.

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A one-month marketing blitz isn't as effective as a year-round plan. So, ask yourself, What can you do to supplement the times marketing puts mortgages first? How can you get the word out on a consistent basis all year long?

**2** Second, are you and your team involved in housing organizations in your communities?

Nothing shows more of a commitment to affordable housing than getting involved in the non-profits that support these crucial services, especial for first-time buyers and younger members.

Habitat for Humanity is probably the most well-known for its housing efforts, but there are many others.

**3** Thirdly, are you "educating" prospective homebuyers and industry representatives about what you do and how you do it? That means hosting homeownership education events. It also means reaching out to Realtors by attending their events and offering to show them the benefits of working with you.

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### GET INTO YOUR COMMUNITY

The bottom line: Being visible at housing-related activities and events should be a part of your marketing plan. And it doesn't cost you much—except an investment of your time.

The new year is time for resolutions. I also know big sweeping resolutions are rarely kept; well, at least past February!

So instead, think about one or two new things you and your team can do to gain more exposure with your members and potential members. Focus on the resources you do have, rather than the ones you don't. And like a resolution, don't put it off until tomorrow. The time is now.

*Tracy Ashfield is the President of ACUMA. She also speaks at industry conferences and examiner seminars, and keeps current with credit unions by running Ashfield & Associates, a consulting and training business that assists with mortgage lending.*