

Letters to Homeowner Prospects: 6 Rules Will Get Them Read... and Answered!

By Ken Lizotte CMC



Of all forms of writing, letter-writing may be the toughest. After all, who reads letters anymore, let alone writes them? Most of us frantically clip thru our snail mail as quickly as possible, casting 90% of it unopened into the trash. Thus, any letter you send to a foreclosed homeowner must grab your recipient's attention at once, hold his or her interest and (best case scenario) motivate your reader to action.

For these reasons, taking extra time and care to draft a letter correctly is essential. Rather than dashing off an ineffective note, observe these six rules to ensure that your letter achieves what you want it to and serves as a marketing/sales tool that gets the communication process started.

1. Keep It Simple, Stupid!

This rule means keep your letter brief, to the point and without jargon. If longer than one page, your letter is in trouble. Keep it to under one page, however, and you're doing swell.

Letters lucky enough to be opened at all typically get about 3 seconds (no exaggeration here!) before a decision is made to keep reading or to discard. So don't burden your recipient with voluminous passages set in type designed for a microscope. Make the form of your letter easy to skim, with plenty of white space in margins and between paragraphs, and short paragraphs to boot. Your chances of getting your reader to pay attention and scroll all the way down the page will rise proportionately.

2. Just the Facts, Ma'am

In the interest of "connecting" with your reader, don't blow it by overly personalizing your message. If you do, you may end up straying into no-win territory.

Example: "I know it's painful for you to feel you have caused this failure with your home and family but do not worry, I can help you out of your disaster." Yecch! You have just reactivated any feelings the homeowner may have forgotten for a brief while of personal failure and disappointment. What a grand way to begin a relationship!

Just stick to the facts by getting down to business right away. See Rule #3 to learn how.

3. Get to the Point Right Away

Skip all fancy, formal or long-winded introductions. Don't say who you are up front, just state your case from the get-go, much like a good advertisement. That is, do so in a manner that grabs your reader's attention right away.

Questions are often great ways to manage this. Here's one way to go:

"Is your home in danger of foreclosure? If so, did you know there are ways to PREVENT foreclosure, as well as keep your credit intact? Yes, you may be able to keep your home after all!"

Now add 2 or 3 more sentences to explain further what you mean, perhaps something about non-traditional finance options or other avenues. After that, it's on to Rule #4.

4. Time for Your Credentials

Never begin your letter, as so many authors do, by blathering on about who you are, your brilliant background, all those super credentials you hold. Your reader just doesn't care about that at the top of a letter! After you've stated that you can help, however, the time for credentials has arrived. Your readers who have gotten this far will be ready to learn more about you.

In fact, the readers now will anxiously WANT to know about you at this point, because you've gotten them hooked. Their next step is to feel sure that you are indeed an expert they can count on to help them through their tough times.

5. Close Your Letter with a Call-to-Action

Many letters mistakenly end ambiguously, with no conclusion or "call-to-action." Others end with a veiled threat disguised as a promise, like, "I will call you on Tuesday to set up an appointment." If I got such a letter, I would feel I'd better remember NOT to answer my phone on Tuesday, or even stay out of my office entirely. When did I give permission to be stalked?

Instead of threatening your readers, ask them to take a next step. Include a reason for them to do so that's repeated from your first paragraph. You want to remind the homeowner why he or she should be motivated to get together with you.

Example: "If you would like to avoid foreclosure and learn more about the many options available to you, call me at 555-5555 or email me at Joe@email.com for more information. Or learn more by visiting my website at www.saveyourhappyhome.com. Together we can save your home, your credit rating, and the lifestyle you enjoy."

Note that this language does not preclude you from making a follow-up call or visit. You're simply not "announcing" it in your letter. Give your reader the chance to take a step in your direction first. If this happens, you'll be dealing with highly qualified prospects, which increases the chances of a potentially great transaction for everyone.

6. Solicit Feedback from Outside Your World

Before you blast off your letter, have someone else read it, preferably someone from OUTSIDE your industry. Make absolutely certain your letter does not contain industry jargon, insider acronyms or (gasp!) typos and grammatical errors. Above all, be sure your letter does not come off as presumptuous or insensitive.

Should you hand off your letter to someone in your own office for this kind of feedback? Generally this is not a good idea because a colleague will likely be caught up in the same insider blind spots as you. Instead, enlist the help of someone beyond the borders of your industry-whoever is NOT familiar with your business. Make one or a few such folks your designated CFO: "Chief Feedback Officer." This way, no letter goes out without being - vetted in such a way that you know it will have the desired effect.

No single letter can turn every foreclosure situation into a gold mine - there will always be a portion of homeowner recipients who will not act on your offer. However, by following these six rules, the percentage of homeowners who do respond will vastly improve. Your successful transactions will increase as well. In these competitive times, such an edge should not be overlooked.

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