A 4-Step Guide for Successful Home Buyer Seminars

How to Develop, Promote and Present Home Buyer Seminars
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Introduction

One of the biggest challenges facing buyer’s representatives is marketing their personal services. In some aspects, winning listings is easier. Home sellers are preoccupied with one thing—getting the most for their property. Sure, they care about who they retain to list their home. But in making that decision, the skill they care about most is your ability to market their home to buyers.

In contrast, buyers are preoccupied with finding the home of their dreams and may not have given any thought to a decision about working with a buyer’s rep. You need to skillfully frame your value proposition to someone who may not even realize they would benefit from your services. After all, they’re thinking about houses, not agents.

So how can you establish a real and meaningful connection with buyers? One of the best ways is to offer home buyer seminars. Buyers are interested in good information. If a seminar captures their attention, they’re likely to attend, creating a powerful opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and earn their respect and trust. Without even realizing it, buyers will develop an appreciation for your services.

Randy Templeman, ABR®, CRB, CRS, e-PRO®, GREEN, GRI, PMN, SFR®, SRES® and REBAC Hall of Fame Inductee has long relied on presentations as his primary business development tool. Every couple months he’s approached by a buyer who attended one of his seminars. Sometimes two or more years can pass before they ask him for transaction assistance. “I might not be aware of it, but these buyers decided a long time ago that I am their agent,” says Templeman. “I keep running home buyer seminars because they’re one of the best ways to meet buyers and showcase my expertise.”

Admittedly, this marketing technique doesn’t work equally well for every buyer’s agent. It takes hard work, patience and good presentation skills. Home buyer seminars also require careful attention to details and planning. That’s where REBAC’s publication, A 4-Step Guide for Successful Home Buyer Seminars can help. 

What’s inside?

On the following pages, you’ll find a comprehensive resource for hosting your own home buyer seminars. While the content is organized into eight sections, some of the steps overlap in terms of timing. To help sequence your activities, we’ve also included a planning timeline which indicates where you can read more about each step.

• Choosing an audience or topic
• Finding sponsors and partners
• Selecting a date, time and location
• Promoting your seminar
• Other event-planning details
• Preparing your content
• Presentation tips
• Follow-up considerations

Seminar Planning Timeline
Step 1: Audience, finding sponsors/partners and selecting date/time/location
Choosing an audience or topic

What kind of home buyer seminar will you offer? This is undoubtedly the first and most important decision you’ll need to make. Ask yourself which topics you know best. Identifying and concentrating on your strengths will raise your confidence and improve your results.

Also, ask yourself what type of program is the best fit with your local market and the rest of your business. It may be preferable to narrow the focus of your seminar. Too often, agents make the mistake of picking a broad seminar topic, assuming this will help them reach a broader audience. Instead, they can face difficulties appealing to anyone in particular, in addition to attempting to cover too much ground in their seminar material.

The number of potential home buyer seminar topics is unlimited. Here are many different ideas to get you started.

**First-time buyers**

Consumers who have never purchased a home usually don’t have much experience with real estate and may be especially interested in gaining tips from professionals. This helps explain why first-time home buyer seminars are a favorite topic; the information is among the easiest to prepare and the audience is among the most eager to learn.

One challenge, however, is deciding how much material to cover. Will you touch on every step in the buying process or concentrate on certain topics that first-time buyers ask about most? Possible names for your seminar include:

- Top Ten Mistakes When Buying Your First Home
- Best Mortgage Options for Today’s First-Time Buyers
- What $ (insert starter home price) Buys Now in (insert your market name)

Regardless of what theme you choose, be sure to include buyer representation—what it means and the benefits it provides—in any first-time buyer seminar. In fact, buyer representation merits inclusion in almost any seminar for buyers, or can even be treated as a stand-alone seminar topic.

** Buyers facing financial obstacles**

Consumers with limited income, minimal savings, or blemishes in their credit history may assume that home ownership is beyond their reach. In many instances, however, these obstacles can be overcome through education and access to the right resources. This is how you can help—by offering seminars that deliver the information these buyers need to pursue home ownership.

The first step is research. Learn what financial assistance programs are offered locally or nationally. Find out if consumer education is required to obtain assistance and, if so, what you must do to become a qualified education provider.

**USE REBAC RESOURCES**

The *Home Buyer’s Toolkit* is an excellent handout for first-time buyer seminars. Members can order plain or customized copies (U.S. or Canadian versions) in the Member area of REBAC.net.
Then, identify any public housing authorities or private experts in your area already familiar with government assistance programs and investigate partnership opportunities. Lenders, credit repair specialists and financial planners may also be good partners for a wide range of seminar topics for buyers facing financial challenges, including general financial fitness programs.

In all cases, it is essential to provide encouragement that home ownership IS possible. Demonstrate with realistic examples, provide practical step-by-step guidance, and help buyers visualize themselves as future home owners. Potential seminar topics include:

- Need Help Buying a Home? The Best Programs for Low-Income Buyers
- You CAN Own a Home: 3 Ways to Make it Happen
- How to Repair Your Credit and Obtain a Mortgage
- Rent-to-Own Real Estate...Right for You?

Distressed properties

Buyers are often enticed by the perception that distressed properties can be purchased at deep discounts. But they rarely understand what it takes to buy one, the repairs that may be needed, or what these properties actually cost. That's a perfect formula for buyer education! If your experience and training includes distressed properties, offer seminars explaining, in detail, what buyers need to know about foreclosures, bank-owned real estate and auction properties in your market.

Make sure you're completely forthright about the pluses and minuses of distressed properties. If attendees subsequently decide NOT to pursue this type of purchase, you’ll still score points by showcasing your real estate expertise and willingness to provide candid, trustworthy information. When they are ready to buy, they won’t forget you. Consider these and other seminar titles:

- Foreclosure Properties and Prices in (your market): What Buyers Can Expect
- Three Ways to Buy a Foreclosed Home
- Going Once, Going Twice, Sold! The Ins and Outs of Real Estate Auctions

Other types of buyers

Every buyer is different and faces a unique set of circumstances, preferences and needs. But some buyers share many similar concerns and would benefit from home buyer education geared to their interests. Some of these groups include:

Single buyers: Single buyers in general, and women in particular, have been playing a more active role in housing purchases and represent an important niche group of buyers. Be sure to address any financing challenges they could face meeting lenders’ qualification ratios with one income.

If your single buyers include unmarried couples, encourage them to document a partnership that stipulates their shares of the down payment and mortgage payments, home maintenance costs, and rights and share of ownership. Unmarried status is not necessarily an impediment to financing since a lender’s top concern is ability to pay. It can be a problem, however, if one of the partners has a troubled credit history.

Immigrant buyers: High levels of immigration have contributed to home buying demand from many different ethnic groups. The preferences and concerns of immigrant buyers are as diverse as the cultures they represent, although one growing trend for some immigrant groups is interest in multigenerational housing. Also, depending on the degree of acculturation, it may be important that your seminar explains the basic details of how real estate is transacted since listings, representation and other aspects of real estate transactions can operate quite differently outside the U.S. and Canada.

Relocating buyers: Buyers relocating to or away from your market face distinctly different challenges in two locations, sometimes involving substantial distances. Inbound buyers will probably want general education about housing choices and key features of different communities; those moving out of your area may want help identifying a qualified buyer’s rep in their new location.

Ideally, you’ll want to establish strong relationships and even partner with major employers in your market that periodically transfer workers between facilities. Knowing their most common employee movements will help you line up solid referral relationships in the markets where other operations are located.
Military: Similar to other relocating buyers, military personnel and their families may need to make purchasing decisions in short time frames and based on very limited opportunities to tour properties. A buyer’s agent with military experience may be more sensitive to their unique situation and can offer valuable assistance in a seminar format, including how to effectively prescreen properties before your visit, tips for making quick property comparisons and purchasing decisions, and the importance of lining up an inspection to coincide with your visit so a sales contract can be promptly finalized.

Investors: Real estate investors’ interests run a broad gamut, encompassing residential and commercial properties at every price point. As a rule, however, investors’ top concern is total cost and expected return—a comprehensive explanation of these points should be the cornerstone of any buyer seminar for investors. Narrow your focus by concentrating on specific types of investment properties, whether single family homes, small apartment buildings, condos, or retail/office buildings, to name a few. Investors may also be interested in seminars on distressed properties, especially if they offer solid buying opportunities.

Retirement: With more and more Baby Boomers reaching retirement age, this buyer segment has grown in importance and enjoys an expanded range of housing options. Whether your market is a better fit for retirees interested in active adult communities, year-round vacation settings, golf course living, urban retirement, or outdoor recreation, there’s bound to be something you can offer retirement-oriented buyers pursuing this important transition.

Senior housing: Seniors may have accrued more real estate experience than other buyers over the course of their life. But that experience probably won’t prepare them for the complexity of decisions they may face in senior housing—decisions that can overlap with healthcare and legal issues, financial and estate planning, home modifications, and more. There’s no shortage of seminar material for programs geared to senior housing buyers.

Other types of properties
If you have special knowledge and expertise in certain types of property, this could also form the basis for a home buyer seminar. Possibilities include:

Condos/townhomes: Educate prospective buyers about considerations they should understand and investigate related to homeowner association fees and rules, shared living spaces and utilities, property maintenance, parking and more.

Manufactured housing: Originally synonymous with mobile home units, this new home construction segment has evolved to include many other types of partially- and fully-prefabricated homes in a wide range of prices. Buyers of vacant land in rural or recreational locations may be particularly drawn to a seminar that explains the ins and outs of placing a manufactured home on their property.

Sustainable homes: Whether their interest is ecological or economical, many buyers are drawn to sustainable homes. Seminars can offer buyers information on the latest low-impact and energy-saving building materials and appliances, ways to retrofit existing homes to reduce long-term utility costs, green remodeling options, and more.

Vacation properties: The interests of vacation home buyers are as varied as the locations of these properties. But many of these prospective owners may value learning more about practical issues such as property and lease management services, as well as recreational topics such as ways to spend their time while visiting their vacation home.

New, spec, and custom homes: Many buyers interested in new homes assume that the builder is their only source of information. However, a buyer’s rep can be a valuable resource in this situation since they can also represent buyers of new construction properties. A seminar on “10 Questions to Ask Your New Home Builder” or other similar topics may help you cement relationships with these buyers.
Finding sponsors and partners

Hosting a home buyer seminar requires considerable time and effort. You don’t need to do everything yourself. In fact, working with a sponsoring organization and/or a business partner from a related real estate field can help everyone involved. Potential benefits include:

Credibility: A seminar that is sponsored by a non-profit organization, community group, or even a lender, is less likely to be perceived as a sales pitch.

Expertise: Program sponsors may also be good sources for additional speaking expertise on various aspects of the real estate transaction.

Promotion assistance: Sponsors and partners can promote the seminar through their communication channels, potentially including community bulletin boards, newsletters, e-mail notifications, Web sites, social media networks, posters, and flyers.

Built-in audience: Some sponsors, such as employers, faith-based institutions, and employee unions can provide a built-in audience. Over time, you can establish your reputation as a knowledgeable and trusted real estate advisor for members of the sponsor’s community.

Cost sharing: Sponsors and partners may be able to help defray costs, including refreshments, promotional expenses, meeting facilities, giveaways, and prizes.

Who to ask?

Look around your community. Who shares your interest in reaching qualified and motivated home buyers as potential customers, or has an obligation to help educate consumers about home ownership? Possible sponsors and partners include:

- Lenders
- Home inspectors
- Insurance agents
- Title insurance/escrow companies
- Credit unions
- Accounting or brokerage firms
- Non-profit organizations, particularly those focused on affordable housing
- Community and service organizations
- Community housing organizations
- Home owners’ associations
- Public service unions: teachers, police, firefighters, hospital workers
- Large employers
- Faith-based institutions: churches, temples, mosques
- Colleges, universities and alumni groups
- Public libraries
- Local radio stations, TV stations, newspapers
- Shopping malls and department stores
- Home improvement stores and home service firms

If your home buyer seminar is intended to reach a very specific niche audience, also consider organizations that share involvement with this group. For example, reach out to administrators at a nearby military base to offer home buyer seminars for members of the armed services. A local tourism board may be a good partner for seminars on buying vacation properties.

Benefits for sponsors

To win sponsor support, demonstrate how involvement with your home buyer seminar will put them in touch with the audience and help present their company and services in a positive light.

Financial institutions and non-profit housing groups that receive government housing development grants are often required, as a condition of the grant, to conduct community outreach programming. But they often lack the staff, expertise, or contacts to present home buyers seminars. Agents can help provide the missing real estate “piece of the puzzle.”

Asking for support

If you don’t already have a personal contact with a possible sponsor, ask your broker if he or she can provide one. When first approaching that sponsor you could say, “I’m planning a home buyers seminar and expect 15 to 20 potential buyers to attend. Would you
like to partner?” Expect questions about what partnering involves, so be prepared with specifics. Depending on the situation, this may include:

- Providing meeting space
- Making a presentation
- Helping with promotion
- Offering financial assistance
- Supplying refreshments

Describe how they can benefit from partnering with you. Be sure to stress that the purpose of the seminar is to educate potential buyers and that it is NOT intended as a sales pitch. Also, emphasize that you are not interested in a one-time partnership but would like to foster the relationship and keep it growing to the point of scheduling quarterly or monthly events.

No sales pitches!
Most importantly, be sure that sponsors and co-presenters understand that attendees come to gain information, not to hear a sales pitch. Audience members will immediately “tune out” if they perceive someone is trying to promote a company’s products or services. Assure co-presenters that their expertise and willingness to provide objective information will speak more loudly and lastingly than any sales pitch—and will result in future customers.

Important Note: If you are a REALTOR® in the U.S., be sure that your sponsor’s involvement complies with RESPA.

Selecting a date, time and location
Good advance planning can make a big difference in hosting a successful home buyer seminar. Once you’ve decided on an audience/topic, determine how long your program will last and where and when to present it.

Seminar scheduling
When is a good time to hold your seminar? The answer depends on who you want to attract and when they are most likely to be available and interested. Considerations include:

- Seasonal buying: Look for a time when buyers in your target market are thinking about making a home purchase. For families, school schedules often impact timing decisions.
- Community calendar: Are there specific events you should avoid, in terms of creating conflicts with your seminar? On the other hand, a community event may create a drawing card and a good opportunity to present your program in conjunction with a larger event.
- Audience availability: Families with school-aged children and workers are more likely to be available on weekday evenings or Saturday mornings. For singles, right after office hours may work well. Seniors and retirees may prefer a time that avoids rush hour traffic or nighttime driving.

POINTERS FOR WORKING WITH SPONSORS AND PARTNERS

- Whatever your sponsor or partner agrees to do or pay for, acknowledge the commitment in writing. Usually a friendly letter confirming their support and specifying details is sufficient.
- Be sure to integrate their critical deadlines and target dates into your planning timeline. You may need to adjust your time frames accordingly.
- Make certain other presenters are in tune with the audience and their information needs. For instance, a lender who talks about $400,000 homes, when most of the attendees will be looking for homes in the $200,000 range, may actually discourage potential home buyers.
- Ask to see other presenters’ handouts in advance to make sure their material is appropriate, examples are relevant, and information is not duplicative or contradictory.
- As a buyer’s agent, make sure other presenters understand how your role differs from a listing agent. Other professionals may not understand this important distinction.
Employee lunch hours: If your program is intended for an employee group, consider offering the seminar over a lunch break. Your sponsor may be able to provide the lunch.

Resort and recreational markets: When do potential buyers visit the area and start a property search? Are most visitors from one city or area? If so, you may be able to team up with an agent from that area and benefit from any resulting referrals.

Future seminars: Always schedule a date for the next seminar and announce it during the current program. Attendees may provide valuable word-of-mouth publicity, encouraging friends, family, or co-workers to sign up for the next event.

Selecting a location
Ideally, you want to find a place to host your event that is well-known and convenient for attendees. Considerations may include availability of parking and public transportation.

Does the presentation room have adequate space for attendees? A classroom seating arrangement is ideal since it’s easier for attendees to take notes.

Does the room have adequate lighting? Can it accommodate your audio/visual needs? Are there restroom facilities?

If there is a separate area for child care or supervised play and you plan to provide this service, be sure to publicize this in your promotional materials.
Possible locations include community centers, churches, and employee meeting rooms. Do not hold your seminar in a location that is associated with real estate sales, such as your office or your local REALTOR® association. Potential home buyers may be less likely to attend because these locations can raise their suspicion that the seminar is really a sales pitch. Instead, look for a location that is familiar and comfortable for the audience.

**Fee or free?**

The most important consideration in this decision is your audience: What approach will generate the best attendance among the home buyers you hope to attract?

If a sponsor is helping defray costs, you will probably want to offer a complimentary seminar, particularly if the program is relatively short. On the other hand, some planners feel that a “free” program will be perceived as less valuable.

Charging a nominal fee, paid in advance, may facilitate planning in that participants are more likely to attend if they’ve made a financial commitment. If charging, consider offering a bring-a-friend-for-free policy.

Another approach is to make your seminar complimentary, but require advance reservations. Indicating that space is limited may motivate attendees to respond earlier.
Step 2  Promoting the seminar and other event-planning details
Promoting your seminar

How well do you know your audience? Do you understand their desires and concerns regarding homeownership? Do you know what they read? Where they spend their time?

Putting yourself in a potential buyer’s mindset is a critical skill, essential for creating and promoting a successful home buyer seminar. To reach buyers, you first need to speak their language. Once you know how to talk to them, make sure you’re communicating your message in places where you’ll be seen and heard.

When should your promotion efforts begin? Ideally, all flyers, ads, etc. should be in distribution at least four weeks prior to the event. That probably means you need to begin working on them up to a month earlier. In addition to print promotion, determine what online efforts are needed, potentially including a Web page, posts on blogs and social networks, and e-mail campaigns.

There are many different marketing tools at your disposal. Work with your sponsor to divide tasks and determine how many of the following tactics can be included in your efforts, as well as which will be most effective in reaching the audience you want to attract:

**Local media**
- Send press releases to area newspapers.
- Contact local reporters—invite a reporter to attend.
- Provide radio stations with a public service announcement.

**Direct mail**
- Send postcards/invitations to any appropriate lists.
- Enclose a flyer in your sponsor’s regular mailings.

**Advertising**
- Place an ad in local newspapers or homes magazines.
- Some papers offer online editions with additional advertising options.

**Announcements**
- Post flyers on local bulletin boards.
- Submit information to published community calendars.
- Place an announcement in your sponsor’s newsletter, in employee newsletters, or in church bulletins.

**Online**
- Post information on your Web site and your sponsor’s site.
- Invite online community calendars to link to a page for your event.
- Send e-mail invitations.

**Social networks**
- Run targeted advertisements on Facebook.
- Post seminar details on your and your sponsor’s Facebook page.
- Tweet about the event, using important keywords and linking to a web page with more details.

**Other**
- Post signage at the location.
- Remember word of mouth—“Bring a friend!”

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**TIP: WHAT SETS YOU APART?**

One of the most difficult challenges facing all real estate agents is gaining a clear understanding of what makes you different. Why should buyers work with you instead of someone else? Taking time to consider your unique value proposition and including this in your seminar promotion materials will go a long way towards helping you forge meaningful connections with future clients.
Include all essential details
Don’t hamper your marketing efforts by accidentally omitting key facts or promoting inaccurate information. This checklist can be used to proofread all marketing components:

- Seminar name—space-permitting, also include a brief program description
- Timing—day, date, beginning and ending times
- Address—consider including a map
- Specific location—add the room name, number and floor if within a large building
- Attendance policy—Free or fee? Deadlines? Advance registration required? etc.
- How to register—Phone? E-mail? Online registration?
- Sponsor names and logos

Putting your best foot forward
Beyond covering all essential details, attempt to give your marketing materials the most polished, professional appearance you can. First impressions can make a big difference in attracting attendees. If you don’t have access to a graphic designer, investigate the many templates offered in word processing programs and through online sources. Carefully proofread all your content before printing or publishing online.

Adding incentives, removing barriers
You may be able to encourage attendance by including incentives or eliminating potential hindrances. What will your attendees value? They might be attracted by prize drawings, refreshments, credits toward services, dollars-off coupons on partners’ products or services, reduced loan fees, a free one-on-one home buyer counseling or credit review session, or free one-on-one mortgage qualification review session.

What can you do to remove attendance barriers? This might include free or validated parking, child care and/or supervised children’s activities, or free lunch for workplace programs.

One of the biggest barriers to attendance is memory! Help registrants remember your program by leaving a voice and/or e-mail reminder message two days before your event.

Other event-planning details
Most of your time and effort will rightfully go towards preparing and presenting the best seminar content possible. But don’t let this cause you to overlook these other important details.

Handouts
The type of person who attends a home buyer seminar wants and expects you to distribute a handout. At a minimum, provide an agenda of the topics being covered plus paper for note-taking. If you’re using slides, consider distributing copies.

If you don’t want to prepare handouts, or want to supplement your handouts with materials tailored to home buyers, consider passing out consumer material produced by REBAC. In addition to the Home Buyer’s Toolkit—a 36-page booklet that explains 10 steps in the buying process—REBAC also provides members with an extensive library of one-page consumer handouts on many pertinent topics. (These and other resources are available in the Member area of REBAC.net.)

GREAT SOURCES FOR FREE SEMINAR CONTENT

- HouseLogic - houselogic.com
  An extensive compilation of information and tools related to home ownership including home improvement, maintenance and repair, home taxes and financing, and countless other topics. For U.S. and international members of NAR only.

- NAR Research - realtor.org/research-and-statistics
  Housing data, affordability indices, local market reports, home buyer profiles, and much more can be accessed through NAR’s Research division. For U.S. and international members of NAR only.

- REBAC - REBAC.net
  The Member area includes past issues of Today’s Buyer’s Rep, numerous consumer one-sheets, Webinars and other resources geared towards home buyers. A benefit available exclusively to REBAC members.

Also decide in advance WHEN to pass out handouts. While you should definitely facilitate note-taking, there are different schools of thought regarding how much detail to include in your handouts.
Many of today’s buyers are conscientious about wasting paper, so one option is to give attendees copies of your most essential materials and direct them to a page on your site where they can view or download your complete presentation. Alternately, offer to send your slides to attendees after the program. This helps ensure you will have follow-up communications with them.

Make sure your name, logo and contact information are included in all handouts. If you’re working with a sponsor, arrange to co-brand your materials.

In addition to handouts, you may want to prepare and bring:

- Name tags and markers
- Index cards for audience questions (and maybe a basket to collect them)
- Pens for attendees (branded pens are good marketing tools)
- Plenty of business cards
- A sign-in sheet and/or list of expected attendees
- Blank evaluation forms
- A summary page or simple brochure on your company (included in a folder with other handouts and/or on display, for attendees to take copies)

Help from assistants

On the day of the seminar you’ll want to keep yourself free to interact with attendees and stay focused on the topic you are about to present. This is much easier if you or your sponsor bring an assistant. They might be able to help with:

- Setting up the room
- Staffing a registration table
- Collecting questions from participants
- Serving refreshments
- Gathering evaluation forms

On the day of the seminar

Go early to set up the room, including seating for attendees, a registration table, and a table for any drinks and food. It is preferable to give attendees a hard writing surface—tables and chairs or student desks rather than just chairs. Also test any audio/visual equipment.

Since you’ll probably have some no-shows, it’s better to set the room for less than expected and be ready to add more seating, rather than give the appearance that you were expecting a lot more people. To get them to sit up close, consider setting materials only on the front chairs or maybe tape off the last rows.

If you know the group will be on the small side (15 or less), consider using a conference table or U-shaped table arrangement with chairs around the perimeter. This format is also preferable to classroom seating when you want to encourage audience interaction and break-out exercises.

Make sure you have a way to track who attended your program, including any walk-ins. If an assistant is stationed at a registration table, they can do this for you. If not, make sure you pass around a simple sign-up sheet, asking for attendees’ name, contact information and a check-mark under a column granting permission to contact them after the seminar. A handwritten sign-up sheet using a plain piece of paper may feel less intimidating than a formal document.

Evaluation forms

Be sure to include an evaluation form and design it to encourage truly constructive feedback. Make it easy and anonymous. To help ensure they’ve completed the form, consider using a different color sheet of paper and stapling it to the back of the handouts. This can make it easier to tell if they’re leaving without filling it out. Ask your assistant to stop attendees and request that they please take a moment to help make the next seminar even better.
Step 3
Preparing the seminar and presentation tips
Preparing your content

The claim that “content is king” has long applied to efforts to engage online readers. But it is equally appropriate advice for home buyer seminars, because preparing your content is arguably the most important step in the process—the one that all others have led up to. Good content will produce the best results, in terms of converting attendees into clients.

To make your content as effective as possible, first reflect back on your initial choice of a target audience. Why are buyers interested in this topic? What information do they most want to gain from your presentation? Always consider your audience’s perspective in all content decisions.

After you’ve determined the most important concepts to include, evaluate different ways to explain key points. This may be easier if you prepare an outline with bullets that drill into the details of each concept. But also think about using stories and hypothetical examples, cartoons, photos and video clips to illustrate key concepts. Posing questions to the audience can also be effective.

As you assemble your content and map out the best sequence for presenting your material, always remember that your primary objectives are to educate and explain. Attendees are there to learn and want to leave with a clear understanding. Meeting this objective often requires striking a fine balance. You want them to gain valuable insights, but don’t want to share so much information that they become overwhelmed or confused.

Other notes of caution:

**Tell, not sell.** Be a reliable source of good information, but let buyers make their own decisions. This also means no sales pitches for your services.

**Avoid real estate jargon.** Try to use conversational language as much as possible, explaining important industry terms as necessary. Consider providing a glossary of real estate terms specific to your topic.

**Be concise and cohesive.** Avoid the temptation to go off on tangents.

**Give credit, ask permission.** Don’t simply copy and paste someone else’s work. Reprint permissions vary. Depending on the source’s policies, you may need to request permission in writing. In other cases, you simply need to cite the source of your information.

Establishing credibility

You will make a stronger first impression if you plan ways to establish your credibility with attendees before you begin speaking. This may include a short speaker bio at the beginning of your handout materials outlining your credentials.

If you are working with a sponsor, ask them to start the seminar by welcoming attendees and introducing you. Having another person speak to your qualifications is a more effective way to establish credibility than introducing yourself.

**WHAT ABOUT WEBINARS?**

While this guide is primarily geared towards buyer’s reps who want to establish face-to-face connections with buyers, many of these presentation tips are also appropriate for Webinars. Consider leveraging your efforts by offering the same content you’ve prepared for live audiences in an online Webinar format.

**Expert tips**

Experienced presenters suggest that you plan periodic breaks in your remarks, stopping every 20 minutes or so to get the audience involved in some way. This technique reduces the likelihood that participants’ thoughts drift away from the subject by reengaging their attention. There are a number of ways to do this, including:

- Pose a specific question to the audience.
- Conduct an informal poll, asking for a show of hands.
- Give them a sample problem to solve; compare solutions.
- Ask a volunteer to step forward and role-play a hypothetical situation.

Another technique of seasoned presenters is to prepare particularly strong opening comments and
equally strong closing remarks. The objective is to make a very positive first impression—capture attendees’ attention at the moment you start speaking—and have their parting thoughts linger on the important points you have shared.

Sponsors and partners
If you are working with a sponsor or partner, it is also important that you coordinate your content development efforts with theirs. Make sure you are not duplicating material or creating any problematic gaps. If you’re both using slides, allow time to merge your content into a single presentation deck.

Presentation slides
A common mistake among presenters is to put too much information on a slide. Try to adhere to the 6 x 6 rule, meaning not more than six lines, and not more than six words on a line. Remember, you want attendees listening to you, not reading your slides. Limit the words on a slide to a few key phrases, allowing your voice to fill in the blanks and provide context.

To make your slides appear attractive and professional:
• Use templates, which provide a harmonious arrangement of colors, type sizes and fonts.
• Add your company name or logo to the template in a small, unobtrusive location.
• Use a title slide at the beginning of your presentation; section dividers at the beginning of each major topic; and a final slide with your contact information for additional questions.
• Place transitions between slides, such as a dissolve or swipe, to give a visual signal that content is changing.
• Similarly, make effective use of builds; if there are four bullets on a slide, make each one appear with a click so the audience doesn’t read ahead of your remarks.

Other audio/visual considerations
Microphone - If there’s any question about whether participants will be able to hear you, make arrangements for a microphone. Ideally, you’ll want a small wireless version that can be clipped to your clothes so you aren’t constrained to a podium or stuck holding a microphone in one hand.

Internet access - You may want to cut away from your slides to demonstrate a particular point online, or to show participants specific sites they can use. If so, make sure you will have Internet access, either through the facility where you’re hosting your event, or through your own mobile WiFi.

Marker boards - Sometimes it’s helpful to be able to write out words, numbers or diagrams at certain points in your presentation. For this, you’ll want to be sure the room has a chalkboard or whiteboard—and bring extra chalk or dry-erase markers and erasers. If the room does not have a marker board, consider investing in an easel that will hold a large flip chart.

Graphics tablets - One alternative to marker boards is Bamboo and other tablets by Wacom. Primarily intended as digital drawing tools, graphics tablets can also be used to project hand-written notes, equations and drawings onto a screen, in effect providing a new alternative to overhead projectors. These devices also integrate with PowerPoint, Acrobat, Word, and more, allowing you to display mark-ups in these and other programs right on the screen—without ever turning your back on your audience.

Online whiteboards - If you have Internet access during your presentation, you could also use one of several online services to easily draw basic shapes, add text, or draw freehand, effectively converting your screen into a whiteboard. Simply search for “online whiteboards” to find several different providers.

Prezi - If you’re tired of standard slide presentations and want to try an entirely different approach, check out Prezi.com, cloud-based presentation software that opens up a new world between whiteboards and slides. The zoom-able canvas can accommodate text, images, and even video, letting you explore ideas and the connections between them.

Finally, don’t forget to add a couple extra power cords to your tool kit. They might help solve last-minute set-up problems on the day of your program.
Presentation tips

How many people enjoy public speaking? Very few. If you fall into this group, you can take some solace in knowing you are in good company—and in knowing there are a number of steps you can take to become more comfortable and improve your presentation skills.

First, understand that stage fright occurs when you allow your mind to focus on negative thoughts and feelings instead of focusing outside of yourself—specifically, on the content of your presentation and your audience. Expect and accept that you will feel nervous at first; almost everyone feels some anxiety when speaking in front of a group. Use these tips to rise above your fears:

• Remember that you probably appear more confident than you feel; the audience is there to see you succeed, not fail.
• Recognize that the audience wants to hear the information you have to offer. They did not come to see you (unless you are a celebrity).
• Make eye contact, ask questions and interact with audience members.
• Visualize yourself doing a good job.
• Most importantly, practice, practice, practice! Speak in front of a mirror or for your spouse or a coworker. Talk to yourself while stuck in traffic or doing household chores. The more you practice, the more confident you’ll become.

Questions

Decide in advance how you’ll handle questions and explain your preferences to the audience. Many presenters prefer to hold questions until the end of their remarks (or the end of each section) to reduce the likelihood that the agenda isn’t disrupted too much. But requesting questions at section breaks can also backfire if no one ever asks anything. You can plan for this situation by preparing a few “common questions” to introduce on your own.

If you decide to allow impromptu audience questions, make sure you are maintaining enough eye contact to notice if someone has raised their hand. It’s also important to be able to pick up where you left off and plan ways to potentially trim back some topics if time spent on audience questions begins impacting your schedule.

Another technique is to include a question page in the handout materials or small note cards that can be dropped in an “Ask It Basket.” All questions can then be reviewed and discussed near the end of the presentation.

Encourage attendees to stay after the program to discuss any questions on an individual basis. This will give you a better opportunity to establish connections, understand attendees’ personal situation, and get valuable one-on-one feedback. Ending your meeting with lunch, dessert, or snacks may improve the likelihood that participants will linger to ask questions.

Low attendance

What if only one or two people show up for your seminar? Experienced presenters would say to adjust your style from a formal presentation to an informal one-on-one conversation. Present the same information, answer questions, and do the same follow-up. Remember, any attendee who made the effort and took the time to come to your seminar deserves your respect and is entitled to hear the material.
Step 4  Follow-up
Follow-up considerations

Congratulations on completing your home buyer seminar! If this is your first seminar, relish in the knowledge that each successive one becomes easier and increasingly effective. Once your program is over, you’ll want to focus on these important activities:

Your next seminar

Ideally, you should have already scheduled your next seminar. That way you can announce it at the conclusion of your meeting and include details in your handouts. Encourage attendees to let others know about the program, supplementing your own promotion efforts with word-of-mouth marketing.

Turn attendees into clients

Stay in touch with participants. Recognize that it may be a while before they are ready to begin the home purchase process. For example, time may be needed to work out credit problems, save for a down payment, or finish the term of a lease.

A key to turning seminar attendees into clients is timely follow-up. Within 24 to 48 hours after the seminar, send a note thanking them for their attendance. These notes can be written ahead of time; after the seminar just fill in the salutation (Dear Mr. or Mrs. Last Name), add the address and drop the note in the mail.

You can also follow up by phone and/or e-mail with an offer to answer questions or provide additional information. Invite the attendee to meet with you for a free, one-on-one counseling session or credit review. Just be sure that your follow-up efforts comply with any regulations on telemarketing, faxing, and e-mail. For up-to-date information on Do Not Call, Do Not E-mail, and Do Not Fax regulations, go to REALTOR.org.*

Evaluate your results

The best time to assess your seminar is immediately after it is over. Note what was effective and any areas that need improvement, both from your own observations and from attendees’ feedback.

Don’t forget to plan a debriefing session with your partners and sponsors. It will give you an opportunity to talk about improving future programs and share leads.

Following are some of the aspects you’ll want to include in your evaluation:

- presenter’s preparation
- presentation materials
- handouts
- topics covered
- meeting room facilities
- refreshments
- audio visual equipment
- scheduling
- seminar follow-up
- advance promotion
- sponsor participation and recognition

Final thoughts

Home buyer seminars are a proven marketing technique well-suited for buyer’s representatives interested in demonstrating their expertise and cultivating business-building relationships with consumers. In addition to the steps outlined in this guide, you can also refer to the planning timeline on the following pages.

We hope this guide helps you find success through home buyer seminars. As always, we welcome your input on this or other REBAC member materials. To share your thoughts, please contact us at REBAC@realtors.org.

* Note: As of this writing, Canada’s regulations regarding Do Not Call, etc. vary from those in the U.S.
## Seminar Planning Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8 Weeks Out</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience/Topic</td>
<td>Decide what kind of seminar you want to present and who would benefit from attending.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7 Weeks Out</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sponsors/Partners</td>
<td>Approach potential sponsors or partners about working together. Agree on responsibilities and time table. Confirm details in writing.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6 Weeks Out</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Room</td>
<td>Select a date, time and location for your seminar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee or Free?</td>
<td>Decide what your attendance policies will be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>Assign roles to any assistants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Finalize your plans to promote the seminar and complete work, over the next two weeks, on any Web pages, invitations, printed flyers and ads.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Weeks Out</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Development</td>
<td>Begin researching and compiling your presentation content. If other speakers are involved, coordinate content details with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcements</td>
<td>Make sure your event is included in any community announcements and calendars, online and physical bulletin boards, etc.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 Weeks Out</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Send all invitations (mail, e-mail, social networks, etc.) and complete other remaining promotion activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handouts</td>
<td>Finalize handout materials, including information on your company and services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Forms</td>
<td>Prepare a simple but useful feedback form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Toolkit</td>
<td>Assemble all other seminar supplies (pens, name tags, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio/Video Equipment</td>
<td>Determine what equipment will be needed and make rental arrangements, if necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/V Tools</td>
<td>Pull together any markers, easels, etc. to supplement your presentation equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refreshments</td>
<td>If serving food and drinks, make necessary arrangements.</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 Weeks Out</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Finalize your presentation content, including coordination with any partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Begin rehearsing your presentation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Weeks Out</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Mention the event on social networks and to key contacts. Encourage sponsors and partners to talk up the seminar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Continue rehearsing your presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Week Out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank-you Notes</td>
<td>Prepare notes or letters to send to attendees the day after the seminar. Do the same for any sponsors or partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics</td>
<td>Reconfirm room arrangements, audio/video equipment, refreshments, etc. with any assistants or facility managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handouts</td>
<td>Assemble all handout material into folders; pull together any other materials you want to have on hand (e.g., extra business cards).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Put the final touches on your presentation remarks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Days Before the Seminar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminders</td>
<td>If attendees have registered in advance, remind them of the event via phone or e-mail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of the Seminar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room Set-up</td>
<td>All presenters and assistants should arrive up to two hours early to help arrange seating, registration, handouts, food/drinks, and test all presentation equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Make sure you can stay late to answer attendees’ questions and respond to any immediate business opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up Planning</td>
<td>Agree on a day/time to meet with sponsors or partners for a post-seminar evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day After the Seminar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank-You Notes</td>
<td>Send previously-prepared thank-you notes and letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handouts</td>
<td>Send handout materials to those who didn’t attend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Forms</td>
<td>Review attendee feedback and note any areas for improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5 Days After the Seminar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up Meeting</td>
<td>Meet with sponsors/partners to review participant feedback and discuss adjustments for next seminar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendee Follow-up</td>
<td>Enter attendees’ information into a contact management system to ensure that future follow-up occurs and complies with any regulations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next Steps</td>
<td>Begin planning your next seminar!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>