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### Marketing Strategy for Maximum Exposure Is This VA's Strength ...

A strong background in marketing and an entrepreneurial spirit launched VA Pam Ivey into [Visual Persuasions Canada](#), a VA practice specializing in marketing strategies that help clients stay first in the minds of their customers. Here's her story.

**MI:** How long have you been working as a virtual assistant, and what started you on the path to becoming a VA?

**PI:** I've been working as a virtual assistant since 2001. I've always possessed an entrepreneurial mindset, a love of computers and the Internet, and have always enjoyed creative endeavors. That, coupled with my administrative and marketing background, several web and graphic design courses, formal small business management training, and encouragement from those around me, led to the launch of Visual Persuasions Canada.

**MI:** Tell us something about your previous work experience that helped you build the skills you use as a VA providing support services.

**PI:** I've been in the workforce for a little over 20 years. (Wow. I wonder if that wouldn't sound so bad if I said it really fast!) Early in my career, I worked through temporary agencies for several different businesses including a university, hospital, real estate office, legal office and an insurance brokerage. This was an excellent way to gain experience in many different facets of running a business.

I started and ran a successful faux finishing business at a time when the industry was just breaking into mainstream decorating, and got out just as the market was becoming saturated by a slew of new decorative painting firms. This experience helped me to understand the intricacies of working with clients, marketing myself and my business and balancing budgets and projects.

For six years, I worked as a marketing manager for a wholesale electrical supply company and decorative lighting showroom. This experience was invaluable in assisting me to understand the intricacies of working with the media, dealing with advertising agencies, printers, cooperative marketing programs, and suppliers. I also organized large trade shows and other events, prepared and monitoring budgets and designed all of the creative for the business.

I also have several years experience as an office manager and executive assistant to two vice presidents in a large international corporation that provided me with a great deal of experience with the most popular business software programs, researching, recommending and coordinating office equipment, policies and procedures and appropriate tools.

**MI:** Did you complete any training or certification to help you obtain the skills and knowledge you need to work as a VA?

**PI:** Most recently, I became certified in Real Estate Virtual Assisting through CyberStarVa ([www.CyberStarVA.com](http://www.CyberStarVA.com)), and

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earned my CCSVA designation. The courses (ten in all), ranged from listing coordination to lead, risk and transaction management.

In 1993, I graduated with honors and became certified in Small Business Management from Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. The main thrust of this program was to produce a comprehensive business and marketing plan and present it to several business and community leaders from the financial, legal and corporate sectors.

In between, I have taken many college, university and online courses for such things as marketing, publicity and public relations, marketing communications, web design, Flash, PhotoShop, Dreamweaver, and advanced Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

**MI: What are some of the services you provide in your VA business?**

**PI:** Marketing is the basis for the services offered by my VA business. Listing coordination, marketing and branding strategy, public relations, lead generation, and contact management are the primary services offered by Visual Persuasions.

I think it's important to note that while I am located in Canada, my services are not restricted by borders. I am currently working with agents in both Canada and the U.S., and with the use of the Internet, instant messaging, telephone, and courier services, I'm only across the "electronic street" from your location. Local real estate laws, rules and regulations are also easily accessible and are only a click away.

**MI: What made you decide to focus on providing virtual support for real estate clients?**

**PI:** When I sold my last home, I very quickly discovered the lack of good marketing among real estate agents. For those that knew how to market themselves successfully, they were just too busy to get back to me in a reasonable amount of time when I called. (Yes, I'm one of those demanding clients - A "computer nerd" with a self-proclaimed addiction to the Internet, I expect a quick response...just like so many other buyers and sellers out there!) Always thinking like an entrepreneur, I immediately saw an opportunity and switched gears from a marketer/web designer "for the masses" and began my focus on the real estate industry. That's when my business really began to blossom. I just needed to find my "niche" and now that I have, I'm excited to work with a variety of great people in a very exciting industry!

**MI: How did concentrating in this area make a difference in your business?**

**PI:** Once focused on the real estate industry, my business really started to take off! With advocates such as yourself and Allen Hainge of CyberStars®, more and more real estate professionals are aware of and actively seeking out the help of a professional virtual assistant to take their practice to the next level.

With this refined focus, I found myself discussing my business and services with interested and motivated prospects, rather than having to explain and convince potential clients in other industries of the purpose and advantages of working with a VA.

**MI: You mentioned a focus on marketing strategies: tell us more about what this entails for your real estate clients.**

**PI:** "Getting your name out there" is a common goal for most REPs. Effective branding is a crucial effort that if not planned and executed according to a specific strategy, can be less than effective and more expensive than desirable. With assistance from Visual Persuasions, an agent can create a realistic and focused effort to fit their budget. This process involves the agent in establishing realistic goals, an affordable budget, and provides

tools to execute the plan. Measuring the effectiveness of your marketing and branding effort is also an important facet of the process, which Visual Persuasion can help achieve.

**MI: Why is helping your clients create branding so important? How do you help them accomplish this?**

**PI:** We've all read the statistics that more than 75% of buyers and sellers choose the initial agent they contact to handle their real estate transactions. With that said, being the first agent that comes to mind is critical.

I help my clients define their unique branding position through logo design and tag line creation, and work with them to develop "that something special," such as the addition or proclamation of a value-added service not currently being offered by other area REPs. Differentiation is the key to branding strategy: the goal here is to have buyers and sellers prefer my client's service over that of his or her competition.

The next step is to let the world (or my client's world) know about it. Through carefully researched and selected advertising venues, along with public relations activities, I communicate my client's brand strategy to his or her target market.

One of my clients with over a decade in the business, approached me for help in taking her practice up a notch. The majority of her current marketing material: postcards, flyers and listing ads, highlighted information about her: that she represents the #1 area agency, that she sells more homes than the competition, that she constantly attends courses and seminars, etc. I asked her to look at her material from a potential seller or buyer's standpoint: "What's in it for me?" and we worked together to define her target audience. What kind of people are they? What do they want? What are they afraid of? What challenges do they face? From this information, we created a branding strategy with the prospects' motivation in mind. Instead of "I do or I am...", think "I can do..., which will help you by..." We developed a customer-focused logo and slogan and then created and executed a six month drip marketing campaign. We also approached a local newspaper to write a weekly column on working with a real estate agent. By the end of the drip campaign, and with the publicity received from the regular column, she achieved an 8% call rate that converted into 7 new listings and 3 buyers!

**MI: Explain more about how you assist real estate professionals with PR work**

**PI:** I've found that public relations is an under-utilized promotional tactic for most REPs. That's unfortunate, because it's often a very low-cost, high-value activity to achieve more recognition of the real estate professional and his or her brand strategy.

I work with the media in order to obtain free and low-cost advertising for my clients in the form of articles and editorial pieces. (The public is much more likely to trust information in articles and editorials over information found in advertising.) It's a smart strategy to receive name and brand recognition without having to pay for it all the time!

With the advent of RSS and other newsfeeds, online PR can also be a powerful tool to add to a REP's arsenal. "Google" different words or phrases and you'll often find PR pieces from newsfeeds in your search results. Along with traditional press kits, press releases and written articles, I can also create key-word rich pieces designed for online distribution.

Working with the media can be a huge time-gobbler: something a REP cannot afford to waste if he or she wants to get to the top of their profession. There's just no time to be chasing the media and submitting and resubmitting PR material. This is an excellent service to hire out to your professional real estate assistant!

**MI: What do you find most rewarding about working as a VA**

supporting real estate professionals?

**PI:** I really enjoy working with real estate professionals because the work and the people are so varied and challenging. Many are brimming with ideas and excited to try some of the techniques and tools they've heard or read about. It certainly keeps me on my toes!

(Also, I'm pretty competitive by nature and quite honestly, I get a real kick each time one of my clients lands a new listing or scoops a deal from one of their competitors!)

**MI:** How would you describe the ideal REALTOR®/VA relationship?

**PI:** The ideal REALTOR®/VA relationship involves honesty and trust. A comfortable and open relationship is key because the REALTOR® needs to discuss their budgets, goals, dreams and more with his or her virtual assistant in order for the VA to be most effective. It is also critical that both the REALTOR® and the VA remain focused. It's tempting and very easy to get distracted by dozens of different ideas but better results can be realized by working with a systematic plan.

**MI:** Pam, thanks for taking the time to talk with us today. You've given us some great ideas and strategies for marketing.

**PI:** Thanks, Michael. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss my business and services with you and your readers.

To learn more about Pam and her services just send her an email at [pivey@visualpersuasions.ca](mailto:pivey@visualpersuasions.ca) or call her at **705-321-7091**.

Always remember to do a thorough due-diligence before hiring any kind of assistant. This interview is part of an ongoing series of VA profiles designed to help you find the perfect VA or VA team to help you get organized, profitable, and in control of your business.

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