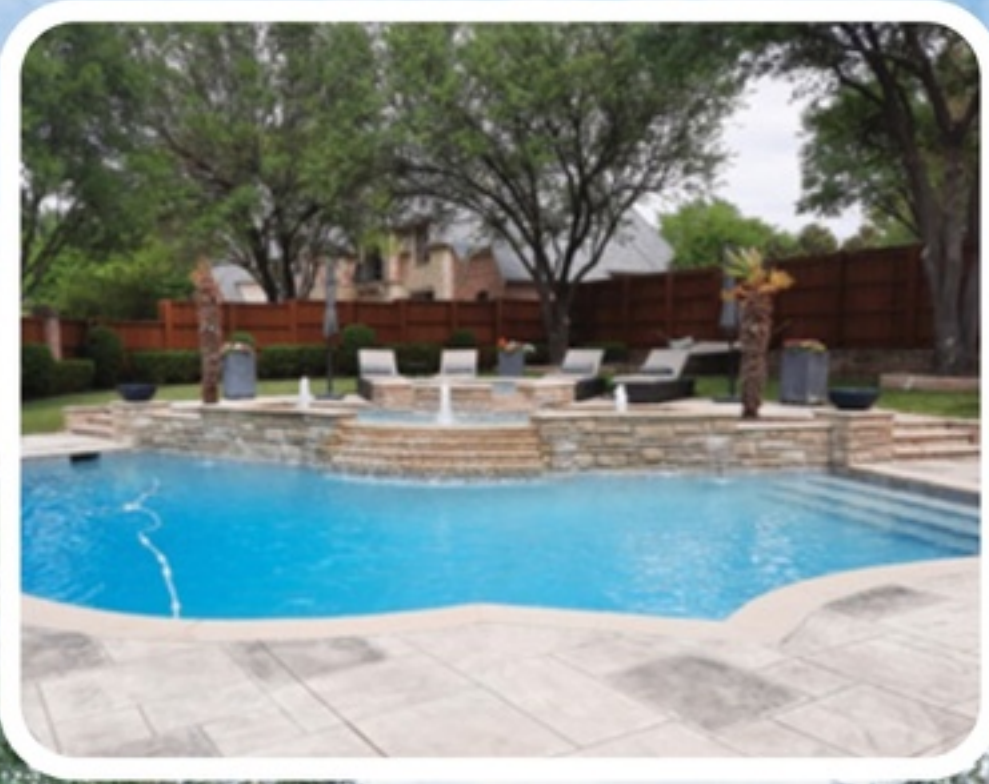


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MARCH 2024

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BY BRETT LLOYD ABBOTT



FOCUS ON REFERRALS IN 2024

When internet leads go down, shift your focus to word-of-mouth

HERE IT IS, ANOTHER busy season is approaching and another round-up of my recommendations for promoting your swimming pool business.

One of my personal goals this year is to streamline operations, which is why I'm streamlining my recommendations. Rather than regurgitate my old sermons from the past, I'll just give you a summary of what I said last year and the year before. That way, we can jump right into the new and unique considerations for this season.

My advice for 2023: "Get clear, nimble and sharp." This meant:

- Get clear in your messaging.
- Be nimble and ready to adjust your business offerings to align with the changing market.
- "Sharpen your ax" in everything

you do — both online and "in the real world."

My "Smart Marketing Recommendations for 2022" reiterated the basic marketing necessities for pool builders:

- A great website
- A compelling "Brand Story"
- Sophisticated marketing automation
- An easy-to-use sales CRM
- Intelligent lead generation
- Proper use of video
- And proper use of social media

Now that we've got that out of the way, let me share my unique presentiments for this year.

Firstly, I'm seeing a bit of a balance shift between "internet leads" and referrals. Historically (for like the last 18 years), I've observed that most good pool builders get about 40% of their

new leads from the internet, and about 40% of their leads from referrals. (The remaining 20% is a mishmash of yard signs, truck signage, partnerships, etc.)

What I'm seeing in the United States, is Google searches for "swimming pool builder" have fallen off a cliff, for two big reasons. First, many homeowners who might buy a pool in 2024 already bought that pool in a panic during the pandemic. Second, the interest rates and the economic uncertainty have scared a lot of potential pool buyers out of the market, and over to the sidelines.

If most of your business comes from internet leads, then you've probably been feeling this pinch all along. This trend seems especially stark in the larger metropolitan areas, where you have lots of pool builders fighting over a dwindling supply of leads. Not a very pretty situation.

While Google searches are down, it seems NEW PERMITS in most of

these cities have NOT fallen off a cliff like you might expect.

My observation is that there is a stratum of society that (1) has the financial resources to purchase a beautiful backyard dream without financing, and (2) they aren't likely to go search Google for a builder. They will, instead, reach out to their similarly wealthy friends, and get recommendations from them instead.

If you are one of those rare builders who gets 80% of their business from referrals, then you're probably asking, "What slowdown? I'm as busy as ever!" You are fortunate to reach that societal stratum of pool buyers which remains invisible to builders who rely on internet searches.

Bottom line: If your internet search leads have reduced to a trickle, you might want to put more emphasis on nurturing referrals.

Let me offer some quick tips on how to do that:

1. Pay extra attention to the homeowner's "experience" of working with you. Make sure everyone on your team views every client as a dear friend, rather than just a customer.
2. Communicate with them regularly to make sure they remain happy throughout the entire process, despite all the typical challenges and setbacks that beset most outdoor construction projects.
3. Try the "FatTowel" / "Thank-you meeting" strategy I've recommended for years. (Basically, you leverage the law of reciprocity by giving them a nice, unexpected gift that will last and be remembered for many years.)
4. Go one step further and sponsor a "Pool Party" for those ideal clients who have friends you would like to meet. Offer \$500 to \$1000 in food catering, in return for letting you hang out and meet everyone. (It's also a perfect opportunity to get some great video footage, by the way.)
5. Continue to communicate with them long after the project is completed. (My personal favorite here is the automated "Happy Birthday to Your Swimming Pool!" e-mail we are now sending to all

our client's clients.)

You may have noticed that I did not suggest "Start a referral program!" If you currently have one, I'm not suggesting you shut it off. I am, however, suggesting (1) most wealthy homeowners are not motivated by your promise of \$500 for the next \$200,000 referral they give you, and (2) you would be much wiser to invest your time and dollars in the

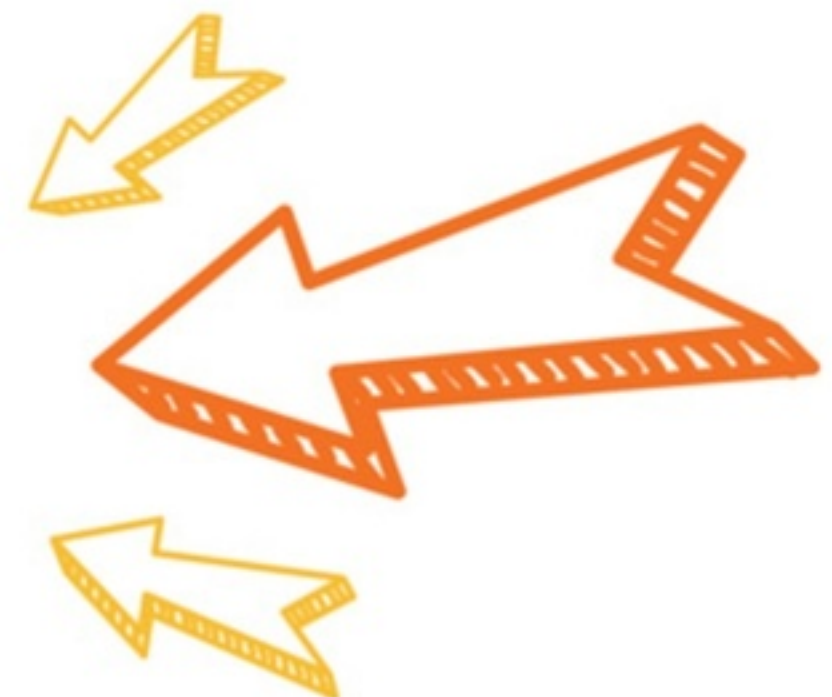
five strategies previously mentioned instead. ~

Brett Lloyd Abbott is the founder and CEO of Pool Builder Marketing LLC (www.PoolBuilderMarketing.com), a marketing consulting agency that works exclusively with swimming pool builders, pool service companies and high-end landscape professionals throughout the world. He is a frequent keynote speaker and leader of workshops and seminars.



The AQUA 2024 State of the Industry Survey is OPEN!

Help us determine the state of the pool & spa industry by making your voice heard. Scan the QR code below to submit your response before it's too late.



Submission Deadline: March 13, 2024