

# The Ultimate Agent Guide to **SUCCESSFUL FARMING**



## Farming.

No, we aren't talking about planting and harvesting corn or other farm crops. We are talking real estate "farming." In real estate farming – like corn farming – the agent "plants the seeds" that will grow into future business. Like a farmer, you nurture and cultivate those seeds, growing them into future business.

There are two main types of farming in real estate: geographic farming (geo-farming) and niche farming.

Geo-farming is targeting a specific area or neighborhood. What size or composition of neighborhood depends on several factors. In some areas, a good-sized geo-farm might be the entire town, a ZIP code or a subdivision.

Niche farming directs your activities to a type of buyer (or seller) as opposed to a physical location as in geo-farming. You could farm first-time buyers, investors, move up buyers, move down sellers, golfers, pilots, engineers, and buyers and sellers in a certain price range – the sky is the limit with niche farming.

## Selecting a Farming Area

In farming, **SIZE MATTERS**. In geo-farming, inventory turnover also matters. There is not much point in wasting your time, effort and dollars farming an area where there aren't enough homes bought and sold to make your efforts worthwhile. You'll need to determine the inventory turnover rate of areas you are considering farming.

Inventory turnover can be examined via your MLS or other sources of home sale data such as Zillow Real Estate Research and Zillow Local Market Overviews.

Inventory turnover isn't really a factor when considering niche farming. You want your niche to be a reasonable size. "PGA tour golfers in the top 50 money list" isn't a very large niche. You'll only have 50 people to try to reach. "People looking to buy golf course homes" expands your potential farming pool to a large number of people. "Anyone who has ever heard the word 'golf'" is too large a farm. Find a balance between size and turnover to optimize your farming efforts.

Another consideration when choosing a farm is to look at what your **COMPETITORS** are doing. Let's say you find the perfect subdivision to farm. Maybe it has 1,000 homes with an average of 200 homes sold per year. You think, "If I could just capture 10 percent of that farm area, that's 20 more sales per year."

So you dump time, money and effort into reaching those 1,000 homeowners. The phone never rings. No one ever emails. Your marketing material is brilliant, so why are people not calling?

Because someone has been farming that area for the past 10 years. They blanket the neighborhood monthly with mailers. They have for sale signs scattered in yards across the area. Everyone knows his or her name.

In other words, another agent has a lock on the farm area.

Sure, you could try to compete. Find out what that agent does and offer something else that is **DIFFERENT AND COMPELLING**. Just be prepared for a long battle, and know that your opponent in the battle has a 10-year head start on you.

Or, you could find another geo-area to farm that no one else is working. Don't assume it's a "bad area." Do your due diligence. There are probably many undiscovered farm areas out there. Go discover one.

# Farming Materials

You've found the ideal geo-area or target niche to farm. Now what? How do you connect with consumers in your farm?

## Traditional Farming Materials

Back in the days before the Internet and email, farming was usually accomplished via direct mail – because direct mail (or door knocking) was the only way to put something in someone's hands.

Direct mail still works. It may get put down by the tech set, and generally speaking, electronic delivery is less expensive than direct mail, but six days a week people still go to their mailboxes.

### **TRADITIONAL FARMING MATERIALS INCLUDE:**

- Newsletters
- Just listed and just sold notices
- Postcards, flyers, market reports and the like.

No matter what you decide to do, your farming materials need to offer something of value to the recipient.

Yes, a recipe for a tasty side dish might be “of value” to someone, but you need to provide real estate value. You are a real estate agent, not a chef or baker. Sports schedules? Given that any team's schedule for any year is readily accessible on the Internet, there just isn't much value in providing a sport's schedule.

Stick to real estate. That's your area of expertise, and farming is a great way to demonstrate your expertise.

## Traditional Farming Delivery

Nothing beats the U.S. Postal Service for efficiently getting printed material into the hands of people. It's relatively inexpensive. Look into bulk mail or Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) offered by the postal service to reduce costs over first-class mail.

You might want to mix things up a little bit. Add a little variety into your delivery method. Consider the tried-and-true door knocking. Print your materials, walk up to a door in the farm area and knock.

With something of value in hand, it makes it easy to open a dialogue with a stranger.

“Hi, I’m not here to try to sell you anything. I just wanted to drop off this real estate market report for your neighborhood. My contact info is there. Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you ever have any questions.”

**THAT’S IT.** Yes, some will take your material and deposit it directly into the trashcan before the door even closes. But you know what? They are throwing away your mailings and not opening your email either.

Getting face-to-face with someone that lives in your geo-farm is rarely a bad idea.

## Electronic Farming Delivery

The advent of the Internet and email has unleashed an amazing – and inexpensive – content delivery system. **USE IT TO YOUR ADVANTAGE.**

Anything that can be delivered via postal mail or door knocking can be converted into a format for electronic delivery. The problem with electronic vs. postal delivery is acquiring contact information. It’s quite simple to get a large set of physical addresses. It’s much more difficult to get the email address of everyone that lives in a neighborhood.

Enter the “combination delivery method.”

Do both postal and electronic delivery. Any and every piece of marketing or branding collateral that you send in the mail or drop off in person should have a link to your website, your phone number and email address.

Where you send people is critical for success. Many agents put the URL of their home page, and only their home page, on mailings. Try sending people to a page that complements the mailing instead.

If you are sending a “Just Listed” flyer or postcard, build a page on your website that shows recent listings in the area. Use that URL on your mailing, not the home page. If you want to get

fancy and start collecting those email addresses, use a short form on your site that asks for name and email address in order to download the additional information. You'll know what geo-farm area the person lives in because you are including area-specific URLs on each of your mailings.

Sending out a newsletter? Include a **PROMINENT CALL TO ACTION** in your newsletter that directs people to a webpage where they can get additional information or register for electronic delivery.

## Consistency is Key

There are **THREE THINGS THAT ARE CRITICAL** for the success of any farming activity – the message, the quality of the delivery platform and consistency.

You can have ridiculously useful information and put it into the most gorgeously designed format, but if you don't send out your messaging consistently, all that time, effort and expense will be for naught.

Sure, you may get lucky and send something at the exact moment in time that someone is looking for agent, but that's "shotgun farming" – where you just blast away firing randomly in the hope that you hit something.

Farming works because it exposes people to you over time. The number of "touches" required to become top of mind in someone's eye varies wildly, but it's a much larger number than one. Many sales experts feel that farming materials should be sent out at least monthly, and expect to do so for a year before seeing any consistent results.

You have to do it month after month after month. This is where most agents fail with farming. They give up too soon.

### **CONSISTENCY IS KEY.**

Pro tip: Blogging is often called "electronic farming." If you have a blog, or are interested in starting one, consistency is also critical to success. Don't expect results from blogging for 12 months.

# Thinking Outside the Box

When most agents hear “farming” they think newsletters and just listed or sold postcards. They have visions of standing in line at the post office, holding a box of mailers, wondering how many are going to be returned undeliverable.

Sending a newsletter or postcard is an agent’s first idea because they’ve been around the longest. They’ve been around a long time for one reason – they work.

Sometimes, however, **IT’S GOOD TO BE DIFFERENT.** It helps you stand out in a sea of agents. While certainly not new, one way to farm is through sponsorships. There’s the traditional sponsoring of a Little League team. That gets points with many for community involvement, but your messaging really only winds up on the back of a 12 year old who plays once a week.

Remember, consistency is key in ALL farming, and it’s hard to deliver consistent messaging via sponsoring a local sports team. But don’t discount the good will that can produce.

Instead of – or in addition to – sponsoring a team, consider sponsoring things like:

- Community events
- A table at a flea market, a bridal show, or any place where large amounts of people gather.
- A food drive
- School fundraising events

**PRO-TIP:** Check with your CPA. Sponsorships may be tax deductible.

The idea is to find something to sponsor that has a built-in audience where you can not necessarily deliver farming materials, but can meet and engage with people in a neutral, non-real estate sales-centric fashion, and expand your sphere of influence (SOI). You are regularly sending your SOI farming materials, aren’t you?

Having a bit of a struggle funding your farming efforts? Why not “partner” with a lender to help absorb costs. Co-marketing with a lender – where their contact info is included on your farming materials – is a great way to reduce expenses. Be sure to confirm with your broker how to do this properly.

Build a nice website dedicated to your farm. Recall that ideally you want to send out both printed and electronic materials. So you want a web address on every piece of printed material.

Remember not to send people only to your home page. Send them to a page specifically made to address the farm.

Or, set up a nice website that is dedicated to nothing but your farm and send them there. Zillow Premier Agent Websites are very affordable – and already included if you are a current Premier Agent – and are ideal for developing a niche farming website.

## Summary

Unless you have the good fortune of being very well-established for a long time in an area and can rely on nothing but referrals from past clients to make a living, you are going to have to prospect and generate leads. Putting “all your eggs in one basket” isn’t the best idea, so multiple sources of lead generation makes sense.

You can (and should!) take advantage of all Zillow has to offer. It’s a great resource and marketing platform, and comes with a built-in contact management and forwarding system, agent websites, free training and more.

You can (and should!) consider establishing (or growing) a geo-farm and/or a niche farm. Farming complements other forms of marketing, branding and lead generation. It doesn’t have to be “old school.” You can make your farming materials and delivery as simple or as fancy as you’d like. Electronic and traditional farming allows you to expand your business and become a more successful agent.

## Want to Bolster Your Business?

We can help. Learn more about the Zillow Premier Agent Program:

**[www.zillow.com/advertising/agent-advertising](http://www.zillow.com/advertising/agent-advertising)**

or call **[1.855.411.3631](tel:1.855.411.3631)**