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Guide for Creating a DBA Realty Company

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Introduction

If you have a real estate license in Atlanta Georgia it has been said you are a member of a select, 35,000 – 50,000 member, group. But, ask anyone working in Atlanta real estate and they will tell you it feels like the group is at least three times larger. It certainly seems as though everyone you meet is only one degree separated from knowing someone else with a real estate license. So how does a single agent stand out in a sea of other agents the size of a sold-out Georgia Dome?

Branding!

Today's entrepreneurially-minded agents view marketing much differently from the franchise-based agents of the past. Today's agents prefer to "create" brands rather than being forced them.

Look for innovations in agent branding to be the keystone to a tsunami of changes in how an agent sells himself.

This document is meant to be a step-by-step overview of how any licensed real estate agent can create their own DBA Realty. It is assumed, agents considering DBAs are versed in social media and Internet-related communication platforms.

While some may think a DBA Realty is a free pass to conduct business in any manner they see fit, nothing could be further from the truth.

A DBA Realty has recognized State status under the license of their Sponsoring Broker and must conform to all the rules and regulations of that Broker.

DBA status is a "branding product" offered by Brokers for their agents. DBA status should not be confused with legal incorporation.

Agents are encouraged to incorporate but it is not a requirement of the DBA Program.

Understanding the Brand Concept

Traditionally, agents were given the brand of their affiliated Broker. While providing some identification value, this formulaic, template-driven marketing and branding of the franchise was more about benefiting the national Brokerage and its “brand”. Agents found little or no brand benefit from being lumped into the same group as thousands of others with exactly the same balloon colors.

Agent entrepreneurialism was frowned upon, conformity to the “Name Your Franchise, Way” was cheered on passionately at rallies. And, yes, it was as creepy as it sounds.

Thankfully times change and so do agent strategies toward customer acquisition.

What is a brand? Sadly, there is no simple answer. For our purposes we will view branding as a platform from which an agent can; identify, generate, qualify, quantify and protect potential leads for business. Yes, it’s a mouthful.

Additionally, and totally lost in the franchise system, a brand is a reflection of the agent. What does an agent’s selection in brand say about them? How do agents use the reflection of a brand to sell themselves?

What does a national franchise brand say about a sales agent in Tucker, Georgia? If you guessed, “absolutely nothing”, you would be absolutely correct.

Today, agents can build their own brands OR settle for what a franchise is selling. (Either way, everyone gets a monthly recruiting email from Prudential)

When developing a brand that has meaning to an agent, it is critical to develop a storyline incorporating the agent and the brand together. The storyline idea is rather hard to explain upfront and is best described through the following illustrative examples.

DBA Origins

Our DBA Program’s roots comes from a discussion with an estate lawyer on how businesses can transfer to spouses.

Look at the agents most often found on expensive billboard advertising. Their names, and faces along with their franchise logo have become their brand. In some instances, these agents have spent decades developing their name and face. They have spent tens of thousands of dollars promoting their franchise brand.

After a decade of brand building and all the money spent, EXACTLY what does a spouse inherit from the business in the event of an untimely demise? NOTHING!

Instead of promoting a franchise brand, wouldn’t agents be better off spending their time and money developing something of value that could be passed down in the event of a disaster? If a family was financially depending on a brand that dies, how do they recover? The brand is over.

With a DBA, agents create something larger than themselves.

To demonstrate the depth of options an agent has we have categorized branding in the following areas.

Universal Brands—are commonly understood and generally relatable to everyone. For example; Chattahoochee Realty, Dogwood Realty, Piedmont Realty and or anything with the word “peach” Realty. These are nice names, but they are so broad their effective meaning is lost. What and how does this reflect back on the agent? Furthermore, these brands are tough to target and expensive to implement.

Affinity Brands—are probably the most targeted branding philosophy. Ask a simple question. What is your hobby? What do you like doing?

Chances are others have similar interest which makes this style of branding storyline friendly.

Perhaps you are an avid dart player. Why not start, Dart Realty? It has nothing to do with real estate and that’s the point. There is a large community of fellow dart players all over town who hold regular tournaments. There are communications systems between groups, clubs and fellow fans. Develop a DBA that reflects YOUR community of interest.

Like talking cars? What aspect of the car hobby could an agent identify with and target as a group? Up-on-Blocks Realty could specialize in both auto storage and properties with multi-bay garages .

Affinity brands are often in sync with the interests of the agent making them an ideal cost effective option.

Vanity Brands—if the 1990’s ever make a comeback, this is your strategy. Historically, agents hemmed in by strict franchise requirements had little choice but to “Trump” it up. Oddly, unlike its namesake, today’s agents have cut significantly back on self-boasting and hysterical prestige positioning. (Specializing in “Atlanta’s Elite Homes of Distinction”, out of an apartment in Snellville, probably never fooled anyone anyway)

Vanity brands are silly and expensive. Remember, our trade isn’t about the agent. And, despite what anyone sees on HGTV, the agent is not the star in a real estate

transaction.

While the agent may believe in their own brand, convincing others will be costly in large part because the potential pool of prospects is everyone.

Community Brands—this strategy requires a DBA to be created in the name of an already known realty brand. Recently, Wynd Realty created Inman Park Realty as an example of a CBR (Community-Branded Realty)

Agents have been selling into Inman Park for generations. Yet, no one ever thought of creating an Inman Park Realty? This oversight demonstrates how the franchise system stifles creativity and how agents may be missing branding opportunities. For a detailed overview of a CBR strategy, visit: www.InmanParkRealty.com, [/InmanParkRealty](https://www.facebook.com/InmanParkRealty) and [@InmanParkRealty](https://www.instagram.com/InmanParkRealty). Atlanta’s first CBR Realty.

*Would a Golf Cart Realty
be a good brand?*

It may in Peachtree City

Lifestyle Brands—reflect how people actually live and not how they wish to. Think of it as being similar to a Vanity Brand, but rooted in reality. An agent probably shouldn't start Horse Breeders Realty without having direct knowledge of that lifestyle. Coastal, urban, gay, vegan and retirement are all examples of a potential lifestyle brands.

It takes one to know one. If I am buying a horse farm, I might want an agent who really knows horses. Could a 30-year-old possibly know the needs of the retiring?

Can the way you live be categorized into a lifestyle brand? If so, sell what you know.

Tag-Line Brands—can be both effective and annoying. Well, mostly annoying. Everyone in Atlanta collectively moans when they hear; “one call, that's all”. And yet, everyone knows exactly who it means. Say what you will about it, but the “One-Call” campaign has been hugely successful.

Tag-line branding requires a very long term strategy. Its success is based on repetition. Its success is based on repetition. And, repetition over the long haul is very expensive. Great for lawyers, carpet installers and those dealing in things that don't flush. Did we mention lawyers?

Created Brands—while potentially inventive, this strategy is not recommended for real estate sales agents. “EnClaire”, kind of sounds real estate-ish. But why spend the time developing it. If inventing names is your thing, the pharmacy industry is calling.

BoGar Realty (the combination of two college greek nick names) isn't a good idea on many branding levels. Creating brands that only you are “in on” kind of defeats the whole purpose.

Conclusion

Our point is, agents are finding new ways for branding messages to bring them business. We can guide agents on how to create a DBA, but ultimately it is up to the agent to make their own brand value determinations.

Keller Williams was correct decades ago when they identified the sales agent as being in the customer acquisition business. That business is based on lead-generation.

Agents can no longer wait for their Broker to give them leads. (Did they ever?) And, paying for poor quality leads is a terrible experience.

Through DBAs, agents can and are, creating their OWN leads—imagine that.

Tag-Line FLASHBACK

When the Internet was fairly new in real estate, agents tried to leverage technology with clever wit. “Click of a mouse to buy a house” was an actual tag line. While adorable, its simply not that practical as a platform for growth.

Additionally an agent's email address should not be considered a brand. Yes, we all know there is only one KayeSell-sAtlanta@blah-blah.com , but that doesn't mean it has value. You are standing in Atlanta, I would expect an agent name Kaye to “sell in Atlanta”.

Naming Your DBA

This is the single biggest decision to be made. Give it some thought. The idea behind creating a DBA is to develop a brand that will generate leads which ultimately will turn into revenue. What name or what brand has the best chance of bringing an agent potential leads? We note “leads” on purpose. It is a salespersons job to turn leads into customers. No program in the world delivers ready-made customers. So, look to achieve lead volume in any name or branding platform you choose.

After a name is selected the first hurdle to “clear” is your name with the Clerk of Courts from your County of Registration. If you live in Fulton County, contact the Clerk of Courts for Fulton County. Tell them you want to clear a “trade name”. They will tell you if the name is clear and usable. Do not proceed with a DBA without clearing the name first.

There are two reasons for this step: 1) to ensure the name isn't already taken and, 2) the name is viable as a trade name. Some names are not trade nameable; Coca Cola Realty for example, unless your first name happens to be Coca and your last name is actually Cola. Racist, sexist and generally distasteful names are illegal as well.

Some potential names an agent may come up with could be too generic to be trade named. Call your Clerk of Courts.

Remember to be very specific on spelling when making your request. There are no grey areas when dealing with governmental agencies.

Gather Your Social Platforms

You may have the world's best trade name but without the appropriate corresponding social platforms your message could get lost. At a minimum, you will need to secure your name's url, for a website, Facebook page and Twitter account.

Make no mistake, these platforms are critical to the creation of a DBA in today's times. Simply put, if you don't have these platforms, it will look suspiciously odd.

This is also an area you should consider when going through the naming process. If your url is not available, you may want to reconsider.

To check the availability of any url go to www.GoDaddy.com. This will be your single biggest DBA investment and by far your cheapest. (These days urls are a couple of bucks a year)

The absence of social tools in the market you are targeting will also provide you with valuable insight. For example when Wynd Realty created Inman Park Realty as a DBA we were stunned to realize it was available. One of the most popular realty brands in the 10th largest market in the United States and NONE of the old-school agents had ever bothered or thought to create an Inman Park Realty. By seeing what other agents don't have, you can begin to carve out your own competitive advantage.

Social platforms and the ability to communicate with them will differentiate your DBA from the rest of the pack. Simply put, the real estate industry is going through significant changes and how one utilizes social platforms will be the stake in the sand marking the demarcation between the ages.

Contact Your Broker

The process of creating a DBA has to go through a Sponsoring Brokerage. Despite those who have tried, agents are simply not allowed to complete their own DBA paperwork.

The DBA process requires fees be paid in advance to the County you live in. After you have cleared your name let your Broker know. They will create a County-specific invoice in the name of your DBA.

The DBA process can not begin until this invoice has been paid. Once paid, the process can take anywhere from 4 to 8 weeks. A certified form in the name of your DBA is sent to the State for its stamp of approval. Once approved, there is an additional 2 week advertising period. Your DBA is advertised in the paper of record for your County of registration.

After the advertising period has passed, then a complete DBA package is sent to GREC as a final step in the process.

Your Broker will handle all the paperwork coordination between the various agencies.

Why it takes so long? No one really knows, but one thing is certain, there isn't anything anyone can do to move it along quicker.

While waiting for your DBA registration, set up other platforms you may use; webpage, facebook, gmail, etc.

Cost

Starting a DBA has to be the most cost effective business strategy anyone can implement. In general, the start-up cost to a DBA are under \$250. This costs consists of 3 fees: County registration, newspaper advertising and a one-time set-up for Wynd Realty.

All County fees are slightly different with fees varying from \$162.00 to \$175.00. The DBA process requires your new trade name be used in advertising for 2 consecutive weeks in the paper of record for your County. Thankfully this is very common and the fee is universal across County lines; \$20 an ad for a total of \$40. Wynd Realty has a one-time \$35 set-up fee for DBA related paperwork processing.

These fees of course only represent a beginning. Your DBA needs to be fed and nurtured over time. As any parent will tell you, conception is the fun part, growth and development is another whole ballgame.

The good news is; DBAs all roll at the speed of their agent. Budget depending, DBA development can go fast, slow or somewhere in-between.

Additionally, Social media costs of today are a fraction of what previous generations had to endure. (think 4-color print magazine ad with a bleed) There has never been a more cost-effective time to launch a real estate brand.

A Word on Rules

With DBA status, the agent brand is registered with the State and agents can begin to advertise and promote their brand to the general public. As always we encourage our agents to be well versed in Georgia's license law. <http://rules.sos.ga.gov/gac/520-1>.

In the main, the relationship between a DBA and their Broker is exactly the same as their agent/Broker relationship. All traditional rules of the Brokerage still apply.

The biggest rule within the DBA program is disclosure. On all printed materials there must be some acknowledgement of where the DBA is getting their brokerage services.

Web & Social Sites—all electronic DBA platforms must disclose their status: ABC Realty is a DBA of Wynd Realty. This is often found in small print on the "About" Page or in small print in the footer of each webpage. Additionally, a Wynd Realty phone number or email address must be included in some logical place within the site. The very valid reasoning behind this is; if the general public had a problem with the DBA it must have reasonable access to complain to a higher authority—in this case the Sponsoring Broker.

In theory, sales brochures have the same rules. As would all print advertising. But, unless you have been teleported into some Stephen King flashback of the 1990's, we do not recommend print advertising of any kind. As for brochures, DBA disclosures are usually found near all the self-promoted agent "certification bugs"

Yard Signs—The DBA name is registered with GREC. The size of the DBA name on a sign can not exceed the size of the agent name. Similarly, phone numbers of the agent and the Sponsoring Broker must be of equal size.

Listings—One of the most asked questions regarding the DBA Program concerns Listings and how they "appear" to the outside world. DBAs are given a unique MLS Broker code that is similar to their Sponsor. In our case WYND35, 36, 37, etc, represents a different DBA under the Wynd Realty family at the local MLS.

Listings appear in the name of the agent DBA.

One of the more odd questions asked about a DBA is if agents are allowed to sign contracts under their DBA? (Why is this a thing?)

The answer is sort of. If your DBA is ABC Realty, you would need to sign ABC Realty a DBA of Wynd Realty. You can do it, but your hand will tire. It's much easier to simply sign on contracts, Wynd Realty.

Now What?

Branding could very well become the...please forgive me...the "Game Changer" of our time. Over the top? We don't think so.

In general, if you ask a long time veteran agent what their Social Strategy is, more often than not you will get a blank stare. Or, be told Facebook, and "all that stuff", is just a fad.

Ask a newer agent what their biggest hurdles are in capturing new business and you will be treated to a discussion of old-boy networks and old school rhetoric.

In many cases, due largely to the technology required, older agents don't care for Branding and would prefer their franchise system. Younger agents, due largely to the technology required, don't care for the franchise system and would prefer to create their own Brands.

If there was only a technology or tool that could draw a line in the sand between old school franchise methodologies versus 21st-century style thinking?

If you have read this far, our bet is you have an honest passion for creating something new. Welcome to the leading edge of Real Estate.

Welcome to the DBA Program

*Helping Change the Industry,
One Agent at a Time*



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