Introduction

Through in-depth research, we plan to put together a well-rounded proposal for our client, Seattle real estate agent, Karen Pestrak, with the purpose of enhancing her existing web presence and attracting more potential clients to her website. This proposal will include a detailed SEO and analytics strategy that will ideally not only improve Karen's search ranking, but also her online authority and credibility as a local real estate expert. In the following situation analysis, we discuss the current state of Karen's business, her business goals, strengths and weaknesses, and how a campaign based on organic and inorganic SEO and Google Analytics can improve her brand's online presence, specifically on a localized level.

Company Information

Karen Pestrak is a Seattle-area real estate agent who began working full-time in January 2015. She relocated in January 2014 from Florida and saw the move as the ideal opportunity to achieve her dream of starting her own business. With a background in advertising, Karen decided to enter the real estate industry and started as an agent's assistant at Lake & Company Real Estate before working for the brokerage as a full-time agent. Although Karen hangs her license with Lake & Co., she essentially functions as an independent business, only paid on commission from her own clients. A benefit of being a part of this brokerage is the mentorship and potential leads she receives from its agents.

As she continues to build her own list of clients, Karen keeps her business broad, working with all types of clients to buy and sell homes in the greater Puget Sound area. Ideally, she would like to focus her business in the up-and-coming Rainier Valley area of South Seattle, however she has shown homes as far north as Everett and as far south as Kent, a range of almost 50 miles. Karen recognizes that her business may be more successful if she can focus on a niche geographical area, however at this time, building a basic client list is her first priority.

To date, Karen has closed four transactions in her real estate career. Most of her clients come from referrals from friends, meeting people at open houses and receiving cold calls from property sale signs. At this time, no clients have come to her from the web.

In an industry built on relationships, Karen believes meeting people and face-to-face networking are the keys to finding clients. To build up her network in her new city, Karen tries to be as involved as possible in her community. According to Karen, meeting people and getting leads are the absolute foundation of her business. Ideally, Karen would like to work with clients who are relocating to Seattle as she can identify with their needs and provide these clients not only with guidance on the local real estate market, but also on the cultural and social aspects of the area.

At its core, Karen's business is committed to service. Her penchant for analytics and personable demeanor motivate her to find the best house for her clients. She wants her business to ultimately be about relationships, not transactions.

Services:

► Assist clients in purchasing a home, including home tours in-person with clients or via Skype.

► Assist clients in selling a home, including holding open houses.

► Educate clients on the greater Seattle area and its competitive real estate market.

Company Information

Vision Statement:

To build a steady, referral-based business that operates from a heart of service.

Company Mission:

Seattle is rapidly expanding as many businesses that call our city home recruit talent to the area. This has created a shortage in housing and real competition in the Seattle real estate market. It is my goal to help buyers and sellers navigate these ever changing conditions and obtain the best value for their needs (Pestrak, 2015).

Business Goals:

To establish her brand as an authoritative resource in the Seattle real estate market and solidify her neighborhood niche.

To build up a large enough client list so she can consistently grow her business year over year until she can perpetually maintain 24 closings a year.

►   2015: Close 4 transactions

►   2016: Close 8 transactions

►   2017: Close 16 transactions

►   2018+: 24 closings a year

Target Public

While Karen would like to eventually focus her business on clients who resemble her own demographic (married, 30s and relocating from out-of-state), she is currently seeking all possible Seattle clients, of all demographics, as she continues to build her client list. Her broad target audience includes:

► Individuals and families who live in Seattle or desire to live in the Puget Sound region and are potentially interested in buying their first home or upgraded/downsized home in the area.

► Individuals and families who currently live in the greater Seattle area and are seeking to potentially sell their home because of relocation out of the area or desire to move into an upgraded/downsized home elsewhere in the city.

► *Niche Target Public:* Individuals and families who are interested in moving to the Rainier Valley or selling their current home in the Rainier Valley region of Seattle.

Demographics:

Located in King County, Washington, the city of Seattle is ranked seventh in highest cost of living in the U.S. (Ho, 2014). According to census statistics, the average resident is between 20-39, married and highly educated. The population is about 650,000, however it's predicted to grow to about 1.2 million people by 2040 ("About the Project"). A growing population means more people will need to find a place to live and possibly purchase a home. At this time, only 31 percent of the Seattle population is considered a long-term resident, having lived in the area for at least five years, meaning most of the population is new to the area and may be ready to purchase a home ("Seattle, WA - Lifestyle and Demographics - Realtor.com®"). An annual 26 percent turnover in the city's real estate also means there are opportunities to find clients ready to sell their home.

Additional Seattle Statistics:

► Cost of Living: $72,4000 ("Browse Seattle, WA Market Overview Data on Realtor.com®")

► Median Household Income: $73,936 ("Seattle, WA - Lifestyle and Demographics - Realtor.com®")

► Median Age: 39 years old

► 44.6% of residents are married, with 31.5% being married with kids

► 55% of residents have earned at least a bachelor's degree (the national average is 34%)

► 69.5% of residents are identified as white, 13.8% Asian, 7.9% black/African American ("Race & Ethnicity Quick Statistics")

► 17.3% of residents are foreign born

Target Public

Psychographics:

Much of Seattle's population is characterized by the effects of its booming tech industry. According to Forbes, 1 in 10 people in Seattle work in high-tech positions ("Seattle, WA."). Microsoft, Amazon, Google and Facebook all are headquartered or have large presences in the area. These high-paying jobs provide disposable income that affords an active lifestyle.

City residents often prioritize "lifestyle over affordability" (Balk, 2015a). To residents, the most important factor in determining where they live in the area is walkability to local restaurants, activities and parks. Other important factors are proximity to public transit and commute time.

Housing Market Consumer Trends:

It is currently cheaper to rent than to purchase a home in Seattle and most residents (51.9 percent) are renters, so there could be an opportunity to turn some of these individuals into potential home buying clients ("Seattle, WA - Lifestyle and Demographics - Realtor. com®"). The real estate market is currently strong for sellers due to high demand and low inventory of homes for sale on the market. Multiple offers and bidding wars are common.

According to a Washington State report, there were 312,853 housing units in the city in 2012 ("Housing Quick Statistics"). Almost 30,000 new housing units were built in the city between 2005 and 2012, however this is only 62 percent of the city's target, meaning more residential growth is expected. Despite the hot real estate market, home ownership is at an all time low in King County, dropping 13 percent since 2007 (Balk, 2015b). Millennials are particularly inclined to rent long-term for several reasons, including inability to afford home ownership due to high prices and college debt, and a desire to have a more flexible lifestyle. The recent foreclosure crisis also plays a role, creating a cautious attitude towards home ownership. This could prove a challenge to finding potential clients from this generational cohort.

Competition

Competitors that challenge Karen's business are not individual real estate developers. Instead of a specific person, Karen must focus more on companies such as Redfin, who give cash rebates to their clients (the agents are not paid on commission) upon closing and is training buyers to expect such treatment from other brokerages. Other large brokerages in the Seattle area include Windermere and John L. Scott, agencies that have many different agents through which the company sells.

► Redfin: Redfin has several features that could set them apart from Karen in a way that would make them seem more credible. Client testimonials play a large role in Redfin's business and these reviews are posted openly on Redfin's website, boosting their online content. In addition, each agent has the number of deals they have closed in their individual profiles and compares realtors to match what the client is looking for.

► Windermere Real Estate: To boost credibility and customer content online, Windermere has created a newsfeed that boots information about their company. A larger entity than Karen, this can reach more people, refresh content and circulate around more feeds for constant information and praise.

► John L. Scott Real Estate: While not as large Redfin, John L. Scott company has taken it upon themselves to create an app for customers. This user friendly application sets JLS apart from other, less tech savvy companies.

Search Results Comparison:

When searching for keywords such as "Seattle," "real estate," "agents" and a combination of similar words, Redfin was the only corporation that appeared on the first page of the Google searches. When there was an individual agent who appeared on page one, they were typically involved with the Redfin name. Karen currently does not rank when searching these terms and only appears in results when searching for her name specifically -- "Karen Pestrak" or "Karen Pestrak real estate."

Social Media:

► **Redfin:** Facebook (92,233 likes), Twitter (33.7K followers), Google+ (4,624 followers)

► **Windermere Real Estate:** Facebook (10,009 likes), Pinterest (1,040 followers), Twitter (717 followers), Blog, Instagram (5,517 followers), Youtube (117 subscribers), LinkedIn (10,173 followers)

► **John L. Scott Real Estate:** Facebook (2,852 likes)

The more social media accounts each competitor had, the more likely they were to be producing content that could potentially drive more business away from reaching Karen.

Both Windermere and Redfin were highly active on social media, sharing vast amounts of information throughout each day. This tells us that even though the content may not always be targeted at specific individuals, the information is reaching enough people to pinpoint those who would see the information as useful.

Company Website Critique

Strengths:

▶ Karen's website has a clean and simple design, which fits her personality well. The overall design is visually appealing and the website itself is easy to navigate.

▶ The website is very consistent with her personal brand and gives insight into her values and available services to potential clients.

▶ Website directly contains a blog, an important asset in building original content.

Weaknesses:

▶ The "search listings" tab leads users to listings located on the Lake & Co. website, which could be confusing for consumers who are not expecting to be take off-site when this menu item is selected. This could also hurt the potential of these potential clients returning to Karen's website after browsing these listings.

▶ The blog is an excellent resource at her disposal, but it is under-utilized and should be updated more often.

▶ The web address in the top left corner of her website is currently an unclickable image. It should be turned into a hyperlink for customers to click on. Seeing as it is the most important of information putting the client in touch with Karen, making it easily clickable is crucial.

Is the website meeting brand's current objectives?

Not yet. As mentioned before, Karen's site is easy to navigate and she provides useful information to the client. Regarding her ultimate goal, to be a resource to her clients, she has the ability to grow. Because the website is already created, next is to generate an immense amount of content for her viewers to seek out and read.

Providing more localized information on the blog could help boost her SEO and make her website a true resource for those relocating to the Seattle area. Possible blog posts regarding local information include: best restaurants, local dentists, unique furniture stores, ways to transition from city to city.

Not only will this get her brand out to the public, she will simultaneously be collaborating with local shops and businesses that could become potential partners in expanding her brand.

General Marketing Strategy

Because referral marketing plays a key role in the success of new real estate agents, Karen's main strategy at this time is to network as much as possible in order to build up a list of potential clients. To do this, she also takes on many open houses on behalf of fellow Lake & Co. agents to meet potential interested buyers.

In order to try to convert those referrals into active clients, Karen stays in touch with these individuals through email, phone, Facebook, and direct mail. She also networks with other agents in her brokerage who may have overflow leads she can take on for future business.

Karen currently pays a fee to Zillow for leads in the Rainier Valley area, however she has only received one unsuccessful contact. She also recently launched an experimental ad campaign with Facebook, directed at Seattle residents above a certain income.

Positioning & Branding:

Karen's brand is built on the values of genuine relationships and customer service. Karen is currently establishing her brand on a grassroots level, leveraging face-to-face communication to turn a growing network of acquaintances into friends, and friends into potential clients. Even if someone is not looking for a house, because they have a relationship with Karen, she may gain the business of their family and friends because of that honest relationship. Karen has also positioned herself as an agent who identifies with relocation clients, due to her recent shared experience being such a client herself. She can not only educate these clients on nuances of the local real estate market, but she can also direct them to local community resources.

Current Social Media:

► LinkedIn: 329 connections

► Facebook (business page): 40 likes, 5 posts

► Pinterest: 3 Followers, 91 pins

Karen also has personal Twitter and Instagram accounts, however they are fairly inactive and she does not currently use them for business or pleasure.

She also has a blog as a part of her site that she has used to post about local real estate trends, home-selling tips and DIY projects. Since February 2015, Karen has only posted to her blog six times. We think that Karen has a solid foundation to expand on her social media, but it needs some devoted time to it and extra attention. She has potential to create a niche for her desired area and can utilize social media to help her achieve this goal.

Karen has enough social media to have at least a presence, but nothing that would increase her sales. In real estate the majority of clients come from word of mouth and utilizing connections.
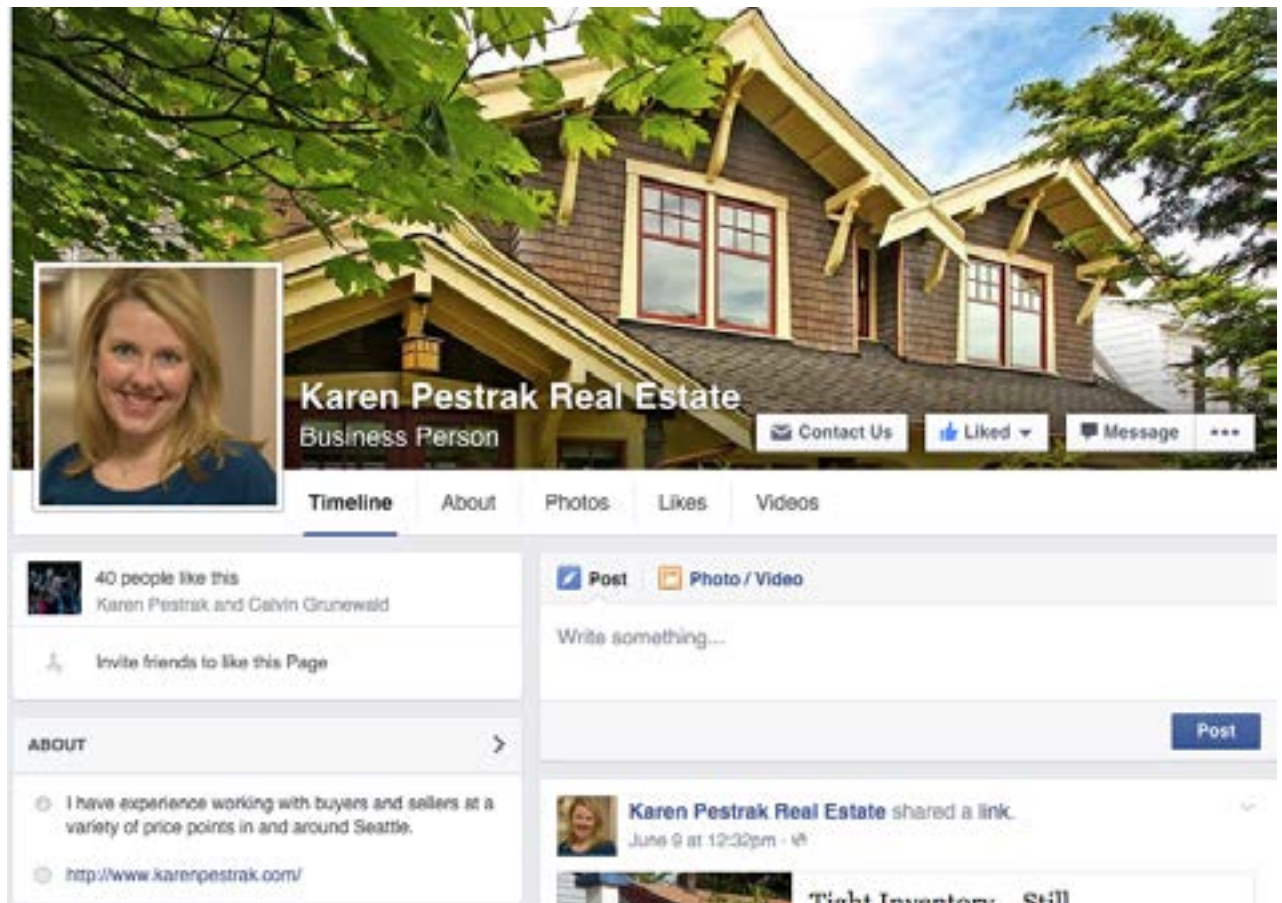
SEO/Analytics

Previous Strategy:

Aside from creating her website and joining Zillow, Karen has not previously tried any marketing efforts via SEO or Analytics however, as a new realtor, she is eager to experiment with these options. She has focused all of her efforts on building interpersonal relationships in order to gain referrals. According to Karen, the realtor community does minimal social media, due to mixed research on whether it truly helps grow the brand, generate business, and produce quality leads.

Who does the SEO?

The brokerage Karen works with does not provide any SEO services for individual agents, however they might for their brokerage as a whole.

Karen has Google Analytics installed, however she has not taken the opportunity to explore its uses and benefits. She plans on pursuing any SEO/Analytics strategy on her own time.

SEO/Analytics Goals

► To expand the reach of her brand online as a credible Seattle real estate agent.

► Use compelling, creative content to drive more unique visitors to Karen's website.

► To direct those who encounter Karen's brand online to contact her in some form, either through her website contact page, Facebook, or email. These contacts are crucial to building a pipeline of leads.

► To consolidate Karen's branded pages online in search results so that when her name is searched, her real-estate information and content should come up first with links to appropriate sites (reviews, social media, blog, website).

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

► Works within a brokerage that has local name recognition, other realtors to mentor her, and also to share leads.
► Background in advertising means she knows how to sell intelligently.
► Appeals to the relocation client market because she can relate to that experience and offer information and resources beyond real estate.
► Very personable and approachable in interpersonal communication, can be projected in social media to connect her to potential clients.

Weaknesses

► Competing with significantly larger real estate brands. These companies have a larger budget and manpower to instill and maintain SEO principles.
► Minimal financial resources for SEO purposes.
► New to the area; does have the knowledge or reputation of real estate agents who have lived in the area for years and know the specifics of individual neighborhoods, such as schools, shopping, public transportation options, etc.
► New agent; many people search online for real estate services and look for agents with testimonials, client history, reviews, etc. Karen only has one online review.

Opportunities

► Professional website & blog that she maintains herself, creative freedom.
► Has a background working with other agents in a local brokerage (good foundation of knowledge, access to practical advice, possible to share clients, receive overflow referrals, opportunities to work open houses, etc.
► Seattle area is growing in population (47,000 additional households are expected the next 10 years) and market is currently very hot. .
► Rainier Valley, her ideal niche area, is apparently up-and-coming. It is currently a less developed area that is expected to gentrify as Seattle's population grows.
► Untapped potential in social media and blog.

Threats

► The critiques are still out whether all this time, effort and resources will actually help a realtor find new leads or not.
► Rebate brokerages (e.g. Redfin) gaining popularity due to lower or no commission costs. forcing commission-only agents to change their business models.
► Decline of millennials purchasing homes means increased difficulty in reaching these individuals.
► Homeownership is at an all time low in the Seattle market, residents would rather rent, making it difficult to convince some individuals to enter the housing market.
► Many real estate brokerages and agents in the region, difficult to set yourself apart from other agents due to limited sales history.

Overarching Campaign Goals

Now that Karen has established her brand and has concrete mission and values, our goal is to saturate Karen's brand presence online to build her reputation as a credible authority in the Seattle real estate market. We will do this by enhancing her existing website and social media, as well as adding additional content and outlets through which potential clients can reach her. The main goal is to not only drive more people to Karen's brand pages (either her website or social media pages), but to persuade those individuals to contact Karen directly so she can immediately contact them and add them to her pipeline of leads.

Since Karen's business is so new, and has little experience using Google Analytics, our most basic goal is to gain an understanding of Karen's business from a data perspective so she can better understand where she can improve her digital marketing strategy.

Our General Strategy

Organic SEO

► **Improve website's SEO optimization:**
  - Bulk up website content including local keywords & keyword phrases.
  - Adding appropriate descriptions and keywords to metadata, images, headers and alt tags.
  - Make website more of a resource, including more hyperlocal real estate content, as well as useful relocation information.

► **Expand Karen's online presence:**
  - Encourage more client testimonials by creating Yelp and other directory pages.
  - Expand social media presence and post more related content, including original content and images. Create Google + business page. Establish a social media calendar so Karen can easily maintain a posting schedule.
  - Inquire into improving Karen's bio page on Lake & Co. website for SEO optimization and add target keywords/keyword phrases to body of page.

► **Build Karen's blog as both a real estate and local information resource:**
  - Establish posting schedule, original compelling content including local keywords, keyword phrases, videos, images, maps, etc.

Inorganic SEO

► **Using Google Adwords, launch ad campaigns geared towards key hyper-local real estate terms.**
  - Focus on neighborhoods that make up Karen's target area of Rainier Valley (Mt. Baker, Seward Park, Columbia City, Rainier Beach).

Google Analytics

► **Create appropriate filters to remove spam hits and referrals from Karen's Google Analytics data in order to measure true statistics.**
► **Track website views and understand from which sources these views come.**
  - Track desktop vs. mobile users statistics.
  - Measure social media page statistics to understand which pages are referring the most viewers so Karen can spend focus her limited time on those account's content and followers.
► **Track and understand website behavior funnel to see where users enter and exit.**
  - Discover if users who click on the "Listings" tab of website and are taken off-site ever return to Karen's website.
► **Set a Google Analytics goal to measure website's contact page views and track conversions of users who successfully submit their information through the form.**