Public Perception of Land Banks: Sending the Right Message

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You work hard every day to make an impact and that deserve accolades. However, if you don’t get out there and talk about what you do, very few people will know about it.

The work of a Land Bank is far from simple and it is up to you to make sure that people understand it.
Why bother?

- Getting the word out about who you are and what you do establishes you as a resource, generating more work for you.

- Establishing yourself as a credible organization by talking about your successes, sets you up to gain partners that will expand what you can accomplish and funding – even in a situation where your funding is pretty much determined, this is still the case because the more competent you are the more likely you’ll get approached to launch a pilot or be a lead on a collaborative effort.

- If you don’t set the tone, someone else will and what they have to say won’t necessarily be accurate or even nice.
Control your messaging

silence sets you up to be defensive; getting the word out builds support and momentum and can help you obtain additional funding

Creating your base message: What is a Land Bank?
- A tool for neighborhood revitalization
- A positive impact on the community via demolition, rehabilitation and preservation (decrease crime, increase property values and quality of life, support community goals)
- A willing partner for community and economic development
Be out front and set the tone on issues that could be a threat to you.

For example: Some Land Banks have come under fire because DTAC funding can be considered a loss of revenue to schools.

A way to combat this could be:
- Developing a strong explanation of how the Land Bank’s work is neighborhood revitalization.
- Creating stronger neighborhoods will in turn increase viability, which will in turn result in a larger overall tax base for schools to pull funding from.
Develop a strategy

- To grab the bull by the horns and have solid control of your messaging you need a strategy that lays out what you will communicate and then how you will communicate it across multiple mediums.
- It’s a good idea to update this strategy every 6 to 12 months and to be dynamic enough to add to it on the fly as well.
- Starting out, consider recruiting qualified board members to help you with this or creating a marketing/outreach committee
- Your general messaging is the backbone of this strategy – it captures the core of who you are and what you do and remains consistent.
- Once you have that, you can tackle how you’ll communicate with the outside world
What should be on a website

- In today’s world, your website is often your first interaction and offers a first impression.

- It should be dynamic enough to effectively explain who you are and what you do and connect people to the resources you offer.
A home page should explain who you are and why you exist in a clear and concise way:
About us should contain:
- mission/vision/organizing principles
- Staff/board
- Organizational docs such as policies and articles of incorporation
What we do: break this down by program area
- Demolition
- Preservation
- Rehabilitation
- Side Lot
Active inventory:

It is good practice to keep an active inventory of all of your properties and where they are in your process. Tracking these online will allow you to make your list accessible to the public in real time.

Sort by status:
- Assessment
- Demolition
- Rehab
- Sale as is

### Land Bank Properties

Click to show For Sale/To Renovate Land Bank Properties.

Click to show Owner Occupant Buyer Advantage Program Properties.

Click to show Renovated Land Bank Properties.

Citizens have first right of refusal for properties within their jurisdictions for the first 30 days after a property is posted on this website.

To begin the buying process for For Sale/To Renovate properties, please review the Property Purchaser Application, the Housing Quality Standards, the Property Transfer Policy and Rehabilitation Programs section of our website, and call 216-698-4033.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fiscal</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Date posted</th>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Cleveland Ward</th>
<th>Bldgs</th>
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What’s Happening Now:

- **A blog** – if you send out a newsletter, the stories need to be hosted somewhere on the web; putting them into a blog makes them searchable online and gives you a dynamic, up-to-date tool to keep the public informed about your endeavors.

- **Your publications** – whatever you publish should be online; this can save you in print costs and makes you appear open and transparent.

- **In the news**: as you start to gather media hits, you should share these with the public via an online feed.

- **Industry news**: a simple RSS feed with narrowed search terms can help you establish yourself as a thought-leader, on top of everything that’s going on.
Resources

- **Relevant Links**: Having links to other relevant organizations make you appear to be a resource and can help direct people in the appropriate direction easily when you cannot help them. Also, each organization you list is likely to be willing to also list you, which will increase your online searchability.

- **FAQ**: Limit calls by making answers to frequently asked questions available online.
What is a press opportunity?

- TV loves a good demolition – if you are doing a big one, tell them about it
- Milestones
- Program launches – even if you’ve just revamped something you are already doing, present it as new
- Any partnership with another organization (public or private), especially creative partnerships that have the potential to create jobs or provide housing
- This is also a great way to get publicity without necessarily paying for it yourself. Cities, development organizations and many non-profits have staff that work with the press and the wherewithal to pull together a press conference. Take advantage of these resources but be sure to get your messaging in – read drafts and supply information to be included in press releases!
What is a press opportunity?

- If another organization is holding a press conference about something that touches what you do or a politician is announcing a piece of legislation that will be helpful to land banks, go to that press conference. While there, introduce yourself to reporters and take their cards.

As a measurement: If you think what you are doing is cool or your friends seem intrigued when you tell them about what you are working on, then the press may feel the same way.
The Value of a Newsletter

A monthly or quarterly newsletter is a great way to share information with people that care about what you do.

Creating a contact list:
Consider everyone that may be interested in what you are doing:
- Community development and economic development organizations
- Municipalities
- Key stakeholders
- Anyone you already email regularly
- Put a email sign-up at the top of every page of your website
Generating content

- A newsletter can have as little as 3 items in it and they should all be short because people just don’t have that long of an attention span
- Any thing that is a press opportunity also goes into your newsletter
- Smaller items that may not be big enough to go to press, such as a side lot expansion, a speaking engagement or a cool project that you only had a small role in
- Partner feature: they’ll be grateful for the exposure and you’ll look like a collaborator
What to put into print collateral

Even though today’s world has gone digital, print collateral still has value because not everyone you want to reach will use the internet to learn about you.

One overview brochure that is well put together can do the trick. Be sure to include all pertinent information about your operation in a clear and concise manner. It’s important that the piece has a clean look and is easy to follow, but it’s not essential for it to be professionally designed and printed.

In your brochure:
- Each of your programs and program categories (demo, rehab, preservation) warrants an explanation
- Say who you are and what you do and provide details on who to call and where on your website people can get more information
Social Media: Why and how to use it

Getting the word out about who you are and what you do requires talking to people where they are and social media is the place to be.

- The Facebook community is one of the largest online (or otherwise) in the world, with 800 million active users
- 400 million Tweets are sent on Twitter every day

When used well, social media can help you build a loyal following that you can count on to spread your message for you and can call upon when you need support.
Generating content and have an engaging social media presence:

- look for who you know and who you want to be talking to and invite them to your page.
- Sign up for Google alerts using key words for the industry. You can get these once a day or once a week. Then pick what’s good and share.
- Give pointers to common concerns.
- Share information about events that may interest your base
- Every 3rd to 5th post, say something specific about what you are doing that’s worth bragging about. You do not want to sound like a billboard on social media but it IS ok to talk about yourself. The secret is balance.
Generating content and have an engaging social media presence:

- Post testimonials.
- Share your videos.
- Share your media hits.
- Share information on causes dear to you – just be cognizant of that fact that when you do this, you associate your cause with your brand.
- Ask people what they want you to talk about and ask for feedback!
Videos and YouTube: Their value, content, why YouTube is awesome

Video is a great way to communicate your message to new and broad potential audiences. In case you were wondering if there are really people out there that will watch your videos, consider this: YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world, 80% of internet users watch videos online and people prefer to watch a video six times more than they would opt for printed information.
A simple video that highlights a client giving a testimonial, a key staffer talking about what they do or that says “welcome” or “thank you” is a great way to interest people in your organization, prove that you know what you are talking about and show why people think you are great.
For more complex programs a video that explains why you do what you do can help constituents get a grasp of your organization quickly and provides supporters with talking points to spread the word about you. These types of organizational videos are also a great resource for explaining your message and your mission to the media, key stakeholders or potential funders.
Complex programs usually mean complex forms and multiple step processes for home purchasers or rehabbers. A step by step video of how to complete your processes can go a long way toward keeping people from getting frustrated with you and can also save you quite a bit of phone time explaining your process to everyone that has a question.

I won’t show you this walkthrough because its 8 minutes long, but visit [www.cuyahogalandbank.org/toRenovate.php](http://www.cuyahogalandbank.org/toRenovate.php) if you’d like to see an example of a walkthrough video.
Video USB giveaway

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