

BIG IDEAS

Mortgage blog a teaching tool

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Tom Tousignant thought the mortgage industry needed a bigger educational component.

So he gave up a job as an Allen Tate Co. mortgage executive to launch an independent mortgage business. In addition to helping homeowners secure financing, he tries to help clients understand how their mortgage fits in their bigger financial picture as the founder of www.startwiththehouse.com, a mortgage education blog.

Why did you decide to split from Allen Tate and go out on your own?

When I got to be a sales manager, I was spending a lot of my time showing mortgage reps how to use the mortgage

QUICKINFO

VITAL STATS

- Tom Tousignant blogs at www.startwiththehouse.com.
- He is one of six mortgage brokers in Charlotte who've earned designation as a certified mortgage planning specialist.

as a tool to help borrowers with their entire financial picture. But I felt like I was just beating my head against the wall. Everyone was just used to doing things a certain way. So I decided in 2007 to break out and do my own thing.

What makes your work different?

I try to offer mortgage-planning services for borrowers instead of just the traditional approach at other shops. I think there are two parts to the mortgage business. We all do half of it. That's helping the borrower find financing and get to closing with everything in place and no surprises.

But I think there's another phase. I try to help borrowers understand if they should pay points, what size down payment to make, how their mortgage will incorporate into the rest of their finances and how they'll make payments if something unexpected happens. At the end of the day, all mortgage brokers are offering the same basic rates. I try to help people look at their mortgage as a financial tool. That's what separates us.

What led you to start blogging?

Being a financial educator is extremely important to me. And that's where I produce a lot of the educational component. Blogging, Facebook, Twitter — those are all great ways to get in front of 500 or 1,000 people with my message. I don't have to stand on the corner with a sign.



Tousignant

House boosts R&D funding, technology programs

The U.S. House has approved legislation that calls for increased federal funding for basic research, support for local efforts to form regional innovation clusters and government-guaranteed loans to help manufacturers update their technology.

The America Competes Reauthorization Act was approved by a 262-150 vote May 28. The Senate has not yet considered the bill. Business groups ranging from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to the Biotechnology Industry Organization support the legislation, which also updates other government programs that promote science and innovation.

HELP WANTED: EXPERT ADVICE ON YOUR QUESTIONS

How can I learn about — and make use of — the city of Charlotte's small-business programs?

John Short, team leader, city of Charlotte's Neighborhood & Business Services: The best way is to utilize our website: www.nbs.charlottenc.gov. There is information about how to become a certified small business with the city, how to contract with the city and how to access our financial programs. Those financial programs include grants to improve building security and for facade renovation, as well as various small-business loans. For more information, call (704) 353-1130.

Renee Hode, director, Institute for Entrepreneurship, Central Piedmont Community College: The city of Charlotte is an excellent supporter of small-business growth and development. It connects entrepreneurs and existing business owners to a myriad of resources that serve the Charlotte region, including CPCC's Institute for Entrepreneurship. The Economic and Neighborhood Development staff is

focused on providing opportunities to help local business owners.

Jerrienne Jackson, small-business opportunity specialist, city of Charlotte's Neighborhood & Business Services office: The Small Business Opportunity Program is a race- and gender-neutral program that ensures small-business participation in



Jackson

contracting and subcontracting opportunities with the city. The program focuses on awarding Small Business Enterprise certification to small companies that meet established size criteria and have the potential to do business with the city. The program also offers city-certified SBEs the Advance Your Business Development Program, which includes a series of workshops, professional association sponsorships and mentoring opportunities. For more information, go to www.smallbiz.charmeck.org.

To submit questions, e-mail David Harris at dharris@bizjournals.com.

BEST BETS

The financial side of a business plan

The session will offer step-by-step instructions for putting together the financial part of a business plan, including information on projecting startup costs and operating expenses.

Date: Thursdays, June 17-July 1

Time: 6-8 p.m.

Location: Central Piedmont Community College Central Campus, 1201 Elizabeth Ave.

Cost: \$89

To register: (704) 330-4223 or www.cpcc.edu/e-institute

The impact of health-care reform

Heather Ryan and Amy Owens of law firm Parker Poe Adams & Bernstein will give an overview of key provisions of the health-care reform legislation and what it may mean for your company's benefits plan.

Date: June 17

Time: 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

Location: The Employers Association, 3020 W. Arrowood Road

Cost: \$35 for members, \$45 for nonmembers

To register: (704) 522-8011 or www.employersassoc.com

'City of Opportunity'

Charlotte Chamber's metro chapter luncheon.

Date: June 22

Time: 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

Location: Omni Charlotte Hotel, 132 E. Trade St.

Cost: \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door for chamber members, \$45 for nonmembers

To register: (704) 378-1366, twilson@charlottechamber.com or www.charlottechamber.com

STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING A BUSINESS

A healthy approach to growth

Device supplier prepares for changes in Medicare

BEA QUIRK
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In today's shaky economy, every small business needs to be creative and flexible. But for Griffin Home Health Care, such flexibility has been a way of life from the company's start.

"We are in one of the most regulated industries in the nation," says Bill Griffin, who founded the business in 1983. "The list of agencies we deal with seems endless. Every day there is a new challenge."

Griffin's company provides medical equipment to patients in their homes in a 16-county region. Its operations rely heavily on reimbursement from private insurers and governmental agencies. But that payment

system has changed dramatically — and repeatedly — the last few decades.

The latest challenge is a proposal to establish a competitive bidding process this year for Medicare service providers such as Griffin Home Health Care. Griffin says the legislation would reduce the number of providers that can receive reimbursements for Medicare-covered customers.

In response, he is aggressively pursuing ways for his company to continue to thrive if it fails to win approval as a Medicaid bidder. Among those moves, Griffin expanded his company's footprint last year by purchasing Med-Equip, a medical-equipment provider in Gaston County. And he's expanding his company's product offerings. For example, Griffin Home Health Care used to offer only a few kinds of wheelchair ramps. Now it markets a wider selection, as well as stair lifts and van lifts.

Plus, Griffin is adding products that won't be affected by the competitive bidding process, such as apnea monitors for infants.

He also is maintaining the company's emphasis on customer service. Griffin personally calls customers after equipment is delivered, making sure the order was correct and his employees were courteous. "We're a longtime presence here, and we are known for our caring, compassionate service."



Griffin

QUICKINFO

DID YOU KNOW?

•Griffin is also a licensed funeral director and has a background in retail pharmacy.