THE REAL ESTATE INVESTOR'S GUIDE TO BIG PROFITS IN PROBATES

A TACTICAL HANDBOOK FOR TAPPING INTO THE GOLDMINE OF PROBATE REAL ESTATE

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A Tactical Handbook for Tapping Into the Goldmine of Probate Real Estate

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"The Real Estate Investor's Guide to Big Profits in Probates"

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Probate…

As a word, it's not especially known for giving people the "warm fuzzies," is it?

It's a term that generally brings to mind things that most of us don't especially enjoy savoring like heirs, estates, executors, and above all *someone's death*.

But, for savvy real estate investors, there's another side to the probate coin entirely – a unique chance to provide truly valuable assistance to someone who genuinely needs help dealing with an estate's property, while making some really great money in the process.

Simply put, one of the most potent and lucrative opportunities for astute investors today lies in the arena of probate real estate. In fact, I've been successfully investing in real estate for 15+ years and have opted to focus my flipping efforts *exclusively* on probate deals for quite some time now.

Why?

Because, to put it bluntly, ***it's the probate deals that tend to make me the most money*** – more than any other type of real estate deal, hands down.

When done right, probate estates can offer an endless channel of quality, high profit, distressed property deals at steep discounts – a perfect storm of uniquely motivated sellers who truly need the help of a cash investor like you, who can step in and make it easy to turn an estate's property into cash.

On the other hand, when done *ineffectively*, probates can be a real challenge to master. It's not that the probate nut is all that tough to crack, but you can definitely find yourself uncomfortably out of your depth if you don't have your head around a few key concepts.

I've seen a number of investors through the years get excited about probates, but are too nervous to actually dive in from lack of know-how and experience. I've also seen many others willing to give it a "shy try" only to struggle and fail, mostly due to simple mistakes you can easily avoid once you know how.

That's *exactly* what this book is designed to help you overcome.

If you're an investor who's curious about the probates strategy, but maybe feeling a little unsure about some of the "knowledge gaps" you have, or maybe not even sure where to begin – great news, you can start here!

In the following pages I'll pull the curtain back wide on probates and lay it all out for you. We'll cover the essentials of the probate process itself (focusing only on the parts you really need to know), and then get into the 'how-to' details of the marketing process in particular.

We'll discuss how to find these elusive leads, some of the legalities you should bear in mind, when and how often to mail your marketing campaigns, what you should say in your letters, how to handle talking to the estate's representatives about the property and what you can offer them, and a whole lot more.

Bottom line, I intend to answer all your questions, and then some. By the time you're done reading, you'll have the knowledge you need to begin systematically taking advantage of this unique, lucrative real estate niche yourself.

What's more, I'm going to make sure you know how you can put all your probate marketing campaigns on ***near-autopilot*** if you want to. From consistently gathering and organizing your local probate leads, to writing quality letters, to crafting time-tested, proven 'multi-touch' marketing campaigns, to effectively deploying these campaigns over and over and over again…

These are all key pieces to the probates puzzle, and you can choose whether to handle them personally yourself, or outsource and automate them so you can focus on your own "highest and best" activities as a business owner.

By the end of this book, you'll know exactly how to handle either approach, depending on your preference and budget.

Now, you may be wondering who the heck I am, and why I'm worth even listening to about all this. So before we dive into the 'how', 'what' and 'why' of probate deals, let me share just a bit about my background and how I got into this in the first place.

About Me, Christina Krause

Since I was a teenager, I remember being interested in real estate. Even at a young age it was fascinating to me, and I always knew I wanted to go into real estate investing at some point. When I finally decided to jump in, I left my banking job, and never looked back.

My investing roots are in 'buy & hold' residential properties – rentals were the vast majority of my career *in the beginning*. At the height of what I owned, I had a pretty sizable portfolio of @250 rental units that I managed myself (along with a small army of employees, of course).

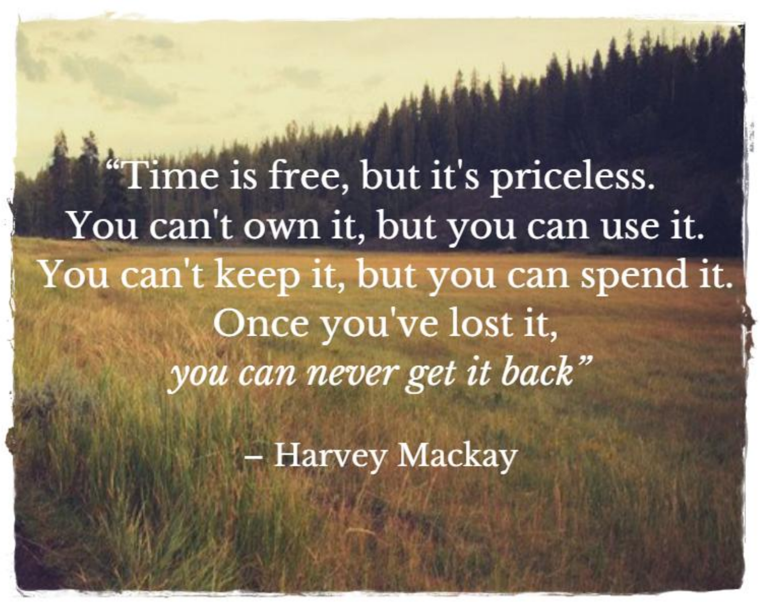
My real estate investing experience grew from there as I moved into fixing and flipping properties as well. In addition to our extensive rental portfolio, I have flipped well over 100 properties since 2001, most of which were fix-and-flips, but with wholesale deals thrown in from time to time, too.

I've probably tried every kind of deal-getting, marketing method you can think of. In the early 2000's we were spending somewhere in the range of $8,000 to $10,000 a month on marketing alone. I know, right – *sticker shock!*

With that kind of marketing budget, of course we were doing a lot of deals. And with all that marketing going out, we were *busy*… with typically anywhere from 5-7 rehabs going on at any given time, plus the demands of our sizeable, *self-managed* rental portfolio.

In recent years I've chosen to scale down the "busy-ness" of my professional life as a real estate investor. I'm still routinely doing deals, but focusing much more today on *quality over quantity*. I've realized more than ever lately that my most precious commodity, by far, is ***time*** – and it's the only one we can never really create more of.

So as a lifestyle choice, I've made it a priority to invest as much time as I possibly can with my two kiddos before I blink, and they've suddenly moved out.



My focus nowadays is on doing *fewer, but better* deals, which actually lets me enjoy the lifestyle I wasn't able to when we were "blowing and going" at ninety miles an hour a few years back. It gives me an excellent income, while leaving me the time and energy to thoroughly enjoy the amazing life I have with my two awesome kids while I have them.

And, one of the biggest factors that made this possible was figuring out how to effectively tap into the **probates goldmine** a number of years ago.

Once I cracked the code on probates, I quickly realized that these were, far and away, our *most lucrative* deals. This facilitated switching my model from quantity to quality, and probates became our exclusive focus. Every once in a great while I'll still pick up a house from a wholesaler *who contacts me*, but I do absolutely zero advertising or mailing to anything other than probates now. Probates are my sole focus. By itself, it's more than enough.

What About You?

You're about to learn exactly how to exploit and profit from probates the same way I do. Then, what happens next is completely up to you.

You can decide for yourself, at that point, if this just another tool in your tool belt …or if it's perhaps the biggest, most powerful deal-getting engine in your whole operation (like it is for me).

The potential is certainly there – but, when the dust settles, *you* get to decide how much you'll take away from this, what you'll implement and take action on, and just how far you'll go with this when all is said and done.

Personally, I hope you go as far as you possibly can with this, because it's proven to be such a fruitful focus for me and many others I've worked with.

So, let's dig in and talk probates, shall we?

Let's First Get Over One Big Hurdle

There's a stigma that sometimes comes along with probate investing that we should address straight away.

I'm just going to say it:

Probate is not a dirty word.

Sometimes people mistakenly believe that for investors like us to market to buy properties from estates in probate is tantamount to grave robbery or scamming little old ladies out of their inheritances.

Some people imagine us hawking over obituaries, looking to swoop in and exploit some poor family's pain and greedily extract cash from their tragic loss.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Actually, as strange as it may sound, probate investors are oftentimes kind of a *hero* to the families that need them…

Here's a quick reality dose for you:

- People die every day, and sometimes, when this happens, they leave behind a whole mess (both figurative and literal) that their loved ones are forced to handle.
- Often this mess includes a house, or other real estate, that needs extensive repairs or updates. Grammy's shag carpet, dark paneled walls, and tiled counters

just aren't cutting it in today's market, not to mention the whole place smells like menthol and mothballs.

- Oftentimes, these heirs are faced with (i) a distressed property they simply must sell for one reason or another and (ii) little-to-no money available to handle the work needed to re-sell to a retail buyer.
- Even if they have the money to do it, they may just not have the *motivation*, due to the emotional trauma surrounding the property and the passing of their loved one. Sometimes the emotional weight of it is just too much.

This is where real estate investors like you and me play a legitimate and much-needed, role in the adept management of an estate's assets… and an absolutely critical part in helping someone in this situation to be able to get out and move on with their lives.

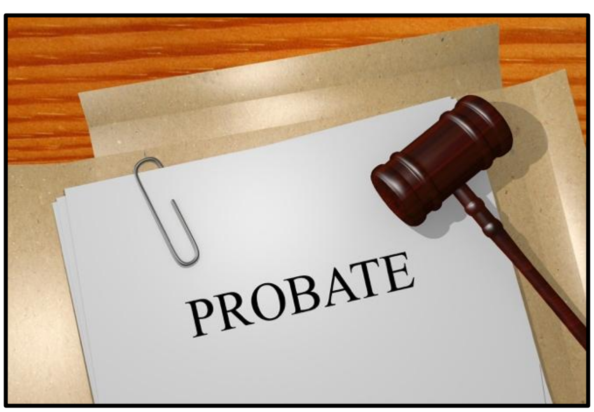
Yes, we're marketing to the family member(s) of someone who's died. So, of course, you always want to approach them with sensitivity and kindness.

But, personally, I'm not pouring over newspaper obituaries or showing up at funerals.

The way I market to probates is tactful, kind, and effective. I'll explain it in detail for you shortly. But, at the end of the day, I can get the warm-fuzzies knowing that I'm not only making great money, but also doing something that actually helps people move on from a tough situation.

So with that out of the way, let's dive into…

The Groundwork: What Is Probate Anyway?



In simplest terms, probate is the formal legal process that occurs after someone has died. It usually involves several things including proving in court that the deceased person's will is valid, paying any debts or taxes the deceased may have owed, and - here's where we come in –

pinpointing, inventorying, appraising, and distributing the deceased person’s property.

At the time of a person's death, a legal entity is automatically created called “The Estate of (Deceased Person’s Name)”. The estate now owns every single thing the deceased person owned immediately prior to their death. This can include their share of community property, separate property, lawsuit claims, debt, and yes–*real estate*.

In fact, one of the most common reasons for opening probate is to pass title of real estate. Since the property is now owned by the estate, that ownership interest requires some document to pass title to the heirs and that is where probate comes in.

Not so tough to understand, right?

Every county has its own set of rules for exactly how this is done - which estates are required to go through probate, and which aren’t. In my experience, most estates go through the probate process, with the biggest exceptions being:

(1) People who die with a living trust in place (the trust owns it all, not them).
(2) People who had very small estates.

Some jurisdictions allow for the use of a small estate affidavit in order to avoid probate. When this is available, the estate is generally under a benchmark of value – anywhere from $25K to $100K – depending on the jurisdiction. Each county sets its own threshold for the dollar amount required of these estates, and if the assets don’t *exceed* that specific dollar amount, then a family member won’t need to open up an estate. This is good news for you since you don’t want to spend money marketing to people who don’t have a high amount of equity to settle.

It is the larger estates that end up going through the probate system.

LEGAL PRO TIP: As I said, every county in every state has its own separate probate process. They’re usually fairly similar, but still unique and entirely independent of one another. So, naturally, there could be a number of variables that depend on where you live, including filing requirements, specific documents used, time frames, etc.

This is the perfect time for me to say how crucial it is you **have a qualified attorney who specializes in probate law as a member of your power team**.

I can speak in generalities about documents, policies, procedures, and time frames based on what I've seen as the norms in most U.S. counties, but that's no replacement for having a local attorney on tap who can give you certainty with a phone call or an email.

What Is the Purpose of Probate?

The main purpose of probate is to ensure that the deceased person's assets are distributed according to the will, and that all estate and funeral expenses as well as debts and taxes are correctly paid. When someone with significant assets dies, before the assets can be distributed to the heirs, the creditors (people who are owed money) have the right to make a claim against those assets in order to get what they are owed.

To facilitate this, probate laws typically require the estate to place a public advertisement declaring that probate has been opened for the estate, and offering creditors the opportunity to step forward. The estate is obliged to run this ad a certain number of times indicating who died, who the executor is, and how to contact the estate to make a claim.

Each county has a designated listing of the publications in which the family is required to post these notices. If you open your local newspaper (wait, does anyone even know what a newspaper is anymore?) you'll almost always find these probate announcement "ads" in the same general area where foreclosure notices are posted. Find the one for your county, and I can almost guarantee that's where you'll find a good number of the probate notices being advertised. In theory, you could market to these notices, however, oftentimes, the information you're looking for in order to be able to effectively market is not contained in the advertisement. Plus, it's going to be difficult for you to know when the original probate was opened and whether the notice is a first notice or duplicate.

Can You Tell if the Probate Includes Real Estate?

You may be wondering if there's anything in the probate case that clearly indicates that there's ***real estate*** among the estate's assets.

Well, yes, you can usually find this out – but, this type of information is definitely not included in the public ad. You'll have to review the actual probate documents that were filed when the estate was opened (which, you can do because probate is a matter of public record – anyone has the right to view these documents), as well as perform some additional digging, which means someone's got to make a trip to the courthouse and have some time on their hands (as well as a high tolerance for tedious work).

Now the real question is… *should you?*

You can certainly try to only target your probate marketing to estates that have real estate to settle if you wish. Feel free to make that trip to the courthouse to review the actual probate docs for each estate. But, frankly, my experience tells me that it's not worth it most of the time.

I've done it both ways, and in our business today, we simply market to *every single probate lead*.

It comes down to this: There are lots of more important, higher-leverage, uses for my time than researching and reading through the public probate records at the courthouse just to ensure we're only targeting estates with houses in them.

Saving a few marketing dollars this way comes at the much greater expense of time and effort it takes to do it. And, in my view, it simply isn't worth it – it's actually more cost effective (and, far less annoying) to market to every probate case.

Besides, my years and years of experiences has shown me that the best general clue that the estate probably contains real estate is the fact that there are *significant assets at all.*

Think of it this way… most people don't own $42,000 worth of designer clothes or $68,000 worth of jewelry, right? So, a significant estate like this is likely to contain real estate anyway.

What Makes Marketing to Probates So Unique?

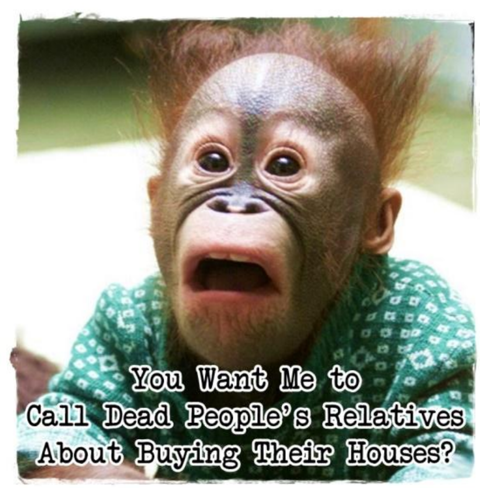
I feel this is an important point to understand – probates are kind of special in how they compare to other lead types investors commonly target. And, I think understanding this uniqueness can really help you better grasp how to get the most out of them when push comes to shove.

For Starters: Probates Frequently Have Less Competition

Back in the day (10 years ago, or so) probates were basically untapped for all intents and purposes. A few investors here and there were quietly working them, but today there's a good deal more who've become savvy to probates.

That said, you may find it surprising to hear that even with more players in the arena, there still isn't all that much serious competition – certainly not compared to other seller ponds investors are fishing in. And I'm not just talking about in my own area, but in markets across the country.

One reason for this is **many investors are simply intimidated**. This is mostly due to a false insecurity about how to navigate the nuances of wills, heirs, executors, and just the probate process overall.



The truth is, you really don't need to understand anything more about the probate process than what I've already covered for you here. But, many investors assume it's much more specialized and complicated than it really is, scaring many away altogether.

For others, the idea of 'wheeling and dealing' with executors and heirs for profit just **seems too darn off-putting**.

I know investors who won't even *consider* probate because they don't want to talk to somebody whose wife just died, for example. I am not exaggerating when I say there are plenty of people out there who won't touch probate – for any amount of money – just for this reason alone.

Reality is, yes, probates are unique from other types of motivated seller leads and need to be handled a little differently. But, from handling the calls, to what to say in your mailers, or even how many letters you should be sending and how often – all of this adds to the mystique and ends up keeping many investors away.

That's great news, really – more deals for us. :-) And, if you know what you're doing, it's not nearly as daunting as many assume.

Secondly: Probates Are Prone to Have More Equity

Any investor who's spent his, or her, hard earned money and time marketing to absentee owners or pre-foreclosures (or, most any other type of motivated seller lead) knows full well how many of your leads simply don't have enough meat on the bone to make a cash deal even feasible. Oftentimes, it seems properties with any real equity are the needle in the haystack.

But consider that with probates, we're very often dealing with the property of a recently deceased *older person* who's typically owned their home for quite some time. More often than not, it was paid off completely a number of years ago! Or, if there is any debt on the property it's usually not that substantial.

But, truth be told, a decent number of my probate deals don't have *any* debts at all.

Yes, there are exceptions. Not everyone dies in older age, and not every senior has their property paid off before passing. But, hands down, probate leads have dealt me properties with a vastly higher likelihood of equity than any other type of seller lead I've ever targeted. This is precisely why I'm so partial to them.

Thirdly: Probate Sellers are Uniquely Motivated

Every new real estate investor learns early on that, whenever possible, you should only deal with motivated sellers – their level of motivation being more or less a 'gold standard' for whether or not a seller lead is even worth your time.

Well, another thing that makes probates so special is the ***type of motivation*** you'll frequently encounter.

Here's what I mean…

Obviously the person you're negotiating to buy the home from is *not* the homeowner, but a personal rep, executor, or an heir of the estate. This means more than you may think, because it really changes their motivation dynamic.

This isn't so much the case with spouses… but often when you're dealing with another relative or a family friend – maybe even a child or sibling of the person who passed away – they most likely didn't own or even live in the estate's home. This means they typically just won't have the same type of *sentimental attachment* to the home itself that a homeowner will.

Of course they'll often have plenty of attachment *to the person* who passed away, but that's not quite the same thing as having the type of emotional connection to the property itself that a homeowner typically has.

In my experience the key motivation factors with executors and heirs are less about…

> *"What's the most amount of money I can get for this property?"*

And center more around…

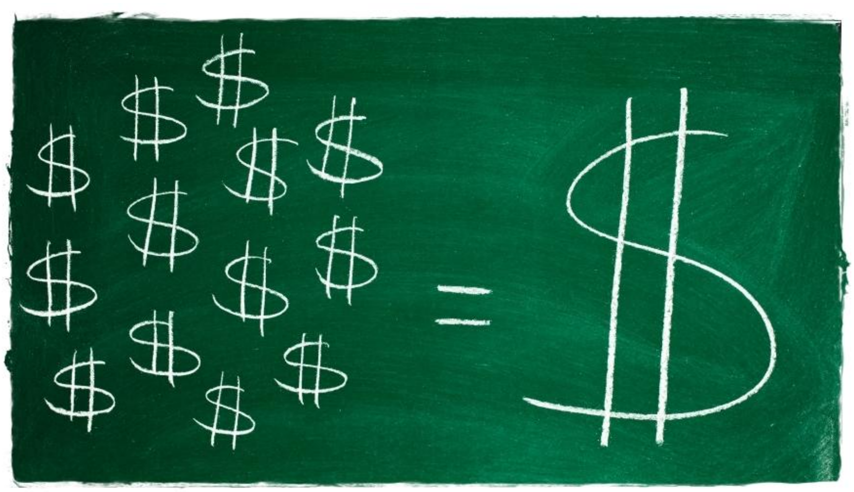
> *"How can we best resolve the estate's issues? And how can you– as an investor – help make this happen decidedly faster, more easily, and less painfully for everyone?"*

One of the things I genuinely love the most about doing probate deals is how often I'm working with somebody who is *authentically grateful* I'm there, helping them get this situation and property taken care of.

Perhaps they inherited their mom's house and it's teeming with memories – good or bad – that are just too painful for them to deal with. Or, maybe this house is in a part of town where granite countertops and high-end finishes are needed, and they just don't want to, or can't, handle dealing with that.

Bottom line, they are overwhelmed and stressed out, and they just need to move on.

Your job is simply to show them how you can help make a significant part of this stress go away quickly and easily by taking care of the real estate piece of their probate puzzle in short order. It's just a notably different energy and focus than you'll have with most other types of motivated sellers.



What Type of Investor Is Probate Marketing Ideal For?

Because of the benefits I've talked about when doing probate deals – it's uniqueness and profitability – you may be wondering if probate deals are right for you.

I'm going to be completely honest here because it's for your own good…

For the 'hobby' investor, who likes to dabble a bit in investing here and there, I'd encourage you to look for other types of deals that are cheaper and easier. It's as simple as that. There are certainly other investing strategies – like bird dogging, wholesaling, and joint venture deals – that are easier and more cost effective to do on a less than part-time basis.

If you're a new investor wondering whether you should do probate marketing – I say,

"Yes, but…"

Newer investors can do probate marketing, but you must have a decent grasp of how investing works and, most importantly, you really need to be comfortable handling seller calls (or, at least be good at faking it!). There's definitely a certain way to speak with sellers who are dealing with an estate, and it may take a while to warm up to the particular approach you'll need to take for these types of calls. Closing probate deals has a lot to do with your ability to present yourself as someone who knows what they're doing. Notice, I didn't say you always have to actually know what you're doing. But, you do need to have a level of confidence when you're speaking with people – they're depending on you to handle what is potentially a new and overwhelming situation.

If you've never handled a seller call before, then write out what you intend to say, as well as the questions you'll ask (I'll give you some key questions later in the book), and practice, practice, practice, until you know you can introduce yourself and ask questions in with an easy, but confident, demeanor.

And, here's another other word of warning for a newer investor: **Probate marketing is time consuming** if you do the work yourself, or expensive if you choose to have someone

else do the work for you. If you don't have time and discipline, or a solid amount of marketing cash to invest into it, I'd suggest you start with other kinds of deals and marketing (like Bandit Signs) that fit better with your budget and won't stress you out financially

So, if you're an investor who's still testing the real estate investing waters, know that there are easier and cheaper ways to invest and to get your feet wet. They might not be as lucrative, but they are a lot less expensive and take a lot less commitment. Probates take commitment.

Now, for the more serious investor, (note, I didn't say seasoned, I said *serious*) allow me to explain why you should consider probate marketing as a real estate investing strategy. See, I think probate tends to be utilized by more serious, experienced investors because the leads are more difficult to obtain and it takes an incredible amount of discipline to consistently harvest those leads. Meaning, the dedicated, all-in investors will likely find success with probates. In fact, the general consensus amongst experienced investors matches up with my own opinion – probate deals are, hands down, the most lucrative of all the real estate deals we do.

That leads perfectly into my next point… that of the competition in probates.

Why there's less probate competition

Because there are easier ways to find leads, you'll actually find far less competition from other investors for probate deals. The payoff is big, but you have to be able to put the time, attention, and/or money out there and make the long term commitment that you're going to keep going until you've achieved success – and, YOU WILL. But, most won't.

Mind you, I didn't say there isn't *any* competition – 10 years ago, it was practically non-existent, but in recent years, it has ramped up – but, only somewhat. And, most investors are still not marketing to these leads the way they should.

There are certainly some things you can do with probates to make yourself stand out from your competition. I'll explain what those things are later on, but just know that you would be hard-pressed to find many investors doing these things. That's just one more reason you'll find the least amount of competitors in probates than you will with just about any other lead that's out there.

Brief Recap:

Whether you should do probates depends on the type of investor you are:

1. A 'hobby' investor should do other types of deals that are easier and less expensive.
2. A newer investor should have a solid foundation of real estate investing knowledge before slowly and cautiously embarking on probate deals.
3. Serious investors, the kind that are willing to invest extra time and/or money if they know the investment will pay off – welcome to the club.

The Framework of the Probate Leads Process

Now that we've covered the basic generalities and legalities surrounding probate deals, I want to explain the actual mail campaigns for probate marketing. To do so, we'll start with the framework of the probate leads process.

First step – find the leads.

How to get probate leads

When it comes to actually getting the probate leads themselves, you have two options:

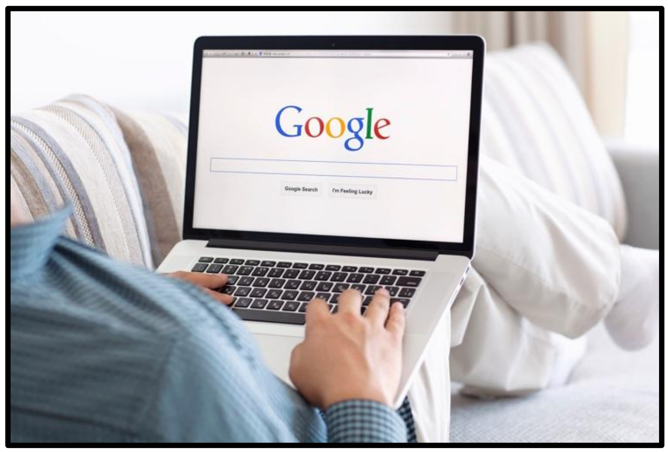
1. Get them yourself.
2. Hire someone to do get them for you.

Later, I'll cover who you might hire if that's something you're interested in doing, but I want to first talk in terms of getting them yourself.

It's important that you keep in mind something I mentioned already: The rules for probate vary by county. So, just like each county sets its own dollar-amount threshold for the requirement of probate, counties also set their own rules for how and where you can gather leads.

Furthermore, each county determines which court will handle their probate cases (circuit, appellate, superior, etc), the language/codes/case sequence numbers that are used to categorize the probate cases, and the types of cases that are seen in each court house (all probate cases or cases heard in probate court are not necessarily estate cases).

The online option



Some counties (I would estimate 20%, or so) do provide the information that you need to market to probate leads online, so you might be able to find them on the internet (I'll go over what the information is that you need shortly). While surfing the web sounds easy enough, it's also a manual process that you have to commit yourself to doing… see how that word, **commitment** crawled back in when talking about probates? Also, I used the word 'manual' in describing the collection process because even if you're able to find the leads online, most states have specific restrictions or bans on using any kind of automation to 'scrape' information from their online databases. This means that any kind of software or program someone writes in order to quickly gather the information you need is usually illegal, and carries some pretty big fines or penalties if you get caught using them. Typically, the only way to gather the data is to grab a big cup of coffee, and manually collect the data you need.

The easiest way to find out if your county provides the information you need online is to Google, for example, "Orange County, California Probate Court Records Search", or some variation of the same.

Now, because every county has their own system and website(s), it's at this point that you're going to need a little common sense to figure things out. Once you've determined that you are, in fact, on the county's website, you'll need to ensure that "probates" are one of the case types this website includes. Sometimes, your search will take you to a website that is completely dedicated to only probates for that particular county. In those cases, you might see words like "Register of Wills" or "probate" prominently displayed. Other times, you'll have to search around a bit on the county's tabs until you get to the specific case type, "probates".

Once at the proper link or dedicated website, you'll want to look for key terms like "online record search" or "probate search". Again, there is no way I can be completely comprehensive about what to search for since every, single county handles things differently. Some even require notarized applications and accounts to be set up. But, I promise you'll figure it out once you're there. If you see nothing about online searching, then it's likely that the county doesn't offer this function, but you can always contact the court clerk directly to be absolutely sure. Also, keep in mind that just because a county has an online search function, doesn't always mean that the information you need is information they provide online. In fact, more often than not, even when counties have online search functions, they do not provide the critical information you need to be able to market to these leads.

If you're able to view the probate record, there are three key pieces of information you need to effectively market to this lead.

1. The name of the estate of the deceased
   This will almost always be found at the beginning of the all of the documents you will see recorded in the probate case (and, there could be many, many documents, depending on which county you're working in and their recording requirements). The reason this piece of information is important is because in your marketing letters, you will reference "the estate of John Doe" when you give

your reason for sending your letter. Ex. "I'm writing to you regarding the estate of Mr. John Doe…".

2. 'Named Representative'
   The named representative is the individual who will ultimately be given the legal power to distribute (and/or dispose of) the assets of the deceased party. They are almost always one of the heirs, if not the sole heir, of the deceased. Although it is not usually the case, there can be more than one 'named representative'. If you come across this scenario, it's usually best to simply market to the first representative listed that has a mailing address in the same state where the case was opened. The reason is that if there is a home that needs to be sold, you're best to work with an heir who lives in the same state as the deceased. Sometimes, the named representative could be listed as a 'fiduciary', 'personal representative', 'executor', or 'executrix', but those titles are far less common.
3. Mailing address for 'named representative'
   The case will always list a mailing address for the named representative. You need this address because that is where you'll send your marketing letter. Please note that this address is not necessarily the address of the real estate that needs to be sold. It is simply the official contact address for the named representative and that's exactly what you need. More often than not, this will be the piece of information not listed in the online records.

If you're lucky and you're able to find this information online, you can proceed with a mail campaign. You'd be surprised, though, at how many counties still *do not* provide that information online. And, sorry to be the bearer of more not-so-good news, but oftentimes, even if *some* of the info is online, they don't give you *all* of what you need on the website.

Head to the courthouse

Alright, you determine your county doesn't offer the information you need online. So, what are you to do? Well, remember that Google search we did earlier? If you didn't get the info you need online, at the very least, you'll be able to figure out the address of the courthouse that houses these public records.

You'll have to get up from your desk chair and head over to the county courthouse where the records are stored. It's public information and, because of that, you can simply go to the clerk and make a request to obtain the details needed and write it all down. Sometimes, courthouses don't allow you to bring in laptops, so make sure you have a pen and paper. The clerks are going to be your friend, your *best friend*. They are the ones who can tell you where and how to gather the vital information – be nice to them.

I'd suggest you go make nice with the clerks and look for those leads at the courthouse once a month.

> **Helpful Tip:** A roadblock you may encounter is that in some counties, the courthouses where the information is housed will only allow you to pull a certain amount of records at one time or even have a maximum time limit given to look for leads. Make a note of it so you aren't caught off guard and frustrated when you go to pull new records next month.

It's worth repeating here again that finding the detailed information varies state by state and county and county. Some counties have old books filled haphazardly with this information, rather than in nicely organized, easy-to-find folders. Others will have books that you will use to get a code that will lead you to other books that will have the information that you're looking for. In one county we worked in, you had to look in one book to get the code that would lead you to two other books, one which contained the decedent information, the other which contained the personal representative's information.

I kid you not, we have literally worked in some counties where we pop into the county courthouse and have found a big, red Western-looking old book that we pull from the shelf and blow off a cloud of dust.

Something else that'll blow your mind – there are even some counties that still use microfiche. (Do you even know what that is? If you're younger than 30, you probably don't. Look it up, it's archaic!)

Okay, I'd like to tie this point up about finding leads all neat and tidy for you…

The cheapest way to get probate leads is for you to do the work yourself. You could either (get lucky) and find the necessary details online, or you may have to go over to the county courthouse, or perhaps some hybrid of the two. Because it's so unique from county to county, you have to put on your Sherlock Holmes hat to figure out the best process. Don't be discouraged if there's a bit of a learning curve to figuring it all out. Once you do it once, it's done and you're smarter than 98% of the other investors out there who are spinning their wheels trying to figure out how to get good deals into their pipeline.

As a side note, if you can afford it, I've found that the best way to obtain probate leads is to just pay someone else to do all that for you. (More on that later.)

How to market to probate leads

You market to probate leads by sending out letters through a systematic mail campaign to the leads you either find online or at the county courthouse. Simple as that.

What your letters say is a critical piece to probate marketing. (Notice, I said letter*s* – as your campaign should be more than just one letter.) And, just as critical is the specific mailing timeframe for your marketing campaigns.

I mail each lead a total of four times with letters that are spaced six weeks apart.

Knowing the appropriate content for your letters, coupled with knowing when and how often to mail each one, will put you several steps closer to a complete mail campaign.

So, let's start with the body of what your letter (and your subsequent follow-up letters) should say.

The first letter is an introduction type of letter, which will include information like this:

> *Hi Mr. Seller,*

> *My name is Christina Krause and I'm contacting you in regards to the estate of Mr. Peabody. I buy homes in California, and regularly buy estate property. If there is a house that needs to be sold in the estate of Mr. Peabody, I can help with that… Here is what I do (or, here is what my company does)…*

This introduction letter will actually be your longest letter, but don't let that intimidate you. You're either a savvy enough writer yourself, you can hire someone to write it for you, or you can easily scoop a template off the internet and customize it.

Remember, in my campaigns, I mail each lead a total of four times with letters that are spaced six weeks apart. So, after you've mailed your initial introductory letter, every six weeks you'll send a follow-up letter. And these follow-up letters get progressively smaller and shorter.

Your second letter, which is the first follow up, might say something like:

> *Hi Mr. Seller,*
>
> *I just wanted to make sure that you received the letter I sent about six weeks ago. I wanted to remind you that I'm here. In the event there's a home that needs to be sold, I can help…*

Your third letter will look similar to your second. But, your fourth, and final, letter is really short and sweet:

> *Hi Mr. Seller,*
>
> *This is the last letter I'll be sending. Just wanted to send a final reminder that I can help if there's a house in the estate that needs to be sold…*

There's right and wrong letter content

Regarding the content of the letter, I strongly suggest that you keep the letters *business only*. Don't include overly sentimental words of empathy or offer condolences. I've known some investors who have sent that type of letter, and I can even understand why...they don't want to offend the recipient or come at them from a predatory standpoint.

But, here's the thing - there's no way to know for sure if the recipient is going to see your letter as a welcome solution to a problem they have that will offer them relief. Or, whether they'll see it as somebody trying to prey upon them in one of the worst times of their life.

On top of that, people aren't stupid, right? If you send a 'heartfelt' letter offering condolences to someone you don't even know, about someone you never knew – they're going to see right through it. That type of letter is over the top, disingenuous, and makes you seem untrustworthy because there's no way that you could be in such dire straits emotionally about *their* loss, when you had no connection to anyone involved.

I have found that a short and direct, but respectful, letter is best. You don't want a long letter that tells them everything that you could possibly do to help them or every benefit of working with you. That can come off as salesy, and as you know, people don't like that type of approach.

Who should this letter come from?

Sounds like a silly question, but once I explain this to you, it'll be crystal clear why we need to discuss it – it involves being consistent with who you are.

When deciding on who your letter should come from, you have two options: a singular, small-guy investor or the big established/experienced company. The option you choose depends on two things:

A: Where you are in the country.

B: You.

Here's what I mean…

On the East Coast, where I do business, we have actually found (based on our tracking and data) that a bigger 'company feel' with logos and letterhead included works best. Recipients here like to feel that we're a team of professional people who have lots of experience.

> "*Our* company has been buying houses for *XX* years; *we* can do this for you."

I also know of investors, in the South and Midwest, who include company logos and branding, but then they sign the letters, 'Joe,' rather than a company name. And, that does have a more personal feel.

Then, there are also investors who forgo all the logos and branding altogether and just send the letter from themselves, personally.

"I buy houses… I can do this for you…"

As you might imagine, the style and tone of the letter that works will vary depending on where you live (state/city/county) and your market area (urban/suburban/rural). You'll need to send some test marketing out and track the results to see which type of letter produces the best seller calls and/or the most deals for YOU.

Letter style

Something else to consider is the **tone** of your letter. The tone of your letter must fit your personality. Not to get all lovey-dovey emotional, but you do need to be true to yourself. It's important that your letter is consistent with who you really are as a person. If your letter sounds super formal, but you've got a more chill and laid-back demeanor – that's incongruent. Recipients will pick up on that just like they'll pick up on your 'fake' offer of condolences.

When you pay attention to those kinds of details, you'll definitely set yourself apart from your investing competition.

What Are the Most Successful Methods of Mail Marketing?

We're now going to hyper-focus on some specific, important details: envelope, stamp, paper, handwritten or typed.

I want to share with you what has brought in the best results for me, as well as for fellow investors.

The devil is in the material details

For my mail marketing, I prefer:

- An invitation-sized envelope (sometimes in varying colors or weight, especially around specific holidays or seasons) because it will stand out against the other business-sized letters in the mailbox. That said, plenty of my clients experience great results with business-sized envelopes and I used them myself, successfully, for many years. Again, try different things and track your results. You can even try sending different envelopes with each of the four, different letters in your campaign (I'm in the middle of trying that now).

- A real stamp, not a bulk-mailing, inked stamp
- White paper (sometimes, I'll throw in a linen finished paper to mix things up)
- Typed content, in a plain font, for the letter itself
- A high-quality scanned image of my signature in blue ink at the bottom of the letter (you can also hand-sign each letter if you like)
- **Hand-written**, addressed envelope (not a computer-generated, handwriting, font)
- Return address label sticker on the back, sealing the envelope

So, imagine receiving a small invitation-style envelope, with your address handwritten on that envelope, and an actual stamp in the upper right-hand corner. Are you going to open it? Heck yea, you are! There's no way you're *not* opening that letter, even if you suspect it might be marketing. Because, what if it happens to be an invitation to that party your daughter has been dying to attend?

Look, with all my experience, I have a pretty good eye for mailer marketing, but even if I got an envelope like this, there's no chance I'm not opening that sucker. Once opened, I might be able to quickly identify it as a marketing piece, but you better believe I'm opening to make sure.

All that being said, our data shows that the two biggest factors for a high open rate is handwriting the address and invitation-sized envelopes. And, of course, a higher open rate leads to a higher conversion rate. The success that investors are having because of the handwritten envelopes is *significant* – I can't stress that enough.

When to send letters

Because I've been dealing with probates for a while now, and my experience is rather vast in this niche, I've nearly perfected our mailing method. And, what I mean by that is, through both tracking and actual results, we've landed on a marketing process that gives us incredible response rates and conversion.

As I stated, we send four letters that are mailed six weeks apart.

But how do you know when to mail that very first letter?

I believe that the sweet spot for when you should mail your introductory letter is waiting a full month *after* the date that the estate was opened by the named representative or family member. In other words, if I pull cases that were opened in April, I wait to mail those leads until June. Said another way, for June's mail out, you would pull leads of probate cases that had been opened in the month of April – your waiting period is the month of May.

When to mail your first of four letters is super important for a number of reasons, but let me throw a couple at you…

If you choose to send a letter right away when the estate is opened, recipients are going to connect the dots – they've *just* opened the estate and you are *immediately* mailing them a letter – you will have a significant increase in angry phone calls. You might get deals from an immediate mailer, however, you need to be prepared and know that people are going to be more frustrated with those letters. So that's more of an emotion-related reason why you shouldn't mail too early.

Here's a technical reason for why you shouldn't:

After an estate is opened, there is a waiting period in which nothing can be done to the estate. So, during that waiting period, even if the family *wanted* to sell you the house, they aren't legally permitted to do so until they have satisfied all the requirements. They still have to send out their legal notices, their public notices, and the judge has to approve and sign off on everything. That's assuming there are no disputes or problems with the case. So, even if you were to contact somebody to get a jumpstart on their situation, you are contacting somebody who legally can't even make a decision. Even if you could get them to sign a contract, if they wanted to get out of that contract they could because they didn't have the authority to sell the home during the waiting period.

Let's say you delay sending your first letter until a month after the estate was opened. You'll likely still encounter someone who will say:

> *"I'm really interested in selling the house, but I have my final court hearing in 2 weeks, so I can't do anything for now anyway."*

So, the reason you don't want to mail too soon is because you don't want to end up talking to people who, legally, can't do anything anyway; it's just too quick and it wastes your time.

Once you've sent your first letter, you will send your three, follow-up letters, each spaced six weeks apart from the last letter sent. Keep in mind that you'll also continue to mail your new letters each month, so you'll want a system that helps you to keep track of where you are with each new, monthly campaign.

Campaign results to expect

I'm going to share with you some results based on our tracking of my mail campaigns (which, as I mentioned, you should *definitely* be doing as well). Interestingly enough, when I've run these results and data by other investors, they are, indeed, very similar to their results, which I think says something of my four-letter strategy.

In fact, I've actually done loads of testing on various types of mail campaigns with various numbers of follow-up letters, and various time in between those letters. And, my four-letter strategy is what consistently gives us the best results.

Here's what I've found: The first letter and the third letter are where we get most of our deals.

So then, you might be thinking – why do I continue to send out the fourth letter? Great question.

Here's why: Every time I think about dropping that stinking fourth letter, I get a deal from it. Seriously, I'll send that fourth letter and time after time, month after month, nothing comes of it. But, wouldn't you know, when I've finally decided (again) I'll drop that fourth letter, it produces a deal. Go figure. I actually know investors who send up to six letters for each lead, so there's certainly an argument to be made for lots of follow up.

Now, here are some numbers that should be helpful to manage your expectations and to compare your results to. Keep in mind that these results can vary depending on your market, mailer, etc.

- I usually send 250 - 300 pieces of mail a month.
- From that first letter I mail out, I typically get anywhere from 5 to 10 calls.
- In pretty much any mail marketing campaign, you can expect a 1% response rate. For me, a 2%-3% response is pretty typical. Having said that, I know some investors who are getting as high as a 5%-7% response rate on their mailings.

Key takeaways about your mail campaigns:

- Take a respectful, business-only approach
- Track your campaigns to help determine whether your letter should be from a company or a single, named investor
- Match the tone of your letter with your personality
- Mail a total of 4 letters, spaced 6 weeks apart

How Do You Handle the Phone Call?

The part of your probate marketing when the business really happens is when the seller calls come in.

When I'm asked about probate marketing, the question I get asked about more often than anything else is: How do I handle the seller calls?

To start off, I want to remind you that just as I advised about the content of your letter – you do not want to say you're sorry for their loss (except if they say, or do, things that specifically elicit you saying something like this) and be super emotional and offer overboard condolences. Again, they'll see right through it.

Plus, here's something you probably haven't even thought about…

If you time your campaigns as I do, by the time they get your letter, they'll have already been dealing with this estate for a while now and are going through the motions of the probate process in a more methodical kind of mindset. There's usually two or three months between the time the person has passed away and when the family member has opened the estate. Add to that, the delay in sending your first letter, which means there's a very significant gap between the time that the person passed away and what you are doing. The emotions of the situation have likely leveled off.

When that family member or representative does call you in response to your letter and the services you're offering, they're not calling to hear false sympathy. They are calling you to get something done. So treat it like business, while still being gentle and respectful.

At the end of the day, you're going to handle this call, just as you would any other of your "we buy homes" calls.

If you have absolutely no experience with this, there are tons of courses out there that will give you this kind of foundational education. And, if you're serious about being a real estate investor, you need invest in one of them. A quick, easy, and inexpensive course I would highly recommend is in video format by a well known and respected wholesaler - Steph Davis. The course is incredibly well done, especially for the price - $97.00. It's perfect for anyone from a newer investor to someone just looking to brush up on their flipping skills.

You can get more information about that course here:
http://www.1shoppingcart.com/app/?Clk=5547058

When I have a seller on the phone – without a doubt – I let the seller dictate the call. Oftentimes, I've spoken with people who want to tell me about the person who passed away and reminisce about memories of them. I *always* write down those personal details. Why? Because I refer to it in a secondary phone call, which helps build rapport, a connection, and trust. But, I am always genuine about it – you need to be genuinely interested in what they have to say about their loved one.

> **Real-life example:** A seller called me after she received one of my probate letters. She had lost her husband to a heart-attack and was interested in selling their home since it was more than she now needed. During her call, she mentioned that her husband loved to play piano. So, in a follow-up call, while we were chit-chatting, I said: *"My kids were at their piano lesson the other day and I thought of you because I remembered you saying your husband loved to play. I really hope they learn to love it, too."* Another, less obvious, thing I always try to do on the phone is listen for them to mention the name of their deceased, loved one (often, less formal than the name listed on the estate) and always refer to the person by that name, going forward.

Look, of course you're going to have to ask the seller very pointed, specific questions about the house itself and the money that's owed, just like other types of real estate investing deal calls. But on these probate calls, when you genuinely listen to the answers that people are giving you, you're going to find that you actually do start to care. You're not a robot, right? And the seller is going to pick up on that.

When your approach and tone have compassion, the seller will notice it. What's better, before you know it, you are actually going to *feel* compassionate. I promise you, you will start to really feel and understand that you are helping this person, which means your part of the conversation won't be forced. After all, you are in this to help the seller find a resolution.

I can't even count the number of times that a seller has said to me, *'You're not my highest offer, but I'm going with you because I trust you.'* Boom! There it is. Our genuine connection built trusting rapport and closed the deal.

Here's a list of some of the critical pieces of information you'll need when you first speak with a seller about their home. Please note that this applies to any house call, probates or otherwise. I've posed these pieces of information as questions to help you hear how you might ask them when you're on the phone:

What is the address of the property you're looking to sell?

How many bedrooms and bathrooms does the house have?

How would you describe the overall condition of the house?

This is where you'll spend the majority of your time on the phone call. Allow them to ramble on for a while, interrupting only to ask specific questions about things they've brought up. Take notes so you don't ask the same questions twice. When they're done with their description, you can ask additional questions to get information about anything they didn't cover themselves. You'll want to make sure you find out about the major systems and whether or not any known problems exist (HVAC, roof, plumbing, electric). Also, ask them whether or not they're aware of any recent work or upgrades that were done. Be conversational. Although you're going through a checklist, do your best not to sound robotic or fire-squad-y.

Do you know if there is any debt on the home, like a mortgage or lien? If so, what is the balance?

Lots of people skip this question altogether because they're intimidated to ask it. If that's the case, you need to take a swig of some kind of grown-up libation, get over it, and ask. 95% of the time, you'll get a straightforward answer. The other 5% of the time, you're going to get someone who asks you why you need to know or even tell you it's none of your business. At that point, you'll just kindly explain that you're trying to determine whether or not this is a situation where you can provide a solution, or not. Whatever you do, do not ask this question timidly. You don't need to growl, but you need to ask it as if you were asking any other question. In a matter-of-fact kind of way.

If the house were completely renovated and ready for sale, what do you think the value of the home would be – what would it sell for?

What would you like to get for the house?

This is another question that is often skipped because it makes people feel too aggressive, too soon. It's not. Your phone is going to be ringing. You will be talking to a lot of potential sellers. Your time is money. You need to value it as such. Wasting time with someone who wants something close to fair market value for their house costs you money and is, ultimately, de-motivating. This is one question that I will get an answer to, or I won't go see a property. Period. I explain it this way (and, that's if I even have to explain it, since more often than not, people will just tell you what they want)…

> *"It's important that I get an idea of what you're looking for to make sure I don't waste your time and my time…we need to make sure we're both playing in the same ball-park. I 'd like to know that we're at least close with our numbers before I ask you to take more of your time to actually show me the house, so I can make you a solid offer."*

I'm normally looking to be no more than $10k from where I ultimately need to be before I'll go out to a house and make an actual offer.

A couple of side notes about the phone call:

If you're not already super familiar with where the house is located, and therefore, you don't have the information you need about the ARV or salability of the area, then don't be afraid to tell the seller that you're not immediately familiar with the neighborhood/area and that you'd like to do a little research and call them back in one hour. If they say they can't talk in an hour, then find out from them when you can call them back, and call them as soon as they can take another call. If you're a newer investor, don't allow this to mess with your head. There are still plenty of times when I don't know much about a home someone calls me about, right off the top of my head. It's not a big deal unless you make it one. Once you've asked your key questions, then tell the person that you need to take a little time to do some research, and that you'll call them back quickly. And, do so. Just make sure you actually schedule a time to call them back – ideally within 30 minutes to an hour – so that they know you're serious and so that they have a mental commitment to you to speak again.

Also, one of the ways I weed out the not-so-motivated sellers **while also** building rapport is to tell people that if their home is generally in good condition, then I am not the option that will make them the most money. I don't say this randomly, because it doesn't always apply. But, if they describe the home as being in decent shape, I'll make sure that they understand that they have other options, "as long as they have time to explore them". It might sound something like this:

> *"Is there any reason you don't just list the house for sale with a realtor? That's the way you'll make the most money on this house. Most of the time, when people use me, there is a compelling reason why – perhaps the house is in bad shape or they don't have the time, or desire, to wait out the housing market. What I do offer is a guarantee, because once I say I'll buy the house, it's done. But, if the house is in decent shape, and you have the time wait for a qualified buyer and settlement, that's what will likely bring you your highest dollar amount. If you're just looking to be done, and you don't want any surprises, that's when I'm a great option."*

Do you see what I did there? Two things: I told them I genuinely cared about them and that I want the best-case scenario for them. But, I also worked into that conversation the fact that if they don't go with me, they're going to have to wait it out. I created an urgency and made a subtle argument for why going with me might be advantageous.

One final random tactic that I *only* use with probate calls: I emphasize the fact that the seller can take whatever they want and leave whatever they don't want because that's what speaks most to people who've lost someone. I tell them if they want to walk through the house and take a few items and leave the rest, that's fine; if they want to go through each room, I tell them I can give them the time to do that.

Notice I said I only use that tactic specifically with probate calls. Here's why…

On other types of seller calls, like foreclosures or short sales for example, when I'm talking with sellers, I have to ask a myriad of questions to gauge their source and level of motivation. With probates, we already know what their motivation is – someone has died and they want to sell the house or they wouldn't be calling you.

So what you're trying to uncover with probate seller calls is what scenario you can create that will provide them with the relief they need. We've already established that probate callers need either emotional relief, financial relief, or some other type of relief. So, from your questions, you want to understand their circumstances enough that you can accentuate how you are going to be able to provide them with the exact flavor of relief that they are looking for.

Your final task on the seller call is to set an appointment to meet with them at the property. You want to do this as soon as the seller will allow you to come. If they're open to it, and your schedule allows, try to do it immediately. You want to meet with them while they're in the mind-set of selling.

How you handle the appointment

As I explain how to handle the in-person meeting, remember this: compassion rules.

I've found that the appointments at the home are fairly easy because you're not dealing with the actual homeowner. As I mentioned, this person has not lived in this house for 30 years (like the deceased homeowner likely did) and doesn't feel as strong of an emotional connection to the property. In fact, if the home is actually in need of a substantial amount of work, or isn't in the best condition, the person will actually be really apologetic about it, which works perfectly for you.

You'll come in and save the day by solving their problem saying something like this:

> *"Oh my gosh, please don't feel you have to apologize!"*
>
> *"This is what I am here for."*
>
> *"Don't worry about it at all."*
>
> *"This is what I do."*
>
> *"This is what I'm here to help you with."*

You want to tailor and guide the conversation so that they understand you are going to make this easy for them, you'll do the heavy lifting, they'll be able to walk away, and move on. Just find ways to work that in during your appointment, without overdoing it. Don't overdo it. Don't overdo it. I mean it. Did I say, "Don't overdo it?" Just don't. It's gross.

My Best Advice for Landing Probate Deals

#1. Answer Your Phone

I know what I'm about to say will sound outrageous, but I promise you it's true. Simply answering your phone is going to put you ahead of 75% of the investors out there. There it is, a truth bomb just exploded. Most investors not only don't answer their phones, but don't call people back either.

Now, I know that we don't live in a perfect world and sometimes, you can't get to the phone. I get that, so I want you to know there are other ways. If life gets in the way and you can't take that call, you have two options:

1. Have someone on your team, who knows what to say when talking with these kinds of callers, gather some initial information that they can pass along to you.

There are also inexpensive answering services you can use to answer your phone, gather some initial information, and send you the message to call the seller back.

2. Let it go to voicemail, but call people back the second you're able to do so.

So, again, to be clear - I *always* answer my phone calls because that's what makes me money.

But, of the other two options, having a live person answer the phone, gather specific information, and then promise the seller a callback from the 'owner' is your next best choice. If you have to resort to the caller leaving a message, call them right back. Do not wait. If you snooze, you lose. Don't let the fact that you can't be the one to answer the phone stop you from taking action. But, know that you're working from a less-than-ideal standpoint and make sure you return people's calls promptly.

#2. Be Consistent and Methodical With Your Marketing

Do whatever you have to do to make sure that once you start a marketing campaign, you don't get knocked off course by anything. And, it's not just getting discouraged too quickly and giving up that messes people up. Oftentimes, it's actually success that sabotages a marketing campaign. You're three months into your marketing campaign and you finally got your first deal!!! So, you get so excited and hyper-focused on that deal that you stop sending your mailers out because you want to make sure the deal gets done. Big mistake. Huge. Any experienced investor will tell you that marketing is all about momentum. So, if you're discouraged that you've been sending letters for three months and don't have a deal yet, you have to have the discipline to put your head down, keep working, and know that your deal is coming. Or, if you get a deal and then slack off, you're going to miss the wave of deals that you would have secured if you would have just continued to market the way you committed to in the first place. And, you'll have to start from scratch to build that momentum all over again. No, thank you. Do whatever you have to do to make sure your marketing is on auto-

pilot, regardless of any circumstance that happens in your life. In my case, I have someone else handle every, single bit of the marketing for me, because I know if it's left to me, it's not going to get done consistently. Not a chance. So, I hold myself accountable by putting someone else in charge of anything that can be done by someone other than me. The only thing I do is answer my phone and go on appointments. That's it. That's the best use of my time, and I make sure those are my only jobs.

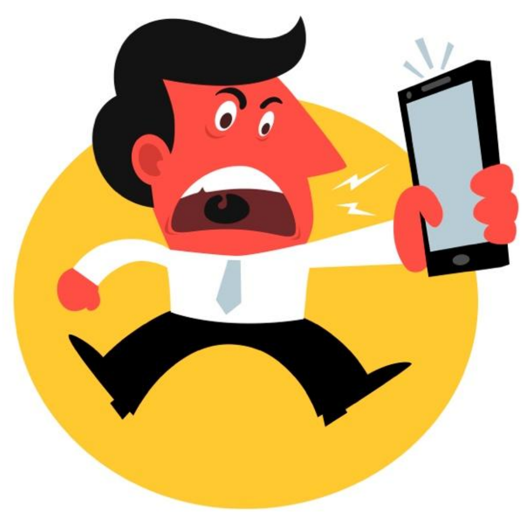
What Issues Are Unique to Marketing to Probates?

Probates are certainly a different breed of real estate investing, and I want to prepare you for some challenges that you may face with these deals.

Issue #1 - angry, upset callers

While this doesn't happen often, it can happen, and it's definitely worth addressing.

Because of the circumstance of probate, emotions are often involved. You will, inevitably, get a call from someone who is offended that you sent them your letter, and they feel like you are preying upon them. It will happen.



Keep in mind that it's a very small amount of people who may challenge you in relation to the kind of mailings you do. Small or not, I want to help you be prepared for the rare occasion when that does happen in probate deals.

First of all, I always tell people not to get defensive.
If you get defensive, you come across as believing that you're doing something wrong. If someone comes at you in an accusatory kind of way, just remind yourself that they likely just someone they cared about, and make a conscious decision to suck it up, and extend some grace.

Second, don't ever get combative with people. Never, ever, ever. If you get combative and power up – and the person you're speaking with is already emotional – they'll power up back on you and your conversation goes nowhere. It's a colossal waste of time. And, it's rude. Even if they were rude first, there is no benefit to returning the rudeness. Zero.

So, when this type of conversation happens, I'm very apologetic and I try to get off the phone as quickly as I can, for two reasons:

#1. That phone call is not going to make me any money.

#2. The longer we talk, the more worked up one of us might get.

Real-life example:

Upset Caller: *"I can't believe you sent this, how could you…??"*

Me: *"I'm really sorry. Please know I meant no offense by that letter. I've been doing this for a long time and there are a lot of people I'm able to genuinely help. I'm sorry that wasn't the case here. I will make sure I take you off of my list. I assure you, you are not going to get another letter from me."*

And that's it, there's not really much else you could say. If you're nervous about getting these kinds of calls, write down your response and keep it handy, so when this call does come in, you'll just read from your notes.

If, by chance, the person just doesn't want to end the conversation and continues to hurl insults or negativity at you, you'll simply say, *"I'm very sorry, goodbye,"* and hang up.

But remember, you absolutely *must* remove that person from any future mail campaigns! Make sure you have a system in place to handle that task.

Listen, these angry calls aren't fun for anyone. But, it's important that you don't let that discourage you to the point of inaction. If you feel like the wind got taken out of your sails after a salty call, go back and read pages 7 and 8 from this book. Believe in what you're doing and remind yourself of all the people you've helped and are going to help. Onward and upward!

Issue #2 - the morality of probate mailings

Since we're in the realm of these heightened emotions surrounding probates, I want to address the issue about the morality of probate mailings.

I understand that people may be nervous or apprehensive when dealing with probates because they think they may offend someone. It might happen, that's true, but you can't stop that from possibly happening because you can't control how people react. And, you're going to tick some people off in every marketing scenario…not just probates.

Knowing this will help you get past that fear: The reality is that there are people who actually *need* real estate investors who are willing to step into this situation and buy a property as-is and provide relief. You are filling a need and that is something to feel good about.

Look, for every one person I've ever talked to who's angry because they got a probate letter from me, I have had 10xs as many people who have been grateful that I was able to step in and provide them the help they needed to finally move on. I have been at countless closing tables, some where the sellers actually cried real tears as they thanked me profusely for what I was doing for them. No lie.

You need to consider those things to produce a mindset shift for yourself. You have to consciously make a decision to shift your thinking to: I am legitimately doing something good for people; I'm doing it because I want to; I'm so glad when I get an opportunity to help people.

Issue #3 – paperwork and power of attorney confusion

This next issue arises in the actual acquisition of the probate property – after your seller call and in-person appointment. This is when the seller has agreed to sell the house to you.

It's probably the most common hiccup you'll see in the probate acquisition process. But don't worry, I've got solutions.

It really is a simple roadblock that you can get over because it's easily fixable. And don't freak out when I say it involves paperwork. I know, I know, paperwork can be a yucky word, but I'm going to clean it up for you.

The most common problem that I've dealt with is someone having power of attorney and thinking that's all they need in order to sell the house – but what they really need is the power of attorney *specific to that house*.

So, if this happens, or there's some other issue with the paperwork details – you actually have help. The title company or attorney who's responsible for closing the deal will know exactly what's needed in that paperwork and what's needed to fix it. They've likely seen this scenario play out many times and can quickly direct you and the seller on what to do.

It'll probably go down like this… you'll get a call from the attorney, for example, and she'll say:

> *"I have the power of attorney for this seller, but before his mother passed away, he really needed to get the power of attorney to* sell her home*. He's going to have to get* this *document signed off and then we can proceed. What is the best way for me to talk directly with the seller so I can explain?"*

See how this really isn't a big deal? The attorney or title company will guide the process to help ensure the seller gets the right docs signed with their T's crossed and I's dotted. And that's the most common problem I see, which, as you can see, really isn't that much of a problem. At the end of the day, any issues that could possibly prevent the seller from selling the home to you can, and almost always will, be resolved with help from the title company or attorney (because, that's what they're there to do).

Issue #4 – multiple heirs

Another issue is dealing with multiple heirs.

As I've mentioned, all the heirs (usually, siblings, when there are multiple heirs) need to be on the same page and initially agree to a deal. If they've agreed to sell you the house and you're ready to acquire the property and close, you're at the point in the process where they *all* have to come together because *each* of them needs to sign the contract – coordinating multiple people with varying schedules can be a bit messy.

With emotions potentially being a factor here, you'll simply handle this as delicately and sincerely as you handled the letters, calls, and appointments. It's not usually a deal killer as much as it takes time to coordinate getting everyone to sign your contract so you can get started with the business of actually buying the home.

There could be other issues

As far as other speedbumps you may encounter in the probate marketing process – some other things may pop up, it's true. But, remember, most of them are going to be handled by the attorney or the title company.

Of course you know that no two deals are exactly the same (this is true in any type of real estate investing strategy), and there's simply no way to prepare for *every* issue that arises or every scenario that may play out. But that's okay...

Why?

Because as sure as the sky is blue, you will figure things out and close the deal. You wouldn't be interested in this business if you didn't have that type of attitude and mindset. If you're investing in real estate, you are definitely not the kind of person who allows things to stop you from taking action. There's nothing that could be thrown at you that you couldn't figure out if you needed to.

Just think of it methodically: In a situation where you are presented with a problem, work through it from every angle, consider your various options, and then do what you have to do to solve it.

That is the wonderful world of real estate investing! When you come up against a challenge, you are going to figure it out. And then you are going to be that much more competent going into the next deal.

Systematize, Outsource, and Automate

An ideal way to help you solve issues like the ones we've just talked about and other problems that may arise is through outsourcing. Not outsourcing your problems (if only!). It's more like getting the right team in place to help you work through issues that come up or maybe even take care of it entirely, by themselves.

Outsourcing can help you eliminate one problem entirely – lack of time.

Let me just say that I've seen some confusion from business owners about when and how they should outsource certain parts of their business. Many people still go by that old way of thinking: 'If you want something done right, do it yourself.'

You need to finally put that archaic idea to bed.

Here's the problem with that – if we try to do everything our business requires, we'll be pulled in numerous directions and things won't get done when they need to… or, they won't get done consistently… or, they won't get done right… or, they might not get done at all. All of that leads to you becoming inconsistent. And, from there, it's a downward spiral. The #1 key to a successful marketing campaign is consistency and that's something that every, single investor out there fails at from time to time.

I'm telling you that the smart way to go is outsourcing and automation.

If what you're personally doing in your business (what you're responsible for or taking care of) is not your highest point of contribution – if it's not the highest and best use of your time – then stop doing it yourself, and outsource it. This is going to take your business to the next level. Coming from an investor with over 15 years of experience in this business, please allow this to be your biggest take-away from this book.

You need to be leveraging people, systems, and processes to run your business like a true CEO, rather than like a self-employed person who wears all the hats and pulls all the gears and levers.

If you're just starting out as an investor and you don't have a big marketing budget and you want (or need) to do things manually to learn the process, I get that. It truly is helpful to have an understanding of certain tasks, which you learn by actually doing them.

But at some point (and, the sooner the better) you'll need to begin thinking like a CEO and get on the automation and outsourcing train that's heading straight for business growth.

"Postal Impact" for Probate Marketing

I finally figured out that it was smart to outsource certain tasks in my business, because it allowed me to focus on what I do best, what makes me money, and what grows my business.

So, many years ago, I decided to train someone on how to find and acquire probate leads, which freed up loads of time for me and enabled me to provide my highest point of contribution to other parts of my business. Long story, short – that outsourcing actually led to the creation of a lead-gathering and probate marketing business I now own, called **Postal Impact**.

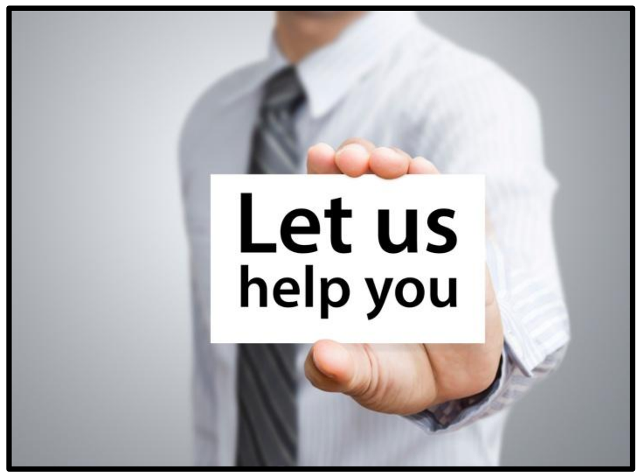
You see, I recognized that knowing how to efficiently and effectively find leads was a valuable service to other investors, and knowing exactly what to look for and what those leads represent is also critical. And, because I do have all of that probate knowledge and know the process inside out, putting it all together through Postal Impact just made sense for me and my clients.

So, let me break it down for you so you can see Postal Impact's true value and what it can provide you as a probate investor.

What exactly does Postal Impact do?

Our team at Postal Impact gathers the probate leads (either online or directly from the courthouse), harvests the needed information, and then manages the entire probate campaign for our clients.

You'll remember that each county has its own set of rules for probate. We know exactly what needs to be done to gather this information and provide you with the cleanest, most effective, leads available.



And, it's important to note that the leads we are providing to our clients are the exact same leads that I provide to myself – nothing more, nothing less. That is how you know, for sure, you are getting the best. Our system for gathering this data has been tried, tested, and perfected over many years, all done through the eyes of an actual real estate investor. The fact that an actual and active real estate investor is at the helm is what sets us apart from everyone else.

In addition to the leads, we also provide clients with my own, personal, four-letter, mail campaign, which, as you now know, I've tested and tweaked over time (and, still actively use to this very day) to ensure my mailers bring the best results.

Clients can use the exact same, copyrighted, letters I mail out. Or, they can use them as a solid starting point and then change it up to reflect their personal style or perhaps add content.

Postal Impact provides even more unique value

Postal Impact not only gives clients their leads and letters, but then goes even further by merging the lead data into your letter. You don't simply get a spreadsheet that contains the information you need. It comes to you already merged. So clients' letter campaigns, with the exact wording they want, are all set up and ready to go. Each month, we email clients a file with their letters, so all they have to do is print, stuff the envelopes, and mail them out.

Then, through the systems we have in place, we automatically follow up and send clients an email with the next letter in their campaign, notifying them it's time to send their next letter.

We keep track of, and manage, everything, so clients don't have to – we can even manage multiple campaigns at one time for the same client. And, we'll scrub lists and remove sellers/prospects, as needed.

Postal Impact now offers complete campaign management

I'll mention one more thing…

Postal Impact has the huge advantage of working with hundreds of investors all across the country which allows us to share trends with you, react in real-time to the market, and use client feedback to make sure the service we offer is stupendously, outrageously valuable to the people who use it.

On that note, and due to overwhelming feedback and demand on the topic of outsourcing as much as possible, our clients now have another option, which is pretty remarkable.

If clients don't want to deal with printing and mailing their letters, we can now help in that arena as well, because Postal Impact has an established relationship with a print company – one that is also run by an actual real estate investor who understands, firsthand, what you want and need. Once clients approve their letter campaign, Postal Impact will communicate directly with this printing/mailing company, who will then print out the letter, stuff and *handwrite* the envelope (not print with a handwriting font – actually have someone handwrite), stamp it, and mail it.

With this option, clients never touch their campaigns. Their entire marketing campaign is completely, and totally, done for them. They can just sit back and answer the phone.

Postal Impact was created for probates

While there is definitely something to be said for doing the whole probate process manually, our clients have told us that the service and value we provide is a no-brainer.

They don't have to spend time researching and finding leads or keep track of their various campaigns. Investors can focus on answering the phone and doing deals instead of doing the work themselves or managing an employee and paying them to do this kind of work.

More importantly, when you put a system in place that forces you to be accountable and consistent with your marketing, you just rocketed yourself ahead of the vast majority of investors out there who are constantly just intermittently stabbing at marketing as they have the time and discipline to do it.

Remember, as an investor and business owner, your mission should be to fully embrace systems and automation as much as you possibly can. And that's what Postal Impact helps provide, with proven results.

If you'd like more information about what we do, or how we can help you find success with probate marketing, feel free to check out our website at www.PostalImpact.com.

The Bottom Line…

So, investor, there you have it – the probate process and probate marketing process explained.

Here are my final thoughts to serve as helpful reminders. These are what I consider to be the three biggest factors for probate success:

1. Answer your phone. You make your money when you answer the phone, and that's what you need to be focused on. All of the other stuff is just a distraction, which you can likely outsource. And, don't forget that if something prevents you from answering your phone, make sure you return calls quickly.

2. Send multiple letters for each campaign. Mail four letters, spaced six weeks apart.
3. Make sure that you have consistency – consistency in the tone and message of your letter and who you as a person and investor. And, most importantly, consistency with your mail outs, which can easily be done utilizing automation and systems, such as Postal Impact. If your budget doesn't allow you to use a service to ensure that you're being methodical with your mailings, then make it your top priority to get it done on your own, and outsource it when you can afford to do so.

Finally, I want you to go out and take action on what you've learned – today. Be a student of what's working, be committed to what works, stick with it, and you'll see results.

Happy probate investing!

Want to Learn More from Christina?

You can find out more about Postal Impact and what we do by visiting our website:

www.postalimpact.com.

Disclaimer: I'm not an attorney nor your legal counsel. All the things I've discussed in my e-book are based on experiences and circumstances from my business. For *your* business, do your own due diligence by consulting a legal professional and/or financial professional before you take any action or inaction based on anything in this e-book.