



NAMP: Putting the 'M' in mortgage professional

The National Association of Mortgage Professionals wants to shine up the mortgage industry's tarnished reputation by launching a designation program for mortgage professionals who pass a plethora of verifications and checks to prove themselves as reliable, trustworthy industry representatives. How is this organization different from NAMB, who also has specific initiatives up its sleeve? Read on for the exclusive scoop.

By Amy Sullivan

A new national mortgage association is in town and it isn't taking unethical practices lying down.

The National Association of Mortgage Professionals (NAMP), which celebrated a soft opening in March, aims to promote the public's confidence in its members' abilities and ethics.

"We encourage our members to attain the highest level of mortgage competency and conduct business with the highest level of integrity," said CEO Michael Lefevre. "NAMP encourages our members to have much higher level of involvement and awareness of their industry."

History in the making

Lefevre told *Broker Newswire* that he wishes he would have started the organization the first time he thought up the idea in 1992.

"A mortgage transaction is a significant transaction," he said. "I recognized this the very first time I saw a mortgage loan application in 1991 as a consumer. Since entering the industry in 1992, I have seen the quality of individuals working in the mortgage industry vary tremendously over the years."

Lefevre believes there is currently a serious lack of attention given to the qualifications of mortgage professionals.

"There is little-to-no 'barrier of entry' into the mortgage industry and that has led to many of the industry's problems including fraud, predatory lending, lack of knowledge and foreclosures. With the current negativity about the mortgage industry and the difficulties and hardships caused by the challenged subprime mortgage market, consumers are more wary when it comes to making mortgage choices, including choosing a reliable mortgage professional."

Mortgage "M"

To help consumers choose a dependable individual, NAMP has established the Mortgage "M" and "M Advocate" — designations professionals can obtain to prove themselves as honest, trustworthy and educated individuals. To obtain the Mortgage "M," a member is required to pass a series of checks, including verification of a valid license; that the member is currently in good standing; is continuing their education in the field; abides by and promotes NAMP's Code of Ethics; has a minimum of two years of mortgage experience; and passes a background check.

According to Lefevre, credentials are confirmed annually and membership is contingent upon all items remaining in proper form at all times.

Individuals who have worked hard in the mortgage industry in collateral positions — mortgage account executives, processors, underwriters, funders, title officers and escrow officers — are eligible for the “M Advocate” designation.

“This is their industry as well and the ‘M Advocate’ designation enables these professionals to have a voice in an association that values their worth,” Lefevre said.

So far there are more than 500 NAMP members, with a goal of reaching 1,000 by the end of 2007.

NAMP vs. NAMB

“We have many good people in this industry,” Lefevre said. “NAMP simply wants to highlight them to the consumer and give NAMP members tools to stay educated, connected and up-to-date with the latest tools to help consumers get the best loan that works for them.”

But how is NAMP different from the National Association of Mortgage Brokers (NAMB)?

According to Lefevre, NAMP’s undertaking is to promote the public’s confidence in the mortgage industry as a whole and to specifically address and highlight the legitimate point-of-sale loan originator.

NAMB is geared specifically toward the broker industry, Lefevre said.

In addition, NAMB is heavily involved in lobbying efforts to promote and pass legislation that will benefit the broker community. Such efforts include reforms of FHA, RESPA and the GSEs. NAMP did say it would support all efforts to license individuals at the point-of-sale of a mortgage transaction. However, aside from this issue, it has no political lobbying agenda.

Also, NAMB is a non-profit organization, where NAMP is for profit.

“Yes NAMP is for profit and we make no qualm stating this fact,” Lefevre said. “The profit incentive has nothing to do with the meltdown, but everything to do with predatory lending, foreclosure issues and establishing professional standards to a profession that I, and many others believe, need.”

NAMB did not wish to comment on NAMP but did say that it is establishing its own designation procedures that members should be on the look out for soon.

Looking ahead

Aside from gathering 1,000 members by the end of the year, NAMP’s goals fall on its motto, “Advancing the Mortgage Professional.” NAMP plans to “continue to focus and do all we can in this area, especially in regards to the education of our members,” Lefevre said. “We also want to focus on strategies that can grow business for ‘M’ members and create a network of professionals doing business ‘the right way.’

“It is of the utmost importance that we get the message out to the consumer that, ‘Yes, there are good quality people in the mortgage industry that will professionally help and guide you with the most significant financial transaction in your life.’”

Stay tuned to Broker Newswire as we bring the latest on NAMB’s initiatives as it becomes available.