THE VOICE OF THE FORCE

NEWS BRIEF

Millions of Families Face Housing Insecurity in 2021

When legal protections expire, more than 11 million families are at risk of eviction and foreclosure.

Government agencies responsible for protecting consumers have precious little time to save millions of families from losing their homes—that's according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's (CFPB) first analysis of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bureau administrators say actions taken by both the public and private sector have, so far, prevented a devastating number of foreclosures during the height of the public health crisis. However, according to a CFBP press release, when legal protections expire, more than 11 million families… or approximately 10% of U.S. households, are at risk of eviction and foreclosure.

"It's common sense that safe, affordable, and stable housing provides the foundation for people's well-being, financial and otherwise. Stable homes mean stable neighborhoods and communities. When people lose their homes, their lives, health, and finances are all disrupted. Even the threat of losing a family's home can force tough financial decisions, including skipping payments on food, medicine, and heat to keep a roof over their head," writes CFPB's Dave Uejio.

He continues, "We also know that many, particularly in Black and Hispanic communities, have still not recovered from the last

financial crisis, more than a decade ago. And those same communities are once again bearing a disproportionate financial and health burden during the pandemic, through no fault of their own."

According to the report summary, those who have fallen behind at least three months on their mortgage increased 250% to 2 million-plus households, now at a level not seen since the height of the Great Recession in 2010. Collectively, these households are estimated to owe almost $90 billion in deferred principal, interest, taxes, and insurance payments.

More than 8 million rental households are behind in their rent.

While there are significant differences from the last crisis (a more stable mortgage market and substantial homeowner equity) there are a significant number of households at risk of losing their housing just as the U.S. economy is poised to emerge from the pandemic—a disproportionate number of them from communities of color.

The CFPB report—which examines the relevant data and research on the impact of the pandemic on the rental and mortgage market, and particularly its impact on low income and minority households—can be accessed at consumerfinance.gov.

- *The number of homeowners behind on their mortgage has doubled since the beginning of the pandemic—6% of mortgages were delinquent as of December 2020.*
- *More homeowners are behind on their mortgages now than at any time since 2010, which was the peak of the Great Recession.*
- *2.1 million homeowners are more than 90 days behind on payments, a key benchmark for being "seriously delinquent" in mortgage payments. That's five times the number of families that were more than 90 days behind on their mortgage before the pandemic began.*
- *Black and Hispanic families are more than twice as likely to report being behind on their housing payments than White families.*
- *An estimated 8.8 million tenant households are behind on their rent.*
- *About 10% of renters reported that they're likely to be evicted in the next two months, with the rates highest among Black and Hispanic households.*

To learn more about The **Voice** of the FORCE click here.

FROM THE CHAIR

State of the Market

As we come to the end of Q1 2021, real estate agents are expecting sales to increase from last year. COVID-19 continues to impact how people live and work and we see clients moving to the suburbs or rural areas. Increasingly, home buyers are looking for work-from-home features.

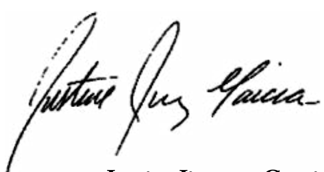
Now is the time for Americans to save and invest. The market is expected to remain strong through 2021, because we're experiencing one of the strongest booms. Real estate booms happen in cycles, and everyone should be preparing by diversifying your investments. Living modestly means sacrificing in areas such as housing, vehicles, and clothing long enough to meet your financial goals. Now may be the time to break bad habits such as your daily latte, or new shoes. Even though it might seem harmless, it effects your bottom line.

The average American has around $7,000 in credit card debt. Start the year off right by having a solid plan of action and self-discipline. It's important to understand what led you to debt. Sometimes people get into debt because they simply don't have a budget. There's also good debt and bad debt. A mortgage is an example of good debt, as hopefully it will give you a chance to increase your net worth. Credit cards are bad debt, if you carry a balance with compounding interest, as this increases your overall debt. Create a budget and track your spending every month. Make sure what you believe is good debt is appreciating in value.

Another tip to increase your net worth this year is to invest at least 20% of your income in real estate and stocks. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Real estate is a great investment because people need a place to live, work, shop, and play. Real estate is just a matter of supply and demand. With your real estate investment know your net income/expenses. Know your cash flow (net income, debt financing payments), your return on investment (ROI) and cash flow investment, the cap rate (net income/property price). Cash-on-cash cash flow/investment. Investigate dividend funds/stocks.

Another way to utilize 2021 to become fiscally sound is to learn all about retirement accounts (for non-self-employed). These are opened through the employer or a licensed institution (bank). The funds in the account are used to buy securities such as stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. Investments withdrawn before age 59.5 are subject to a 10% penalty. 401K plans are employer-sponsored, some employers match contributions to some extent (max 19,500 annually). Contribution limits can vary a bit year to year in all retirement accounts. Individual IRA private account (not open though employer) currently has an annual contribution limit of about $6,000. There's also the Solo 401k plan designed for business owners without employees. The current annual contribution limit is 58,000. The Simplified Employee Pension (SEP IRA) is for a business owner without employees, or very few. The employer must contribute equally to all employees, proportional to their income.

I encourage our members to put their focus this year into building wealth! Let's check in in a few months and see where you are in your financial goals!



Justine Jimenez Garcia
FORCE Advisory Council Chairperson
Founder and Principal Broker, Countrywide Properties ERA

JUSTINE JIMENEZ, COUNTRYWIDE PROPERTIES ERA

Justine Jimenez Garcia is Chair of the Five Star FORCE Advisory Council, and Founder and Principal Broker of Countrywide Properties ERA, based in Miami. She has more than 20 years' full-service real estate industry experience and 12-plus years of experience managing and selling REO properties in surrounding areas. Countrywide Properties ERA provides services related to REO, property management, short sales, and residential and commercial sales. Employees are bilingual and the company is 8(a) certified, and women and minority-owned.

MEMBER INSIGHT

Upcoming Event Features Experts in Single-Family Rental Investing

The 2021 Single Family Rental Summit (SFRS) is taking place Wednesday, May 12

Five Star Institute is proud to announce Jeffrey Tesch, CEO of RCN Capital, as moderator for its 2021 Single-Family Rental Summit (SFRS), taking place Wednesday, May 12 at Four Seasons Resort and Club Dallas at Las Colinas. Tesch—who is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of RCN Capital LLC and who has personally overseen more than $2 billion in originations since the company's inception—says he is "pleased and honored" to be moderating the in-person event. RCN Capital will also be the event's Host Sponsor. "Five Star has positioned itself as a national leader in education for SFR and I look forward to being part of this event as it will have such a tremendous impact on the space," Tesch said. "We anticipate an amazing number of leaders in the space to provide insight into where this booming industry is headed as well as networking opportunities that are second to none."

The interest in SFR has been increasing since recovery from the Great Recession, and recent reports reveal that the pandemic has ignited Americans' desire for larger living spaces and thus sparked a new level of "zest" for this sector of real estate.

The SFRS agenda includes discussions on technology, regional market analysis, understanding the cost-benefit behind buying properties, property management strategies, financing, and how investors can scale single-family business, to name a few.

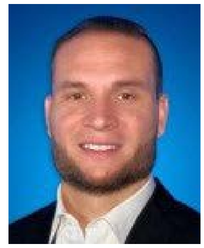
Five Star has positioned itself as a national leader in education for SFR and I look forward to being part of this event as it will have such a tremendous impact on the space.

Five Star Global Chairman Ed Delgado says that Tesch—along with other subject-matter experts—will offer attendees valuable insight.

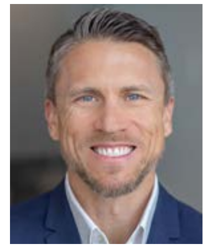
"I am delighted to be working with Jeff Tesh, on the development and presentation of the 2021 SFRS," Delgado said. "Jeff's commentary regarding emerging opportunities in the SFR marketplace will provide attendees with keen insights and perspectives, all designed to develop or expand portfolios. Five Star is fortunate to have him centerstage."

More information about the agenda, registration, and other event details are available here.

Asset Management Sit-down



Rob Pajon
SVP, Marketing and Product Development, ***RES.NET***



Andrew Oliverson
VP, Real Estate Services Operations at ***Radian Group, Inc.***

Steve Paton
VP-Field Services, ***SingleSource Property Solutions***

In this Q&A we spoke with three asset managers on how they are preparing for the end of foreclosure moratoriums.

In late February, following news from the White House that more 10 million homeowners are still missing mortgage payments and one in five renters are behind on rent, the eviction and foreclosure moratoriums to help those renters and homeowners were extended again. REO agents and brokers must prepare for the end of those forbearances and the moratorium, as well as understand what's going on in real estate markets nationwide.

Mortgage holders insured by the Federal Housing Administration, or guaranteed by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, were covered by the processing of the extension of the moratorium on foreclosures and evictions. It's important to note that during the pre-pandemic period of January 2019 to February 2020, the forbearance rate increased from 0.09% to a rate of 5.6% from March to June 2020. The mortgage forbearance rate reached a peak in May 2020 with more than 4 million mortgages. Approximately 8% of mortgages and $1 trillion in mortgage debt has been affected.

Freddie Mac concluded homeowners have delayed approximately $4 billion in mortgage payments each month throughout the forbearance period. The moratorium has played a part in creating a backlog of likely foreclosures, that Auction.com analyses estimate will grow to more than 1.1 million by Q2 2021.

Though the moratorium may be pushed out, it's vital for REO brokers and agents to prepare for the unknown landscape. We asked **Rob Pajon, SVP, Marketing and Product Development, RES.NET; Andrew Oliverson, VP, Real Estate Services Operations at Radian Group, Inc.**; and **Steve Paton, VP-Field Services, SingleSource Property Solutions**, to weigh in on some key questions.

What data are you focused on right now and how will that change once it's clear the moratoriums will officially end?

Oliverson: We are keenly interested in how the count of homes listed for sale continues to trend. As an REO outsourcer, our primary job is to maximize the return of a foreclosed asset. With the lower inventory, the demand for limited listings has brought an increased return to our clients. We'll continue to focus on the supply side of the equation as it appears demand will remain high for the foreseeable future.

Paton: Right now, we're focusing on the number of forbearance agreements because the assumption is most borrowers that could, would have resumed payments. Regarding unemployment, approximately 20 million people are currently receiving assistance. If you are unemployed, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to avoid foreclosure and/or eviction.

Have your alternative liquidation strategies changed during the COVID-19 pandemic? Are you doing anything differently?

Oliverson: Radian manages REO versus active loans, including those considered NPLs. That being said, our alternative liquidation strategies for REO continue to be those that maximize return to our clients. We all recognize the decline in those homes listed for sale has only increased the demand for all seller-owned assets, including REO. As a result, we're making extra efforts to catch the widest audience and buyer pool, and thereby maximize return to the seller.

What can FORCE agents be doing to help you most right now?

Pajon: Right now, moratoriums are still a factor impacting default BPO and REO services. So as a provider in the real estate space that wants to secure footing and be "first in line" when default inventory returns, it's key to remain a solution provider for all those who will have default inventory down the road in whatever capacity.

An example would be due-diligence BPOs for private lenders and institutional investors currently in NPL acquisition mode. Since the future of housing is unclear, this means the future of asset appreciation and depreciation is also somewhat unclear. This is where the local agent becomes a big factor. Automated Valuation Models (AVMs) for example, while it's a great tool serving a multitude of purposes, it's not the crystal ball on values in an unpredictable market.

Oliverson: Staying on top of how any local regulations that diverge from national ones would be helpful. For example, if vendors are aware of a narrower view by local jurisdiction (versus Federal), that could be very helpful to us to maintain compliance. Agents should continue to provide that information to their sales contacts and vendor management teams.

Paton: Provide realistic values with some basis in history, because when the true impact of the looming financial crisis, the end to the moratoriums, combines with the drop in home values from 12-year highs, it will be critical to value the properties reasonably. It is very challenging to value properties when the values are dropping in the midst of increasing defaults.

What's the best way for agents like those in the FORCE to communicate they're willing to do things for you that could be considered going 'above and beyond'?

Oliverson: Continue to communicate with vendor management teams. Once the default process is allowed to move forward as with pre-COVID, we will need the support, knowledge, and input of our local vendors to make sure we're in compliance with any temporary or permanent local ordinances, state laws, or federal mandates.

Pajon: I believe the same advice is applicable to any cycle of the market. Treat your brand and business as a full-time job. From the perspective of the client, they can see which agents are trying to close this one deal and which is a career-minded agent. REO is unique in that when you get a client, it can be just for one or two listings or it can be for several. They want to use an agent that can handle the workload and make it easy for them. In short, having a long-term perspective really pays off in this market, especially because it is cyclical.

Paton: Establish contact/relationships with the "right" person in the asset management company or REO department—the person who can bring you on as a vendor and will understand your value.

(continued on page 6)

NEWS BRIEF

Servicers Brace for Forbearance Challenges

The default servicing side of the industry may be hit with volumes of daunting proportions.

With the nation inching closer to a full calendar year since the World Health Organization (WHO) deemed COVID-19 a national pandemic, the mortgage servicing market is bracing for a wave of foreclosures, forbearance issues, loan modifications, and uncertainty brought about in its aftermath. Actions taken by the government to offset record delinquencies have been beneficial to U.S. homeowners, but as deadlines approach and a time of normalcy approach, the default servicing side of the industry may be hit with volumes of daunting proportions.

DS News recently held the webinar, "Next Steps in Mortgage Servicing," to discuss the present and future of the servicing sector as it braces for this next chapter.

The webinar featured Steve Schachter, EVP, Market Leader & Head of Mortgage at webinar sponsor Sourcepoint; Michael Keaton, Chief Servicing Officer for Shellpoint Mortgage Servicing; Sundara Sukavanam, Chief Digital Officer for Firstsource Solutions; and Courtney Thompson, SVP of Default Mortgage Servicing at Flagstar Bank (also a member of the *DS News* Editorial Advisory Board).

President Joe Biden recently announced an extension of the moratorium on home foreclosures for federally-backed mortgages through the end of September. Federal intervention has been key to keeping homeowners in their homes during these tumultuous times, however keeping the consumer appraised of these changes will keep servicers on their toes.

"We have already received guidance from Fannie, Freddie, and the FHA that differs in some ways in terms of how to differentiate the terms of forbearance," Keaton said. "I am looking forward to seeing from the Administration or the FHFA the ability to pull it all together and say, 'Let's agree and let's coalesce under a single set of standards.'"

Thompson added, "With the extended forbearance protections offered by Fannie, Freddie, the UDSA, VA and FHA, extended forbearance protections means that humans are taken care of … which is always our first concern and priority and that some of our practices can begin again in a post-COVID default environment."

Servicers have adapted to the new norm as well, having to keep pace with a nation in the middle of a very new experience for all due to the pandemic.

"Servicers need to be knowledgeable on changes and completely up-to-date and making that information convenient for borrower access. Servicers need to be very clear with what they are reporting and how well they are doing," said Schachter. "We are anticipating a regulatory approach to timeliness, investigations, and audits…there will be some amount of change there, and potentially, how they would deal with non-compliance if it's found. More broadly, we think there is going to be some more risk in the operating environment."

With both U.S. homeowners and the mortgage servicing space blindsided by the pandemic, Thompson noted a new population, one that was new to the delinquency side, was born and the industry needed to find a way to handle this emerging market.

"We had a whole new group of humans that were in default and entered into the delinquency process," explained Thompson. "This was not your traditional default consumer … these are consumers who are not used to navigating the different channels of default, whether it's forbearance, loss mitigation, or a repayment plan. There are consumers who are in something we have all never dealt with before, this world pandemic!"

Volume on the servicing side remains a primary concern as moratoria are set to expire and the industry needs to gear up for an influx of business.

"The challenges for servicers on one side is supporting homeowners, but on the other side, some of the challenges are not really different than before," said Sukavanam. "How do I plan for a demand that I can't forecast, and how do I become more efficient? How do we continue to drive quality?"

Schachter noted, "We have borrowers who are into products now that they can be into for quite some time. I see a lot of opportunity for investment across the entire servicing suite, including default."

All webinar participants agreed on one thing, the servicing sector must work hand-in-hand with a nation not only reeling from a year-long pandemic, but a nation dealing with its impact on the biggest investment in their lives, their home.

"One of the biggest things servicers can do today is help homeowners understand what's really going on," noted Keaton. "Here is what we as an industry can do to help you and here is what we can't do in your particular situation, but here are some options. Information helps homeowners understand the situation they are in."

Click here to view a recording of the webinar.

Market Overview

Larry Pool of AMDC Marketing Services helps break down market differences across the U.S.

Larry Pool, Owner and President of AMDC Marketing Services, has been in the REO side of the real estate industry since 2001 and has worked at many of the industry leaders, such as IndyMac Bank, New Century Mortgage, Carrington Mortgage Services and Equity Pointe Asset Services – before starting his own company in 2009. His firm serves real estate agents and brokers nationwide with marketing and re-branding, to help them get in front of the leading companies, which has become a tough and competitive industry. This edition, we sat down with Larry to get his market takeaways and tips for agents and brokers looking to stand out.

What data are you focusing on right now, and how will that change once it's clear the moratorium is officially ending?

Pool: I do about 80% of my research using Black Knight. They are the nation's leading repository of loan-level residential mortgage data.

The research I get out of Black Knight is understanding what the market is doing in each state. Some of the most important things it tells me is: how many properties are under a forbearance program, properties reaching the expiration of the capped term, currently in foreclosure, in pre-foreclosure, the total U.S. loan delinquency rate (loans that are 30 days or more past due), how many total U.S. foreclosure starts there are, monthly prepayment rates, foreclosure sales as percent of 90+, the number of properties 30 or more days past due but not in foreclosure, 90 days past due but not in foreclosure, and the foreclosure pre-sale inventory.

Have alternative liquidation strategies changed during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Pool: Yes, there has been a greater interest in bringing back rent to own and lease programs. Auctions have also been discussed but auctions can be cumbersome. It's easier to do rent to own if possible. When foreclosures pick up, homeowners will be in a state of shock. They know in the back of their mind that their forbearance term is coming to an end, but the pandemic has left many Americans in a state of denial that this has all happened.

If the homeowners can refinance their property before it gets into REO, then maybe fee removals in their favor will cause them to try a re-fi. If the borrower does get a new loan and have the old one paid off, I'm thinking these companies will start removing late fees, prepayment penalty fees, title fees, or extend terms to make it an attractive consideration for these homeowners. I don't know if this is going to be implemented en masse, but I do think it's a consideration.

Do you expect a sizable increase in REO inventory in 2021?

Pool: Several us in the industry, and market experts, have been saying since the COVID-19 pandemic started back in March 2020 that it will likely cause some sort of housing issue. It might be like it was back in 1998 when the housing market crashed. We're in a different situation than we were back then but a crash is a crash. I think it's going to be sizable, but I don't think it's going to be the same crash we saw then. Of course, we don't know for sure,we're still under moratoriums. All we can really do estimate with the research and numbers we have.

What do banks and asset management companies value the most when working with agents and brokers

Pool: Trustworthiness, knowledge of the market, the ease of interaction (be personable and patient), and a history of getting properties sold within guidelines and within at least 90 DOM. The agents and brokers are the eyes and ears for us on the ground. The provide value by developing their skills in marketing not only properties but their own brand and services.

Agents must be able to negotiate deals, provide sound financial advice, and coordinate all details of the sale. We must have confidence in knowing that our agent will do everything without having to hold their hand.

Agents must be able to negotiate deals, provide sound financial advice, and coordinate all details of the sale. We must have confidence in knowing that our agent will do everything without having to hold their hand. It smooths our process tremendously, so we can focus on the other 200 properties we have in our pipeline at any given time.

We're going to see a rise within the HUD (government REO side), so I've been advising our agents to utilize our company to get their HUD marketing proposal done and submitted for their NAID Number—to be ready and in line for their assets.

We have to remember that it's not like the last housing market crash, when homeowners were losing their properties because of overstated incomes, and didn't have a clear understanding that their mortgage payment might double after four years. This time around most homeowners are losing their properties because they had one or more of the following situations: the primary or secondary breadwinner got sick; a lost job due to hotel, food, airline (or similar) cutbacks; having to accept a pay cut; or firms going out of business. We have to tread lightly when dealing with REOs, especially the ones that are backed by HUD or FHA. The phrase "thinking outside of the box", is one that I can't stress enough to our clients and when giving agents advice. Agents, like everyone else, are having to find ways to adapt. For example, buyers are scared to go out in public. I've

(continued on page 6)

("Asset Management Sit-down" continued from page 3)

What should these agents be doing right now to be better positioned for the influx of REO to come?

Oliverson: Agents should do their best to keep their teams intact or have a plan to readily ramp up staff once the foreclosure and eviction moratoria expire. While we should expect the need for time to adjust before, and immediately after expiration, agents should be ready for both instances.

Pajon: It is hard to say when, but we must remember that more than 2.8 million homes are under some sort of forbearance plan. A surge in default inventory is imminent and the timing and velocity in which default inventory hits the market is the question. But, like anything else, get prepared now. Get REO certifications in place and take on smaller opportunities your competitors are passing up.

I can tell you, from the RES.NET perspective, REO listings are out there and being assigned to agents every day. Non-GSE loans and tenant-leased assets don't have the same restrictions that owner-occupied residential homes have; business is out there because we are seeing it go through our system and we are adding REO clients. It just requires more proactive marketing efforts and strategic targeting. Follow the pain points for future clients today so you're positioned to get the business you really want tomorrow.

Paton: Brush up on your ability to work with homeowners to manage short sales. Convince your clients you can produce a greater return than a sale to private/institutional investors.

Do you expect a big increase, given the current strength of the real estate market?

Oliverson: REO inventory will increase to pre-COVID levels at some point in the next year. However, pinpointing exactly when that will happen is the challenge all of us in the industry face. The expiration of federal moratoriums will be fairly transparent, however, what may be more difficult to project is when states and other local jurisdictions will remove their own restrictions on foreclosures and evictions. We expect an increase in REOs, but not nearly at the levels compared to defaults during the last downturn.

Paton: Yes, same answer as number three above regarding what agents can be doing to help right now. Provide realistic values with a basis in history because it will be critical to value the properties reasonably. It is very challenging to value properties when values are dropping in the midst of increasing defaults.

("Market Overview" continued from page 5)

been seeing agents and brokers coming up with creative ways to adapt to the new environment. They're doing virtual open houses now. The potential buyer logs on to a website and the agent takes them around the property with a handheld camera to show them the property. If the buyer has any questions or concerns, the agent can answer them in real time. If the buyer wants to make an offer, the agent sends a PDF offer over to the buyer for them digitally sign and submit to the seller. This is all done with the buyers safe and sound at home. The forbearance programs all started in March 2020 and will be coming to an end soon. This is a harsh reality that many Americans are facing. The numbers are shocking, the millions of Americans with forbearance programs ending, without the income or savings to resume payments.

Can you talk briefly of the importance of agent/brokers relationships with asset management companies, banks and HUD contractors?

Pool: In today's market and with the world in such a health crisis, building on that personal partnership/relationship is more important than ever before. The REO clients, asset managers, and buyers are all looking for stability, assurance and some level of guidance during these uncertain times. Everything that is being said or read is about the epidemic or how bad the economy or housing market is going to get. We're headed, I'm afraid, back into a financial and housing crisis. It appears to be building and building and could possibly be as bad, or even worse, than the housing crisis in 1998-2002. The business relationship is a must between the listing agent and the client because you want to be able to build that trust quickly.

When the housing bubble crisis hit full force last time, I had to build that relationship with my agents very fast because I was always handling a pipeline of at least 200 REO properties—and never seemed to have enough time in the day. I was often on a call and emailing a different agent at the same time. The relationship between agents and brokers and their asset manager is still and will always be a vital part of the REO industry. It's that foundation that decides if the agent will be a returning salesperson for your REO portfolio. I always tell agents and my clients in my current position to just remember one thing—lenders and asset managers are going to be more demanding and sometimes tougher on the listing agents. Stress is a key factor for them hit their numbers at month end. Be someone who makes their life easier.

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Search Engine Optimization – Increase Your Ranking

How to better market yourself and your REO listings.

By Jim Hastings

I recently updated my website, Huckle.com, to prepare for the next REO cycle. It is important to stay current and to market your REO listings with the best technology possible. I used real estate web designer Jim Cronin, at RealEstateTomato.com. The cost was low, and the quality was very high. In addition to updating my website, I wanted to increase my Google ranking presence or search engine optimization (SEO). I know people pay a lot for SEO and I wanted to be able to make sure it was done right as well as learn how to do it. When I used Jim Cronin to update my website his package included SEO training among other types of training. I asked Jim to provide us the overall highlights of how SEO works.

What you need to do first when starting Google ranking is to decide on your desired keywords. Most of the following guidelines are tasks that need to be done "under the hood" and may require assistance from your trusted web developer. Using a platform like WordPress for your website does make these types of tasks easier, but the guidance of a professional is recommended. How you appear in the search engines shouldn't be left up to chance.

The following are listed in the order in which they should be completed:

1. Establish an effective Title Tag for your website's homepage and interior pages. Title tags are the clickable, main headline displayed in Google's search results pages (SERPs). It is a crucial element in your SEO, click-worthiness, and social sharing. It is the main line that represents the site (or page's) name and claim. The limit is around 50-60 characters and lengths vary due to character thickness, for example 'i's occupy less width than 'o's.

2. Establish a well-defined, and keyword strong meta description for your website's homepage and interior pages. The meta description is a more rounded, yet brief summary, of a web page. Google leverages and displays the meta description in its search results, influencing click-through rates. The limit is approximately 150-160 characters.

At the very minimum, complete these first tasks for your website's homepage to ensure that your audience sees your website for what it represents. Failure to do so will have people seeing a default language for your business name and function, if they find you at all.

3. Install Google Analytics, which puts you on Google's radar by having a direct connection between your website and Google's analytics program. It also gives you instant data on your website's traffic statistics from the number of visitors to exactly what keywords they used to find your website. This information is invaluable to track the effectiveness of your efforts. Adding Google Analytics to your website will require pasting the tracking code provided into the <head> of your website's code. This may require assistance from your trusted web developer.

4. Claim ownership of the property that is your domain / website with Google Search Console. The Google Search Console establishes an additional direct connection between your website and Google's services. This connection will reveal challenges your website may have including spiderability (ensuring that a site is easily accessible to search engines), broken links, speed issues, mobile friendliness, etc. Google uses all of these factors to determine your placement in their search results. Claiming ownership of your domain/website with Google will require adding a tracking TXT key (text record, a type of resource in the Domain Name System) to your domain name Domain Name System (DNS, the phonebook of the internet) settings. DNS settings are managed with your domain provided (for example, GoDaddy.com). If this makes no sense to you then this will require assistance from your trusted web developer.

5. Sign up for and exhaustively populate your Google My Business profile. Confirmation of your claimed business address will entail confirmation through a code that will be sent on a postcard from Google to you. This can take a few business days to receive. It is imperative that you use an actual address where you can receive mail as a Post Office Box will not suffice. You may not be able to exhaustively populate your Google My Business profile until your address is confirmed. Do not skip the opportunity to upload your branding, business images, testimonials, business hours, etc. The more complete the profile the better your sidebar profile will appear.

6. Claim (or confirm) the placement of your business in Google Maps. When searching for businesses using Google maps, or artificial intelligence (AI) assistants (such as Siri) the competitive results are those that are properly claimed by their address. The information used to showcase your business is tied to your Google My Business profile (from above).

7. If using WordPress for your website platform you can install and complete the setup of a SEO maintenance plugin such as Yoast SEO. Setting up an SEO plugin will help you proofread your published content to ensure it is SEO friendly. Every blog post or published page will receive a score as to how complete the SEO friendliness of the content. Several factors are considered such as keyword focus, page title, page description, readability, keyword frequency, etc. This can be a bit daunting for the casual user, so at a minimum you should focus on your published pages title and description (from item numbers one and two above).

8. Continue to create content for interior pages of your website, maximizing your SEO plugin's scores. Doing well in Google's search results requires that you maintain a healthy relationship with Google. Google wants to see focused content that is regularly posted to your website and is unique. There are no shortcuts to this task. New content that is relevant to your desired keywords and key phrases will need to be published to the website at a regular pace. Just as importantly, the content must be unique. You can't copy from others, and you can't use auto-publishing services that sell you their canned content. These tactics will actually harm your effectiveness. Blogging is the most common method for regular, unique, Google friendly content publishing. Note that steps one and two above will continue to be a huge part of acing this step eight.

Your Google ranking is important as well as having a relevant website. If you are not able to do oversee your website yourself, hire someone like Jim Cronin. Years ago, we would spend a lot on letterhead. Your website as well as your Google ranking is now the new focus of how you and your company appear to the everyone.

FORCE Vice Chair **JIM HASTINGS** *is the Broker of Hastings Brokerage, Ltd., a Las Vegas real estate firm that specializes in helping mortgage servicers and residential real estate portfolio managers with their complete REO process since 1984. He holds a bachelor's degree in real estate from Arizona State University and has closed over $1 billion in residential REO.*

New and Notable

The FORCE is excited to welcome the following agents to the membership. To learn more about them, go to FiveStarForce.com and see the REO Red Book for our full member directory.

Elizabeth Borsuk-Bellonio

HomeSmart Realty

Elizabeth Borsuk-Bellonio is an REO real estate agent with HomeSmart Realty in Howell, New Jersey. She is also the owner of a full service REO rehab/design/construction firm titled WCI Grounds Maintenance Services. They service all of New Jersey, and parts of New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. In 2010, Borsuk-Bellonio was honored by the SBA as the state of NJ Small Business of the year. She has extensive experience working with the full cycle of REO disposition. With a BA in Interior Design, and MA in Interior Architecture, she has also worked with many high profile, celebrity clients in designing their homes. Borsuk-Bellonio is extremely knowledgeable, and a consummate professional, for any business in the greater New Jersey area.

Carmen Jock

Jock Team Real Estate

Carmen Jock leads the Jock Team Real Estate firm in Wisconsin, and serving Milwaukee, Waukesha, Racine, and Kenosha Counties. Jock and her team have experience and knowledge gained through 200-plus REO sales and over 300-plus closings. They handle the full cycle of REO sales, cash-for-keys through close, investors and first-time home buyers. She is proud to be Native American, and manages a woman owned and operated firm. Current and past clients include PNC, CITI Group, Chase, PMH/Stewart, Fannie Mae, VA, VRMCO, Equity Pointe, ORTS, Green River Capital, and Single-Source.

Allen Pozzi

Coldwell Banker D'Ann Harper

Allen Pozzi is with Coldwell Banker D'Ann Harper, REALTORS in San Antonio, Texas. He services Bexar, Comal, Guadalupe, Kendall, Medina, Bandera, Hayes, Travis, Wilson, and Kerr counties. He's been a REALTOR and licensed real estate broker since 2003. He has a team of five agents that specialize in divorce, estates, and REO. Pozzi also teaches CE classes for the state of Texas, and the New Agent Qualifying Education Course. He is a Certified Negotiation Specialist, Military Relocation Expert, ABR, and SRES. He is your expert in south Texas.

Brian W. Ziegenfuss

Re/Max Connection

Brian W. Ziegenfuss is with Re/Max Connection in New Jersey, servicing Gloucester, Camden, Burlington, and Salem. He provides excellent service at the highest level in property and construction management. He is a proven Top Producer, maintaining 98.9% on time tasks along with a 95+% BPO to sales price ratio, and consistently below the county DOM average. Ziegenfuss has developed a proven system he can apply to thousands of assets at one time, duplicating these exceptional results in any area. He has experience with most platforms and technologies and is a CDPE, REO Specialist, Equator Certified, RES.NET certified, NRBA, and holds Five Star certifications.