



An Agent's Guide to Technology in REO

Compiled from previous editions of the "Voice of the FORCE" newsletter.

Technology in REO

What are agents using to streamline their business?

IN THIS DAY AND AGE, IT IS OBVIOUS TECHNOLOGY HAS BECOME ONE OF THE NECESSITIES IN EVERYDAY LIFE. SIMPLE DEVICES SUCH AS LAPTOPS, TABLETS, AND MOBILE PHONES HAVE COME TO SHAPE OUR CULTURE. THERE ONCE WAS A TIME WHEN A COMPUTER TOOK UP AN ENTIRE ROOM BY ITSELF; NOW WE CARRY THEM IN OUR POCKETS. THE QUESTION WE KEEP ASKING OURSELVES IS: “WHICH OF THESE MANY DIFFERENT TECHNOLOGIES ARE STREAMLINING BUSINESS FOR AGENTS AND BROKERS TODAY?”

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Systems

CRMs, such as RES. NET are incredibly useful tools to agents. All in one place agents can use this software to automate their workflow and manage their interactions with current and future customers; as well as managing showings, open houses, closings and other activities in the property buying and selling process. CRMs are both convenient and important because they have the capability to raise productivity while keeping every detail organized at the same time. As described by FORCE member, Meg Russell, Allison James Estates and Homes, “Everyone from field inspectors, to eviction attorneys, to asset managers, to closing coordinators are able to respond on one platform; where all parties can see who is responsible for which task and what next steps are required.”

The Cloud

Cloud computing became a popular resource for the general public in the late 2000s and has been growing ever since. Cloud computing is where different services—such as servers, stored information, and applications—are stored and delivered to a business’s computers or devices via the Internet. Through this, a business can keep all of their information and documents in one secure place, and easily access them whenever and wherever. This comes in handy for agents as they often have to work on site and not in the office. FORCE member, CJ Dagnan, Dagnan Realty Group said, “We utilize a great deal of technology in our business. Cloud services being the most

efficient to date, in my opinion. The Cloud service allows us to share files and pictures instantaneously from the field to the office as well as with contractors and preservation vendors.”

Social Media

It is no secret social media is in demand these days. Websites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter have the ability to connect people around the world in a split second and offer inexpensive advertising and marketing to those who know how to utilize it. FORCE member, Christine Cerda, Guarantee Real Estate, expressed her appreciation for social media saying, “A great tech tool is Facebook. It allows the world to know what, where, when and why your message is needed.” What do you suggest? Fellow FORCE members gave us feedback on which technologies they utilize in taking their businesses to a new level.

Realty Juggler

Realty Juggler is a type of real estate CRM software that boasts its ability to organize and improve the efficiency of real estate agents. Through this program agents can track and manage the many activities they are responsible for on any given day. Chip Wilson, Garibaldi Realty, explained, “It’s is a lot easier to learn than the more complicated contact manager programs designed for the real estate industry. It easily interacts with my Gmail and also takes feeds from my Zillow account. It does everything from tracking my lockbox inventory to recording showings to keeping contact list of all the players in a transaction.”

Technology in REO (Con't)

What are agents using to streamline their business?

Broker Brain

This asset management tool was created for brokers in order to help automate their business. With this system you are capable of managing multiple properties from anywhere, at any time as long as there is an internet connection. Broker Brain not only offers a simple way to consolidate property information into one location, but also offers customizable task options, integrated forms, email integration, electronic document storage, tracking, and customized reports. Jim Hastings, Hastings Brokerage, is a big fan of Broker Brain boasting, "This online program tracks everything. No doubt about it. I am able to respond to client questions quickly as I have everything I need in the system."

Wise Agent

Specializing in customer service, product integration, and data management; Wise Agent is a CRM system tailored to real estate agents. Their focus is on providing simple, yet professional customer service, product integration, and data management. This system ultimately helps agents organize and automate their businesses in order to increase their overall productivity. "The checklists are great for my assistant, and everything goes to my calendar for review. Since I can add up to five assistants on one contract, I have room to expand my team," said Cheryl Gober, IMC Real Estate.

The Good and the Bad

Though technology provides many positives, it can also have its negatives. These new technologies are helping agents become more organized and productive. Halina Zdanowski, Royal Service Realty Home Sweet Home said, "Technology effectively improved the efficiency of my business, and it creates cost-effective ways of getting the job done faster." Furthermore,

agents save on resources not always having to physically travel to a site. Brenda Clark, Ashney Properties, described, "Now by being able to look up homes online and not have to drive all over the community." Joel Nelson, Keller Williams Realty Kalamazoo, made a good point on the real estate process of the past saying, "Imagine trying to find properties using fold up paper maps, or having to keep a notebook with all of the addresses and key box codes?" Additionally, you can respond back to a client or asset manager quickly and easily via the internet. Productivity can change drastically doing everything via the internet, but you lose the over all in personal connection. "Sometimes technology is a barrier to the human element and customer service lacks because some don't want to talk for five minutes to solve an urgent problem," said Heith Mohler, Property Marketers. Carole Schoo, Weesner Properties, agreed with Mohler's point adding, "I rarely communicate telephonically with an asset manager. The relationships are impersonal." Though there are negatives, the general consensus among FORCE agents and brokers is that technology has changed the real estate industry for the better and has elevated their businesses. Tim Miles, Eagle Crest Realty describes, "It was initially a real challenge trying to keep up with the rapidly changing technology; but a real necessity!"

New Technology Delivers Convenience and Engages Millennials

AGUSTIN CANTENS WITH AROMAZ REALTY IN MIAMI LAKES, FLORIDA, USES REAL ESTATE APPS REGULARLY. ONE OF CANTENS' FAVORITE APPS IS PAPERPUSHER. "MILLENNIALS LIKE ANYTHING THEY CAN DO ON AN APP OR ON THEIR PHONES," HE SAYS. HE ALSO LIKES SCANNER, WHICH HE USES TO PHOTOGRAPH AND SAVE CLIENT DOCUMENTS. CANTENS ALSO RELIES ON AN APP CREATED BY HIS LOCAL MLS. IN ADDITION TO PROPERTY INFORMATION, THE LOCAL FLORIDABASED MLS OFFERS A LINK FOR QR CODES AGENTS CAN USE ON THEIR FLIERS.

A potential homebuyer can use the QR code to obtain property information. In addition to some local MLSs offering QR code capabilities, real estate agents can find these offerings through several other outlets, including DriveBuy Technologies and Mobile Real Estate. These companies also offer texting codes for yard signs. Homebuyers can text a short code displayed on a yard sign for property details and agent contact information. This service takes the place of paper fliers, which can blow away and cause potential problems with homeowner associations. Cantens finds younger clients like using QR codes.

Not All Clients Are Tech-savvy

However, not everyone is smitten with these new high-tech offerings. It is important to remember that not all homebuyers or all buyers agents are tech-savvy, says Patrick D'Agostino at Allison James Estates & Homes in Windermere, Florida. "You can have all the greatest technology in the world, but if people aren't going to use it, it doesn't do you any good," he says. In fact, some clients even get put off by technology they can't understand or manipulate, according to D'Agostino. Others find offering QR codes or texting services too much of a hassle. Pamela Hargrove Van Ornam at Advanced Realty Services in Port St. Lucie, Florida, chooses to forgo texting and QR codes in yard signage out of convenience. She says she has too many properties and doesn't want to have to re-print signage for each property.

Technology Can Hinder as Well as Help.

The influx of real estate apps and systems may be a double-edged sword. While Realtors stated overwhelmingly that they favor communicating with clients by email (93 percent) and text messages (85 percent) in a recent survey by the National Association of Realtors, about 46 percent of real estate firms said keeping up with technology is one of the biggest challenges they anticipate over the next two years. This sentiment certainly hits home with D'Agostino. He looks for technology that is easy to use and reliable. If you have to spend a lot of time making it work and synchronizing it with your other systems, it might not be worth it, he warns. "A lot of people get sucked into that hole," he says, describing the paradox of staying up late at night trying to get a technology to work that is supposed to make life easier. Agents should keep an eye on their technologies to see which ones are actually helping save time or draw in clients and which ones are simply draining their time.

The Rise of Mobile Technology

Are New Mobile Apps Time-Savers or Time-Wasters?

WHILE THE LIST OF REAL ESTATE RELATED APPS AND TECHNOLOGIES GROWS EVER-LONGER, AGENTS MUST STOP TO ASK THEMSELVES, WHICH ARE ACTUALLY CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR BUSINESS AND WHICH ARE SIMPLY ADDING TO THEIR DAILY TASKS? SMARTPHONES HAVE BECOME UBIQUITOUS AND ARE NEVER OUT OF REACH FOR MANY. BOTH REAL ESTATE AGENTS AND THEIR CLIENTS HAVE COME TO RELY ON MOBILE DEVICES TO FUNCTION AS PHONES, CALENDARS, CAMERAS, AND MINI, ON-THE-GO OFFICES. REAL ESTATE AGENTS USE MOBILE DEVICES TO COMMUNICATE WITH CLIENTS AND STREAMLINE WORKFLOW, WHILE HOMEBUYERS USE THEM TO LOCATE HOMES, OBTAIN PROPERTY DETAILS, AND REACH OUT TO REAL ESTATE AGENTS. AGENTS HAVE BEGUN TO REALIZE THEIR PHONES AND TABLETS ARE INVALUABLE, AND THE IDEAL WAY TO CONDUCT BUSINESS WHEN THEY ARE AWAY FROM THE OFFICE.

Smart phones are being used daily to assist new home buyers or property investors, as well as real estate agents trying to

finalize a deal. Bluetooth is quickly becoming a huge asset to agents and buyers. It can immediately recognize the location you are in and tell you basically anything you would want to know about a property; from the nearest schools, to bus stops, even previous history of the location. It's no surprise that agents are taking advantage of one of the most popular items on the market, the mobile phone. With so many possibilities, and the fact that almost every single person has a mobile phone; for real estate agents, the options are endless. Clients are expecting

real estate websites to be smart phone-friendly, and apps similar to Zillow, Trulia, and Lovely seem to be multiplying daily to help agents close deals. These websites and apps are most helpful because they allow individuals to view houses for sale, see what

has recently sold in their area, and even view photos of other open houses.

FORCE Members Speak Out About Mobile Real Estate Apps

There are dozens of mobile real estate apps available on Apple, Android, and Windows platforms. A simple search in an app store can reveal all of them to you instantly, but which ones should you use? We have reached out to FORCE members to see if they have entered the mobile real estate app world, what apps are their favorites, and what they would like to see in the future.

Embracing New Tech

The majority of FORCE members are embracing the use of real estate apps on a daily basis. "I absolutely love my real estate apps," LaCrisha Butler of The Butler Group @ Independent Realty in Washington, D.C., said. "I have an iPhone so all my apps are available on the Apple App Store. I use Homesnap Pro, MRIS Close It, SentriSmart, ZipForm, and DocuSign. I can do everything on my phone. It's my appendage," she laughs.

Alternatives to Real Estate Apps

Still others prefer to engage with technology in different ways, like using laptops to bring tech into the field. Tim Shea, one of

Real estate agents and their clients have come to rely on mobile devices to function as phones, calendars, cameras, and mini, on-the-go offices.

The Rise of Mobile Technology (Con't)

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North America's top real estate agents working for Berkshire Hathaway in Florida stays loyal to his tried and trusted technology. "There are a ton of applications out there, primarily with REO properties. Right now, I don't have a use for them. I prefer to use my laptop," he says. A 14-year veteran in the industry, Shea explains that if some factors change, then he will consider using them. "For me, mastering the apps is too time consuming and I really don't like using the small screen of a phone. But, if this were to change, I would consider using them," says Shea. He jokingly added, "I think it's true if you don't change with the time, you'll be left behind. If only I was like my 15-year-old son. He picks up technology so fast. I wish the apps were easier to work for older agents like me." For those like Shea, the use of real estate apps is inevitable, and will soon become part of their arsenal with a few minor fixes.

The Top Contenders

When asked about her favorite real estate apps, Butler was quick to name Homesnap Pro. "It's amazing. I was walking out of an apartment the other night and I saw a property I was interested in, I pulled up the app on my phone and framed the home with the camera. Bam! It instantly told me the listing price, pulled up photos, and other useful information." Butler continued, "The neat thing about Homesnap is that it's available to both consumers and agents. We can get the Pro version that has even more features. It also uses your current location.

You can walk into a house and it automatically give you a valuation." Kathy Cross, of Imagine Real Estate in Washington, relies primarily on two real estate apps. "My favorite apps to use are Northwest MLS and Homepass. I use them all the time to access homes, look at listings, and get information in an instant," says Cross. She added, "These are my favorite apps because they are easy to use, they increase your efficiency and productivity, and they enhance your business. What's not to like about that?"

What's Next for Real Estate Apps?

Although app stores are flooded with real estate apps, FORCE members would like to see even more. Travis Cox, a veteran agent for Associated Brokers & Consultants in Colorado, is familiar with popular apps like Trulia, Homes.com, and countless others, but is looking to an even brighter future in the real estate market. Travis says, "RES.NET is a huge REO platform used by many agents across the country. Everything I do is through RES.NET." When asked about what else is on his wish list, Cox had his fellow companions in the industry in mind. "In my mind, most real estate apps are for consumers, not agents. I don't think there is much we can do with them. I would love an app where we could communicate with clients and companies, and even present offers easily. I care about apps for agents most importantly," says Cox.

The Social Networking Learning Curve

WHEN USED PROPERLY, SITES SUCH AS FACEBOOK, LINKEDIN, AND TWITTER CAN INSTANTLY CONNECT USERS TO AN ESTABLISHED FAN BASE WHILE HELPING TO CATCH THE ATTENTION OF A WIDER AUDIENCE. USED INCORRECTLY HOWEVER, PROFESSIONALS CAN FIND THEMSELVES EXPOSED TO A LITANY OF NEW AGE FAUX PAS THAT CAN OFFEND AND ALIENATE ANY POTENTIAL CLIENTS. KEEP THESE TIPS IN MIND THE NEXT TIME YOU EXPAND YOUR BUSINESS ONLINE.

Choosing Your Platform

With new social media sites flooding the market, it's important to choose the platform that best fits your message. Lisa Lopez of Home Alliance Realty explains that her company likes to spread out their social media contributions depending on the nature of the post. "Our main three sites are Facebook, Twitter,

and LinkedIn. We also use Pinterest, Instagram, and Tumblr primarily for lifestyle posts," says Lopez. Explaining further how her company diversifies, Lopez notes that, "Facebook gives us the ability to target our market with paid ads and grow our fan base ... [while] Twitter is great for getting quick snippets out there on events and relevant trending topics." Gina Sharma of Keller Williams Realty North Atlanta agrees. While she mainly uses Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, she expands her base when a business need presents itself. "We use Google Plus to help us in the search

engine department and are working to create fresh content on our blogs so we can be found easily online," says Sharma.

When used properly, sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter can instantly connect users to an established fan base while helping to catch the attention of a wider audience.

Building Your Audience

Once you have chosen your platform, it is key to tailor your message, so it attracts and maintains your audience's attention. For Danielle Abbott-Goins of Legacy Real Estate Group, LLC, this means striking a balance between personal and business posts. "I always make sure not to bombard my page with too many real estate-related posts. I am not one to post over personal subjects on my page, but I do make sure everyone knows I have a life outside of real estate." For Sharma's team, they find value in making themselves a trusted voice in the community. "We generally post relevant content about our local area like road closures, school information, or any other topics that are connected to real estate," says Sharma.

Maintaining Professionalism

While growing your social media persona can be rewarding, it is important to remember to never get so comfortable that professionalism is lost. As Sharma notes, this is critical even on your "personal" page. "[My team] is careful what we post to our personal Facebook pages, as we are conscious of being found online when consumers are searching for a real estate agent ... professionals should not post pictures or other information to their personal profiles that would hurt their reputation."

SOCIAL MEDIA FAUX PAS

FORCE Members Reflect on Social Media Blunders and Share Their Take on the Best Uses of Social Media.

AMERICANS SPENT 121 BILLION MINUTES ON SOCIAL MEDIA IN JULY 2012; ACCORDING TO CONSUMER RESEARCH FIRM NIELSEN, A 99 PERCENT RISE FROM A YEAR EARLIER. ABOUT 142 MILLION AMERICANS ACCESS SOCIAL MEDIA THROUGH APPS ON THEIR SMARTPHONES, AND 133 MILLION USE SOCIAL MEDIA ON THEIR COMPUTERS, ACCORDING TO DATA NIELSEN RELEASED IN MARCH. JUST AS SOCIAL MEDIA HAS BECOME PART OF THE DAILY LIFE OF SO MANY AMERICANS, SO TOO HAS IT BECOME PART OF THE DAILY ROUTINE OF BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONALS. BUT WHILE CONSUMERS POST EVERYTHING FROM PICTURES OF WHAT THEY ATE FOR DINNER, TO RANTS ABOUT THE TRAFFIC ON THE WAY TO WORK; THOSE TRYING TO LEVERAGE SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING TOOL MUST CONSIDER HOW THEIR POSTS REFLECT ON THEIR COMPETENCE AND PROFESSIONALISM.

THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK ... OR POST.

In the professional world, it is always important to think before you speak, and in the digital professional world, this rule can be even more imperative.

In the professional world, it is always important to think before you speak, and in the digital professional world, this rule can be even more imperative. A social media faux pas can make the rounds and damage an agent's reputation nearly instantly. Sharing "personal bad business dealings on social media" is one blunder Nuvia Rivera of Virginia Beach, Virginia-based Nuvia Rivera & Associates has witnessed in the industry is sharing. She warns others "not to burn bridges." Complaining or

posting negative comments about others "can come across as unprofessional and is a sure way to show your clients that you aren't a confident and secure negotiator," Rivera says. Francis Mazzuca, a San Francisco Bay area agent with Better Homes & Gardens Mason McDuffie Real Estate agrees. "Some people use

social media as a smear campaign," he says, adding, "that's not the right way to do it."

DON'T DISCUSS RELIGION OR POLITICS IN POLITE COMPANY... OR ONLINE.

In the vein of the age old adage about discussing religion and politics comes another issue for professionals using social media. While social media may serve as a constant sounding board for many personal opinions on politics, religion, current events, and more, professionals should restrain from opining on social media. Deciding what to post can be a "fine line," says Todd Yovino, broker and owner of Island Advantage Realty in Hauppauge, New York. "You could post something you think is innocent, and it could be perceived the wrong way." Yovino enforces strict quality control on all social media posts for his brokerage. "We try to keep it very high level and very professional."

STAY ON MESSAGE ONLINE.

Just as it is important to avoid complaining or opining on social media, experienced FORCE members agree it is best to avoid diluting one's message with mundane personal comments. "Keep your personal and professional life separate," says Albert

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Seara, a Miami, Florida-based REO specialist with Unlimited Homes. "Do not post irrelevant or personal information unless it contributes towards your cause." Seara advises agents to "post relevant articles or photos that help build your brand." Similarly, Rivera aims to "share content that is shareable, informative and engaging." "If you can touch at least one of these things in your posts, you ensure that you will get the engagement and responses you desire," she says. A "shareable" post is something intriguing or informative that others will want to share with their own followers. Images, videos, and links to helpful articles are the types of posts followers might

be inclined to share with others—thus expanding your exposure. It is also important to "keep it very upbeat," according to Yovino. Yovino posts information about the benefits of purchasing a home in today's market. For example, he discusses the role of real estate as an investment in one's future and encourages consumers to purchase now while interest rates remain low. Yovino also leverages social media to promote individual properties.

more than 100 agents, Yovino carefully analyzes all marketing and outreach efforts to determine which bring the best results. Open houses, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings remain invaluable, even in today's increasingly digitized world, according to Yovino. Social media is a great way to reach the Millennial generation, according to Yovino, but "Millennials aren't the ones buying right now," he adds.

MAKE SOCIAL MEDIA WORK FOR YOU.

While social media can serve as a marketing tool, it can also serve as a professional networking tool and a great source for professional advice. Diane Amato, an agent with Carrington Real Estate Services, LLC, in Danvers, Massachusetts, limits her social media activity to LinkedIn. "It's 100 percent professional," she says. Amato turns to LinkedIn when she wants to read up on market trends in other parts of the country or when she's looking for a new software tool. She says she usually received 20 to 30 helpful responses when she reaches out with a question on LinkedIn, where she finds, "great advice, awesome help; and everybody's there."

SAY IT IN PERSON.

While social media is certainly here to stay, Yovino says it is important to remember the marketing tactics that have proven successful in the past. "There are definitely some benefits to technology, but we can't forget what's worked over the course of time as well," he says. As a broker in an office with

Online Agent Gossip

The Importance of Online Reviews

WITH CONSUMERS PUTTING INCREASING STOCK IN ONLINE REVIEWS, AGENTS OUGHT TO BE LEVERAGING THIS GROWING OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE A POSITIVE PUBLIC IMAGE. ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING A GOOD REPUTATION THROUGHOUT ONE'S COMMUNITY IS A TOP PRIORITY FOR REAL ESTATE AGENTS, AND MANY AGENTS FIND WORD OF MOUTH GOES A LONG WAY FOR THEIR BUSINESSES. WHILE CLIENTS WILL READILY TALK WITH THEIR FAMILY AND FRIENDS ABOUT THEIR REAL ESTATE AGENTS—RECOMMENDING THEM IF THEY HAD A GOOD EXPERIENCE OR WARNING THEM IF THINGS DID NOT GO WELL—CLIENTS CAN ALSO LEAVE FAR-REACHING FEEDBACK ONLINE. WHILE SOME FORCE AGENTS TOLD US THEY DON'T REALLY FOCUS MUCH ON ONLINE REVIEWS AND TEND NOT TO PUT MUCH STOCK IN THEM, CONSUMERS NATIONWIDE SEEM TO BE PAYING HEED. RESEARCH DEMONSTRATES THAT ONLINE REVIEWS CAN HELP BUILD AN AGENT'S REPUTATION BY MAKING HIM OR HER APPEAR MORE LIKEABLE AND TRUSTWORTHY.

The Importance of Online Reviews

Word of mouth goes a long way for real estate agents, and some FORCE agents say this is one of their main sources of new business. However, Internet presence also has a far reach, and a recent survey found 80 percent of Americans trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations—as long as they don't suspect those reviews to be fake. In the same survey, conducted by Bright Local in 2015, 92 percent of respondents said they read online reviews. About 68 percent said positive reviews make them place more trust in a local business, and just over half—51 percent—said they will choose a business if it has positive reviews.

Research demonstrates that online reviews can help build an agent's reputation by making him or her appear more likeable and trustworthy.

How to Encourage Good Reviews

Tracie Peltier, Associate Broker at 3 Tier Real Estate, LLC, in Sterling Heights, Michigan, encourages clients to leave positive reviews on her Facebook page and on Google. Michael Morris with William Raveis Real Estate in Ridgefield, Connecticut, also encourages his clients to review his business. After completing a sale, he sends out a closing email to thank his client. Included in that email are a list of local resources, such as lawn care and other services new homeowners may need, and an Internal survey in which the client can offer feedback. Additionally, Morris encourages clients in his closing email to review him on Zillow and other sites. "We look at what they thought of the company, their impression of the showings, the speed of communication, the type of communication, their experience with our admins, and we use that feedback," Morris says. If necessary, he will address any complaints with his office staff and will adjust office policies to better meet clients' needs.

Learning from Client Feedback

Jennifer Ruspini of Ruspini Realty in Westport, Connecticut, takes client relationships very seriously. From their first meeting, she tells her clients their relationship will be like a marriage, so they need to make sure it is going to be a good

Online Agent Gossip (Con't)

The Importance of Online Reviews

fit. At their first interview, Ruspini offers each client a packet of information with a survey for them to complete at the end of the transaction. She asks her clients to be honest in their review. "That's how I grow," she says.

What to Do with a Bad Review

While Morris has not received a negative online review, he has a plan in mind in case he does encounter one in the future. The first thing Morris would do in the case of a bad review is reach out to the client to see what his office could have done better. If

there was a misunderstanding or he is able to resolve the complaint, he will ask the client to change or clarify their review online. He might also post a reply to the client on the website alongside the negative review. Peltier likewise has yet to receive a negative review online, but she says she would take a similar approach to that of Morris. She would call the client directly to see what she can do to remedy the situation or change his or her

mind. She might also offer a gift card or other offering to end the interaction on a positive note. However, agents shouldn't fret too much over one or two negative reviews. "[H]aving some negative reviews is normal and helps give your company a believable identity on a review site," according to the article, "10 Ideas: How to Fix a Damning Business Review," on the website, Search Engine Land. The article also suggests counteracting negative reviews by encouraging clients to leave positive

reviews on the site where you have a negative review. Focusing on local reputation in one's community is a worthwhile endeavor, but so too is pursuing a stellar reputation online. As home buyers and sellers increasingly use the internet throughout their real estate transactions, an agent's online reviews become more visible and more pertinent.

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"We look at what they thought of the company, their impression of the showings, the speed of communication, the type of communication, their experience with our admins, and we use that feedback."

MICHAEL MORRIS, WILLIAM RAVEIS REAL ESTATE

Is the Cold Call Dead Cold?

Savvy FORCE Agents Are Finding Substantial Success with Online Leads

SOME FORCE AGENTS ARE INUNDATED WITH SO MANY INTERNET LEADS, IT ELIMINATES THEIR NEED FOR COLD CALLS. WITH ZILLOW, TRULIA, FACEBOOK, AND ALL KINDS OF VIRTUAL HOME TOURS; THE HIGHLY PERSONAL WORLD OF REAL ESTATE IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY VIRTUAL AND INUNDATED WITH AN EVER-INCREASING NEED FOR SPEED. AMONG ALL THE PLACES TO FIND LEADS—BOTH REAL-WORLD AND VIRTUAL—WE ASKED SOME OF OUR MEMBERS WHERE THEY ARE CAPTURING MEANINGFUL LEADS.

Word of Mouth: “By providing the most outstanding customer service to our current clients, we hope they feel confident in referring us to their family and friends,” says Todd Sullivan, Managing Broker at 509 Properties in Spokane, Washington. Tracy Peltier, Associate Broker at 3 Tier Real Estate, LLC, in Sterling Heights, Michigan, also relies heavily on word of mouth and the reputation she has built in her community over her 13 years in real estate.

Repeat Business: Jennifer Ruspini of Ruspini Realty in Westport, Connecticut, says many of her clients are repeat business.

Cold Calls: Cold calls are alive and well at some offices. Sullivan and his team of three listing agents together make about 120 cold calls per week. They also engage in some good old-fashioned door knocking.

Open Houses: Sullivan’s team also holds about two to three open houses each week to meet new clients.

Online: Michael Morris with William Raveis Real Estate in Ridgefield, Connecticut, says, “Our biggest thing is we really believe in Internet advertising.” His team posts to 50 of the top 60 real estate websites. Sullivan and Peltier also post regularly to their websites, top real estate websites, and Facebook. When Peltier posts to her website, it automatically filters her listings out to 300 other websites.

Pursuing the Online Lead

It goes without saying that posting listings online is now standard for most real estate agents. With 36 million unique

visitors each month, Zillow is an essential part of the real estate world; and for agents who are prepared to capture online leads, the Internet can be a substantial source of new business. Posting to 50 of the top 60 real estate websites certainly seems to be paying off for Morris, who says online leads make up about 70 percent of his leads. The other 30 percent, he says, come by phone. In fact, Morris says, “We get more than enough leads coming in, so we don’t need to cold call.” “We average about 25 internet leads per day; it’s constant,” Morris says, adding, “It’s even more on the weekends, and that’s when a lot of people staff down.” Morris makes sure his team is up and running over the weekends, and he requires one of his four buyers’ agents be in the office at all times, “so we always have an agent on duty who can speak intelligently to buyers.”

Sullivan takes a similar approach with his team of agents. “Each agent signs up for floor on average for three shifts per week,” he says. “They answer calls on our listings and also generate new clients from our website.”

Don’t Let Your Leads Pass You By

“Timeliness is next to godliness on these leads,” Morris says. “If you don’t get back to them in an hour, they will move on.” According to an article on Placester, 30 to 50 percent of sales go to the agent who responds first. With more and more prospective homebuyers starting their home searches online, it is imperative agents be there to meet them. The earlier an agent can interact with a homebuyer, the more likely that homebuyer is to work with him or her and actually purchase a home through him or her.

A Good Lead Is Hard to Find

Using Software to Capture and Nurture New Leads

WITH LEAD GENERATION SOFTWARE, REAL ESTATE AGENTS CAN REACH OUT AND CONNECT WITH NEW CLIENTS WHERE THEY FIRST START THEIR HOME SEARCH—ONLINE. FOR MANY HOME BUYERS—ABOUT 42 PERCENT, ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS—THE HOME BUYING PROCESS BEGINS ONLINE. HOWEVER, THE MAJORITY OF BUYERS WILL TURN TO A REAL ESTATE AGENT AFTER SOME PRELIMINARY ONLINE SEARCHING. ABOUT 87 PERCENT OF RECENT BUYERS PURCHASED THEIR HOMES THROUGH AN AGENT OR BROKER, ACCORDING TO NAR. HOWEVER, IF 42 PERCENT OF BUYERS ARE STARTING THEIR HOME SEARCH ONLINE, AGENTS HOPING TO FIND NEW LEADS SHOULD BE THERE TO GREET THEM. ESTABLISHING AN ONLINE PRESENCE WITH A WEBSITE, BLOG, AND SOCIAL MEDIA IS A GOOD WAY TO START; BUT THE NEXT STEP IS TO CAPTURE THE LEADS WHO VISIT YOUR WEBSITE OR SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE AND REACH OUT TO THEM.

Enter lead generation software. What is it? Lead generation software captures leads and helps agents establish and nurture relationships with potential clients early in their home buying process. Rather than waiting until they are weeks away from purchasing a home and hoping they wander into your office, lead generation software allows you to build a relationship from the start so when they are ready to reach out to an agent, they know to call you. These programs often also have features that allow you to create real estate fliers or newsletters you can send your leads. In addition to capturing new leads, these software

programs also help you to stay in touch with past clients, so when they are ready to buy or sell again, you are top of mind. Lead Generation Software can help with the following tasks: track leads and clients and schedule follow-up calls on a regular basis; assign leads to agents in your office; import and organize

leads from your website, your MLS, tax records, etc.; end bulk emails and drip campaigns for different client groups; send reminders to congratulate clients on their closing anniversaries and/or birthdays; and receive showing feedback from other agents with automated forms.

Is It Worth It? We heard a resounding “yes” from FORCE member Tammy Seymour of Desert Dream Realty in Cave Creek, Arizona. Likewise, Jennifer Ruspini of Ruspini Realty in Monroe, Connecticut, says many of her leads come to her because of her experience in the REO field, but she does use software to capture leads online as well. Ruspini says in some cases people will submit false names or information when searching, but she is able to access the IP address from their computer and know where they are. What do you do with a lead? Once she has a lead, Ruspini says, “I follow up on them and nurture those leads. You have to be responsive all the time.” Seymour agrees that staying in touch with clients throughout the entire home buying process is valuable.

With her lead generation software, RealtyJuggler, Seymour is able to classify her leads into three categories: (a) those likely to buy within the next 30 days, (b) those likely to buy within the next 60 days, and (c) those who will not be ready to buy within the next 90 days. She can then set up drip campaigns for her leads and clients based on where they are in the home buying

With lead generation software, real estate agents can reach out and connect with new clients where they first start their home search—online.

A Good Lead Is Hard to Find (Con't)

Using Software to Capture and Nurture New Leads

process. For a first-time buyer who will be ready to purchase soon, Seymour may send out information on the home buying process. For a lead who is just prospecting but not going to buy immediately, she may send out community information to help him or her decide which neighborhood might be ideal for him or her. What about agent leads? Seymour uses her lead generation and CRM not only for potential home buyers but also for real estate agents. Through Showing Suite, Seymour keeps a database of all the agents who have showed one of her properties. She has more than 700 real estate agents in her database, and each name is linked to the property they showed. When she acquires a new listing, she can look to see which agents showed her past properties in that neighborhood, and she will send them information on her new listing. In this way, she is able to target agents based on the locale they service. Seymour remains in constant communication with all her contacts—new leads, past clients, buyer agents, and REO clients.

In addition to capturing new leads, these software programs also help you to stay in touch with past clients, so when they are ready to buy or sell again, you are top of mind.

How to Choose the Perfect Site

IN TODAY'S COMPETITIVE MARKETPLACE, IT'S STANDARD PRACTICE FOR MOST BUSINESSES TO HAVE SOME SORT OF WEBSITE. REAL ESTATE IS NO EXCEPTION, BUT THE DETAILS OF EACH PLATFORM AND THEIR OFFERINGS CAN GET CONFUSING. CORRECT PLANNING IS CRUCIAL TO FINDING THE RIGHT HOST FOR YOUR NEEDS.

What are You Looking For?

Site hosts can offer a plethora of services and add-ons, but as an agent, your needs are very specific. You should consider lead management, customer relationship management (CRM) capabilities, listing implementation, marketing capabilities, and price. Once you decide what you are looking for from these categories, the choices begin to narrow.

MLS System Preferences

As with any system, there are multiple ways to receive your MLS listing information. The first and most common way is by using an IDX system. This system allows agents to receive their MLS listings in a simple and inexpensive format to place onto their site. While this system is easy to navigate and usually low-priced, agents lose search engine optimization (SEO) value in the transition because the information provider keeps the original IP address. In organic MLS migration, the distributor connects the agent to the MLS feed directly. This allows SEO to be directed to the agent's site. However, this method tends to cost between \$1,500 and \$16,000 depending on the volume of listings received.

All Providers Are Not the Same

Placester // One of the most popular real estate platforms today, Placester, offers multiple features at a comparatively low cost. For about \$75 per month, users can receive lead capture, email marketing, and CRM tools. This platform also allows for contact export and some integration, but you must provide your own domain.

Premier Agent // This platform, designed by Zillow, has a large MLS network and includes the domain. The system allows you to capture and manage leads, and also export contacts and send email marketing. At a mere \$10 per month, Premier Agent is one of the more inexpensive options.

Website Box // This platform allows the user to receive leads through integration and syndicates to top sites like Zillow, Oodle, Trulia, and Yahoo Real Estate. This platform allows agents to use their domain or they may purchase one for \$15 per year. The current rate for a site through Website Box is a one-time fee of \$99.

TORCHx // This website provider gives access to every feature an agent could need with auto lead import, full CRM management, and real-time MLS data updates. This platform also provides extensive marketing tools such as email marketing templates, drip campaigns, and action planning. While TORCHx leads the competition in benefits, it also leads in price, coming in at \$500-\$900 per month.

Not All Websites Are Created Equally

How to Make Your Website Contribute to Your Business Goals

MOST REAL ESTATE AGENTS HAVE A WEBSITE, AND MOST CONTAIN THE BASICS—CONTACT INFORMATION, A FEW LISTINGS, A HEADSHOT AND PERHAPS A BIO OF THE AGENT. HOWEVER, SOME REAL ESTATE AGENTS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CREATE WEBSITES THAT TRULY SERVE THEIR BUSINESSES, ATTRACT POTENTIAL CLIENTS, AND BUILD PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS. ABOUT 88 PERCENT OF HOMEBUYERS RELY ON WEBSITES FOR INFORMATION WHEN THEY ARE LOOKING TO PURCHASE A HOME, AND 43 PERCENT SEARCH FOR HOMES ONLINE, ACCORDING TO THE HOME BUYER AND SELLER GENERATIONAL TRENDS REPORT 2015, FROM THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS (NAR). “AMONG ALL GENERATIONS OF HOME BUYERS, THE FIRST STEP IN THE HOME BUYING PROCESS IS LOOKING ONLINE FOR PROPERTIES FOR SALE,” NAR SAID IN THE REPORT. **TO ATTRACT POTENTIAL CLIENTS TO YOUR BUSINESS, YOUR WEBSITE SHOULD HAVE THE FOLLOWING ATTRIBUTES:**

Accessibility

Make sure the information you want people to see is accessible. If people can't get to it easily, or without a hassle, they'll move on to your competition. Trice Massey of Greater Kansas Realty says one of the good things about her website is “you don't have to log in. We don't force people to sign in or give private information. Listings are available without special access.”

Ease of Navigation

Another factor to consider is navigation. No one will spend more than a few seconds on a website that is difficult to navigate; especially when there are plenty of other options. Easy navigation is another priority for Massey with her website.

Interactivity

Massey also recommends making a website interactive. Include as many stunning images as you can. Show off your listings with virtual tours and videos whenever possible. Interactive maps featuring your listings are also a great way to captivate visitors. Additionally, embedding a Google map with your location can help Google verify your location so your website shows up in local searches. Informative Another great way to

serve your clients and potential clients online is to include tools and resources for them to navigate through the home buying or home selling process. Mortgage calculators, relocation information, and community information are good components to add to your website. Some agents include pages that walk prospective buyers through the process of purchasing, with information about home inspections, appraisals, and closings. Not only will this make the process a little clearer and less daunting for a buyer, but it will also present you as a trusted resource.

Testimonials

Testimonials are also growing in popularity for real estate websites and are a great way to gain trust with prospective clients. Video testimonials in particular are a somewhat new but growing trend for real estate agents.

Tips for Creating an Effective Real Estate Blog

THERE ARE COUNTLESS SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES WHERE PEOPLE CAN SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT ANYTHING ON THEIR MIND, INCLUDING REAL ESTATE. FOCUSING ON A TARGET AUDIENCE WITH QUALITY CONTENT CAN EARN YOU TRUST AS AN INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY EXPERT. WITH THE ADVENT OF WORDPRESS AND OTHER SIMILAR FREE BLOG PLATFORMS, SETTING UP A BLOG IS FAIRLY SIMPLE. HOWEVER, IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO COME UP WITH AN ENDLESS LIST OF CONTENT IDEAS TO CARRY YOU THROUGH EACH WEEK, AS WELL AS DETERMINING WHICH TOPICS ACTUALLY SERVE YOUR BUSINESS. REAL ESTATE BLOGS ARE CERTAINLY NOT UNHEARD OF, BUT THEY ARE NOT AS UBIQUITOUS AS REAL ESTATE WEBSITES. A BLOG—ESPECIALLY EMBEDDED IN YOUR WEBSITE—CAN GIVE YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE YOUR LOCAL KNOWLEDGE, AS WELL AS YOUR PERSONALITY.

Blogging quality content can help position you as an expert in your field and your community. Before beginning to post to your blog, it is important to determine your goal with your blog and identify your target market. Are you trying to network with other agents and industry professionals, or are you trying to attract potential clients in your area? Each post should support your goal. Think about what your target audience wants to read about. If you're trying to reach local buyers and sellers, posting national price trends and other industry reports may not be the way to go. Instead, posting hyper-local information about the housing market and the community in general may attract the readers you're seeking.

Trice Massey of Greater Kansas City Realty often posts seasonal home maintenance tips in addition to information about upcoming events she is hosting, such as homebuying seminars. Joanna Warski of Berkshire Hathaway Home Services in Coral Springs, Florida, also posts tips for homeowners, homebuyers, and home sellers. In one post, she offers tips on curb appeal, and in another she offers tips on saving on your heating bill during the winter. Think about questions clients ask or common mistakes homebuyers and sellers make and use those as blog post topics. Blogging often is also important. Massey recommends posting at least a couple times each week.

Quick Tips for Blogging:

- » Blog often and remember your target audience.
- » Include at least one image in each post.
- » Utilize video when possible.
- » Promote your blog posts through social media and any email blasts or newsletters you send out.
- » Read other real estate blogs and your local newspaper for topic ideas

Trouble Getting Started? Here's some Blog Post Ideas:

- » Local neighborhood information—school rankings, a list of parks, best places to eat, etc.
- » Upcoming community events
- » Market trends—home prices, home sales, mortgage rates, etc.
- » Home buying and selling tips
- » Frequently asked questions from buyers or sellers
- » Open house information
- » Useful apps for home buyers
- » Luxury or celebrity homes in your market
- » Local charities or organizations you are involved with

Digital Marketing ROI

How to Get the Most from Your Digital Marketing Efforts

WHETHER JUST BEGINNING TO DABBLE IN DIGITAL MARKETING OR ENGAGING FULL-FORCE, HERE ARE A FEW STATS AND TIPS TO HELP YOUR DIGITAL MARKETING EFFORTS GAIN TRACTION. THE WORLD OF DIGITAL MARKETING CAN BE OVERWHELMING. CHASING AFTER “LIKES,” AND PURSUING NEW FOLLOWERS CAN BE TIME-INTENSIVE TASKS, AND THE PRAGMATIC ARE LEFT WONDERING WHAT IS THE ROI—RETURN ON INVESTMENT? SOME FOREGO DIGITAL MARKETING ALTOGETHER OR SET UP A FACEBOOK PAGE BUT LATER ABANDON IT, BELIEVING IT ISN'T HELPING THEIR BOTTOM LINE.

For those agents struggling with the oft-imperceptible results of their digital marketing efforts, you are not alone. Digital Strategy Consulting relays the results from a global study by the Fournaise Marketing Group, saying “Nine out of 10 (90 percent) global marketers are not trained to calculate return on investment (ROI), and 80 percent struggle with being able to properly demonstrate to their management the business effectiveness of their spending, campaigns, and activities.”

While we can't calculate the ROI for your own digital marketing efforts, Rutgers Business School posted in an article that digital marketing efforts were more effective than TV, print, radio, and outdoor marketing, according to an econometrics study by Microsoft. Real estate agents

can engage in Facebook and create quick, appealing videos to increase their visibility and market their firm.

General Facebook Tips:
Post often, include images to get noticed, and keep it professional and tasteful—avoid politics and emotional rants.

Facebook Is King

With more than 1.3 billion members, Facebook is still the largest social networking site, so if you're looking to reach a broad audience, start here. About 77 percent of Realtors use Facebook for their business, the highest of any social networking site, according to a report from NAR. About 70 percent of Realtors who engage in social media do so with a goal of networking and building relationships, according to NAR. About 64 percent of those using social media use it for marketing and to boost their visibility.

What to Post: Real estate agents can promote individual properties on their Facebook pages, but they can also position themselves as local market experts and active community members by posting links to real estate-related articles and community information and events. Those who have blogs should post their blog entries on their Facebook pages as well to drive traffic to their websites.

How to Post Your Professional Content: There are two ways to set up a professional Facebook account—either as an individual or as a business. If you post as an individual, you can choose to filter your content to different parties. You can click on “Create Group” on your Facebook page to create a group for your friends and family. Then you may post personal updates exclusively for this group, while maintaining a professional presence for your clients and professional peers.

Digital Marketing ROI (Con't)

How to Get the Most from Your Digital Marketing Efforts

General Facebook Tips: Post often, include images to get noticed, and keep it professional and tasteful—avoid politics and emotional rants.

Video Is the New Black

While more than three-fourths of real estate agents are using Facebook to promote their business, only about one-third are using one the newest, most impactful digital marketing tools: video, according to the 2014-2015 Center for Realtor Technology Survey by NAR. About 15 percent of agents used video to sell detached, single-family homes in 2012, up 114 percent from 7 percent just a year earlier, according to NAR. The video trend is rising, and for good reason. Inman News reported in 2014 that 85 percent of home buyers and sellers prefer to work with a real estate agent who uses video. Additionally, homes with video listings receive four times more inquiries than homes with no video, according to Inman.

Home buyers are using video both to tour homes virtually and to learn more about particular communities, according to Inman. Hiring a professional videographer is one way to obtain professional video content, but it may not be in every agent's budget. Fortunately, there are several apps that can help you create video, often right from your smartphone, either for free or for a small fee. You can also seek out a service such as MarketVideos.com, which helps you create video newsletters for \$29 per month. Your newsletters will be embedded with the latest MLS data for your area and a few videos with real estate tips.