

REALTORS® Utilize TECHNOLOGY to Market Homes II

BY JOANNE DIMAGGIO

“Once a new technology rolls over you, if you’re not part of the steamroller, you’re part of the road.”

That quote is attributed to Stewart Brand, author, editor, and creator of “The Whole Earth Catalog,” a publication that helps people to find virtually any information. Created in 1968, the catalog was a forerunner of the Internet. While we have come a long way since then, Brand’s message about technology continues to ring true, especially in today’s real estate marketplace.

Last week, we examined how some area REALTORS® are using technology such as innovative Web sites, blogging, virtual tours, 800-number links, and Palm Pilots to market their properties. This week we will look at how podcasting, The “talking house,” and technology aimed at youngsters is giving some REALTORS® a competitive edge.

Podcasting

Jim Duncan, a REALTOR® with Century 21 Manley Associates, Inc. (www.jduncanrealestate.com), believes that next to blogging, podcasting is one of the most innovative trends in real estate marketing.

“A podcast is a way to get a more personal view of what it’s like to live in the property and the neighborhood,” Duncan explained. “It’s a visual and audio interview with the house and its owners. It presents the property from the owner’s point of view. As REALTORS®, we deal with facts. With a podcast you’re able to touch on the emotions of people. I did a podcast where the owners wrote an essay describing what it was like to raise their children there and what they did with those two kids as they grew. Their family grew in that house and they wanted to convey that to the next owner. For lack of a better term, it conveys ‘vibes’ of the house from the owner’s point of view.”

Podcasting is definitely an advantage for sellers—it adds

more market exposure by providing different methods to interact with the house, differentiating it from other homes on the market.

“Now with so much inventory out there, if you’re able to give more information about a particular property, it helps the buyers and the sellers as well,” Duncan said. He added that reaction to podcasting has been good because buying and selling homes is not just a financial process, but also an emotional one.

“My buyers and sellers have been quite pleased with it, but again it’s just another thing in the marketing timeline,” he said. “It’s shown tremendous growth. There have been so many articles in the national real estate media and larger

real estate Web sites are developing their own, but what I’ve seen locally is of a far higher quality than anything I’ve seen elsewhere.”

The Talking House

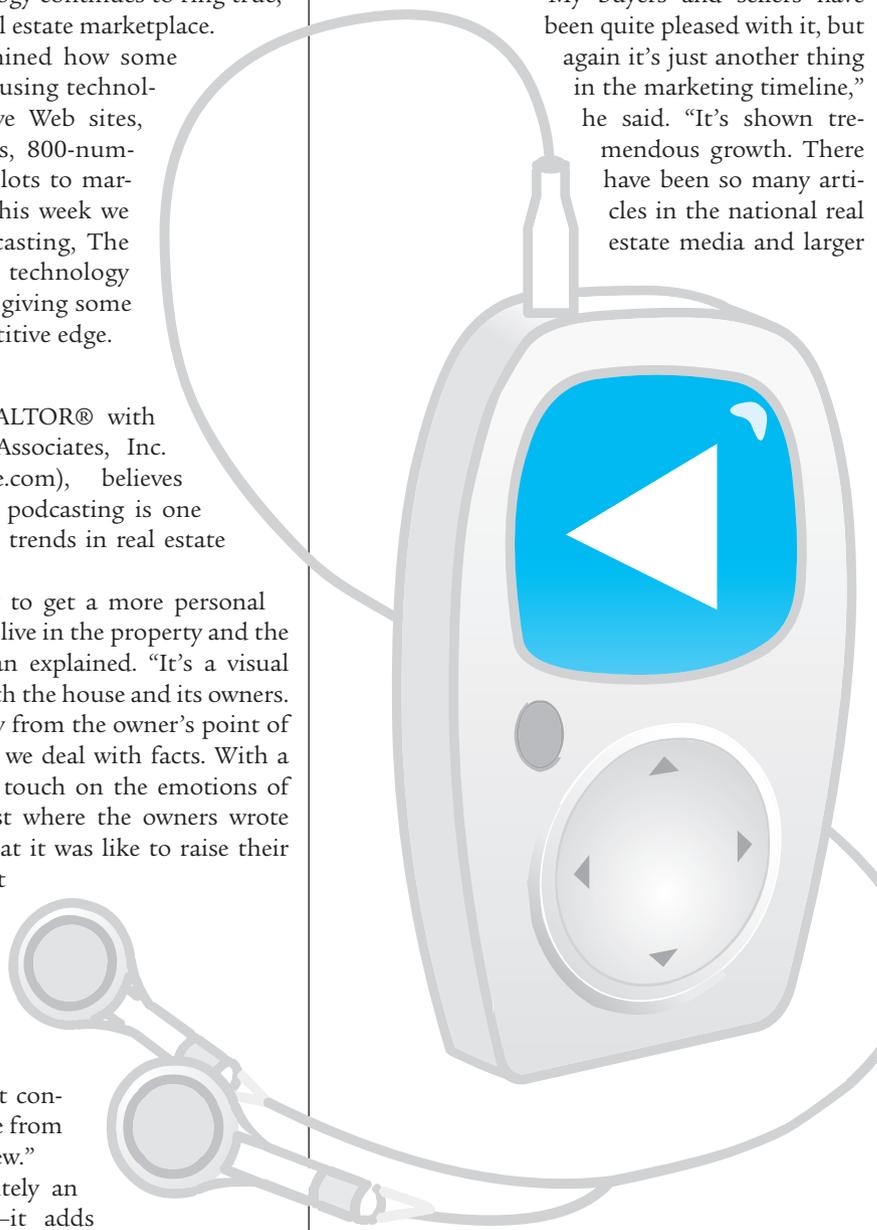
A technology that’s been around for a while is the “talking house.” The concept is fairly simple. A “talking house” sign placed in the seller’s front yard tells people to tune their car radio to a specified station for additional information about the house. Potential buyers can sit in the comfort of their cars and listen to a pre-recorded message from the REALTOR® giving details about the house that make it come alive. The transmitter—which is operational 24/7—sits inside the house and is completely silent, so it doesn’t disturb sellers.

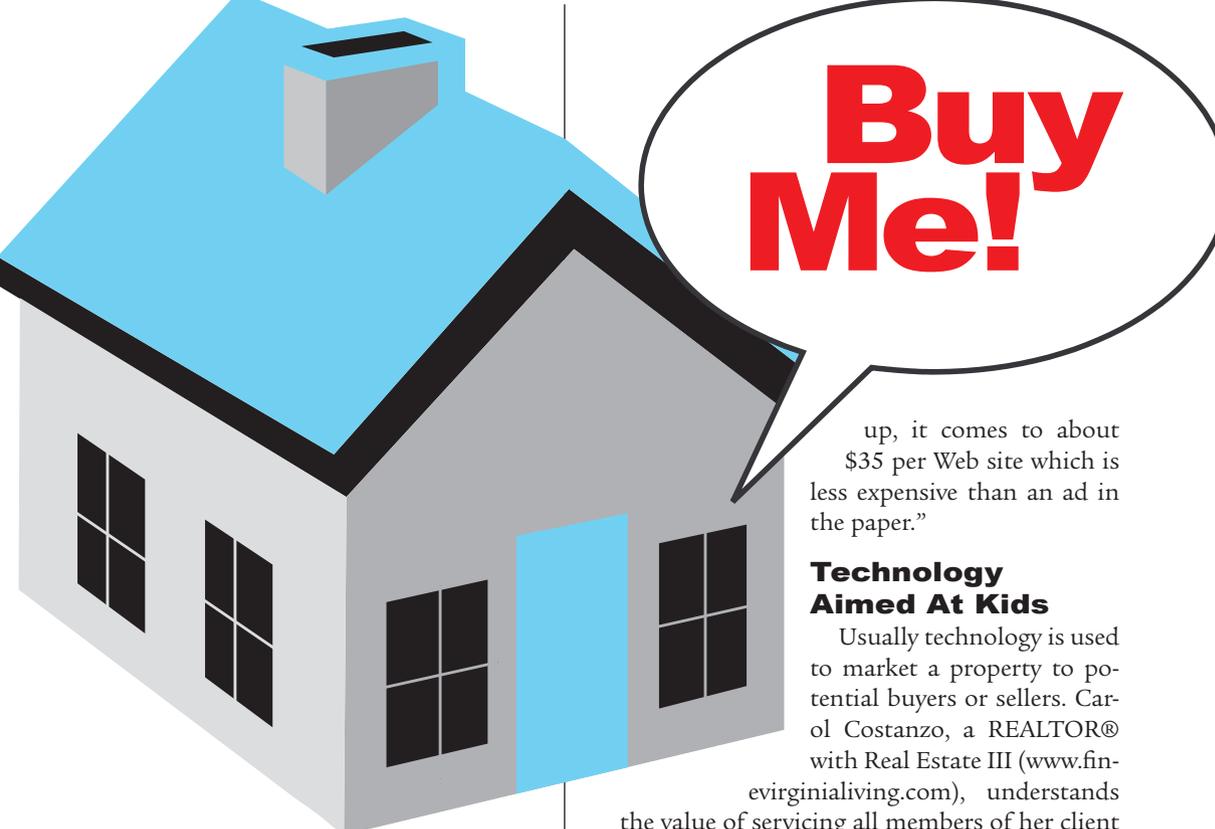
Although it is not widely used by REALTORS® in our area because of its cost, it is a technology that Bev Nash of RE/MAX Assured Properties (www.bev-nash.com) thinks is well worth the investment.

“I’ve been using it for seven years and I can honestly say that it’s made me thousands of dollars, which means my sellers have made thousands of dollars,” Nash said. “I put on a five-minute message that would describe the inside of the property and aspects of it that the potential purchaser would not normally see from the side of the road. It gives things like room sizes, features of the property, hardwood floors, vaulted ceilings, and fireplaces—all those things that you may not notice even by taking a flyer. It also means that potential purchasers don’t have to get out of their car if it’s a wet day.”

Nash said typically buyers listen to the message twice, which means they are sitting in front of the property for ten minutes. During the message, he invites them to take a flyer from the sign so they can write down specifics they hear on the message that aren’t on the flyer. More often than not, it results in a showing.

“I’ve got a phrase that I use,” he said. “Drive-bys usually mean goodbyes. The ‘talking house’ encourages people to linger. The longer they linger, the more likely they are to get hooked on going inside the house. Typically they will call and say, ‘We’ve heard this ‘talking house’—can we see it please?’ It also works with buyers working with other agents. The agents will call and say their buyers listened to that ‘talking house’ and they want to see the property.”





Buy Me!

up, it comes to about \$35 per Web site which is less expensive than an ad in the paper.”

Technology Aimed At Kids

Usually technology is used to market a property to potential buyers or sellers. Carol Costanzo, a REALTOR® with Real Estate III (www.finevirginaliving.com), understands

the value of servicing all members of her client families, including youngsters. She knows making kids happy has a positive effect on moms and dads as well. To address this segment of her market, she has developed Just for Kids, which can be accessed under the Buyers & Sellers section of her Web site.

Just for Kids is a fun Web site for kids and adults where visitors can see photographs through a high power microscope, see the world through the eyes of a bee, make animations on their own computer, or help save the rainforests.

“There’s a fabulous educational section of it that goes from simple math through physics—truly a cutting-edge site just for kids and very fun for adults, too,” said Costanzo.

Keeping Pace Helps Win the Race

As Cliff Kavanaugh, a REALTOR® with Keller Williams Realty (www.cvillehomesearch.com) said last week, the real estate business has come a long way since the days of pulling out a phone-book-sized MLS book to find properties. Today’s REALTORS® are embracing innovative technology to keep up with industry standards and provide a level of service that keeps the market exciting and profitable.

“The Internet and promotional market is really everything now,” Bev Nash said. “According to www.realtor.com, 78% of buyers look on the Web site. You’ve got to spend the money to make the money. You never stop learning and there’s always something different.” 🏠

Nash said all of his properties utilize the “talking house,” except where it would create a hazard on busy roads like Route 29 or Route 250. Subdivisions, like Fontana and Western Ridge, are perfect for this type of technology.

“The good thing about that from a marketing standpoint is that people within those subdivisions love it and when they come to list their property, they’ll ask, ‘Who is that guy with the ‘talking house?’ So I get lots of listings.”

Nash added that the “talking house” concept is popular with both sellers and buyers. Sellers like it because it promotes their house so well and buyers like it because they see there is ready information available to them about the property.

An avid believer in aggressive marketing, Nash says the “talking house” is just one of five methods he uses to promote his properties.

“If we (REALTORS®) are going to make a huge amount of money, we should spend some of our money on marketing,” he said. “We all need to have something different these days to sell property. You can’t just rely on the MLS system anymore.”

In addition to the “talking house,” every home Nash lists has a personal Web site with nine color photos, a description of the property, and links to county information. He also offers virtual tours of every property.

“I’ve got a total of 22 generic Web sites,” he stated. “When you think of the cost of setting these

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