

NEW YORK STATE REALTOR®

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

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MAY/JUNE 2008

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NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®, INC.

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Linda J. Page
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda J. Page". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

RPAC allows us to support those elected officials who have been supporters of REALTOR® issues. If you have not yet made an RPAC contribution, please consider making one today.

As our clients and customers increasingly expect us to be tech-savvy, we must be prepared to meet their needs using the Internet, e-mail, smartphones and a wide array of gadgets. In today's changing market, the smart use of technology is vital to our business success. Each of us will choose the tools that work best for us.

To assist you in refining your use of technology, we have articles covering "must-have" technology for the successful real estate professional, a report on smartphones and some great tips from a veteran REALTOR® blogger. While blogging is clearly not for everyone, Jim Duncan has used it to build a very successful real estate practice with Century 21 Manley in Charlottesville, Va. He also shares insightful tips for those who may want to start a blog. You can also read about tools some of your peers here in New York find indispensable.

Like you, it is important for NYSAR to continually evaluate its use of technology. I am pleased to announce that the association is undertaking a study of nysar.com in an effort to refine the contents and features, and more closely align it with your needs. As part of this process, NYSAR will conduct a series of focus groups to give members the opportunity to tell us what works, what is valuable and what content should be added. A working group comprised of members of the organizational planning, emerging issues and communications committees will analyze this information and work with staff and a consultant to create a plan to guide the evolution of the website.

We anticipate that the plan will be ready for consideration by the board of directors this September, and with its adoption, the all-new nysar.com should debut in mid-2009. Watch future issues of *New York State REALTOR®* for developments.

Elsewhere in this issue, I encourage you to read about our 2008 legislative agenda, which includes key issues such as protecting earned but unpaid commissions, advocating for property tax relief, banning all sex offenders from obtaining or holding real estate licenses, providing first-time homebuyer savings accounts and creating access to affordable health care for REALTORS®. Together, you, your leadership team and staff will work for the passage of legislation favorably addressing these issues. We also will work to defeat proposals that would create transfer taxes, limit our ability to practice real estate and require brokers to verify zoning compliance of all listings. (See page 23 for more about our legislative agenda.)

Every NYSAR member is an integral part of the team that will help advance our legislative agenda, so I ask that when you receive a "Call for Action," please respond and take action. Don't say, "Oh, I will come back to that later." Please take the very few minutes required to respond right away. Your action pays huge dividends for our industry. Our lawmakers need to know the REALTOR® position from their constituents, and your participation does this. Additionally, I encourage you to attend the annual Lobby Day in Albany on June 10. You will be able to participate in face-to-face meetings with your legislators and educate them about issues important to your industry, your clients and customers. Time after time, these strategies have proven effective, but they can only be effective if you participate. By working together, we are able to accomplish much for our industry.

I would be remiss in writing about our advocacy efforts without also reminding you that your financial support of RPAC is vital to these efforts. In this election year, RPAC allows us to support those elected officials who have been supporters of REALTOR® issues. If you have not yet made an RPAC contribution, please consider making one today. If you have already made an RPAC contribution, consider taking it up a level with an added contribution. Information is available from your local board or at nysar.com. Your financial and participatory support of RPAC is critical to our goals.

NEW YORK NEWS BRIEFS

NYSAR announces new affinity partner

In response to increased member demand for affordable health insurance, NYSAR has partnered with MVP Health Care to offer its members access to discounted EPO health insurance. Key program features include two innovative plan options, an extensive provider network, no referrals and dedicated customer care.

The competitively priced program, underwritten by MVP Health Care and administered by USA Affinity, also offers NYSAR members access to comprehensive prescription drug coverage and 24/7 online access to provider listings, mail-order prescription refills and more.

For more information on this new member benefit, visit nysar.com or call 888-834-3713 for a customized quote.

Additional content added to online Media Center

Since its inception in February, the NYSAR Media Center has grown to include almost a dozen download options with additional content including presentations from the NYSAR Mid-winter Business Meetings and legal webinars.

Presentations from NYSAR's Mid-winter Business Meetings include "Challenges, Threats and Opportunities for the Real Estate Industry," a 33-minute presentation from Gregg Larson, president and CEO of Clarity Consulting. Larson's presentation covers pertinent topics that all REALTORS® should know about, including how to cater to younger consumers. Also available is Pierre Calzadilla's 30-minute presentation "Bringing Your Office Skills to the Web." Calzadilla, the manager of strategic partnerships for Trulia, outlines ways in which traditional marketing and sales methods can be transformed to work in an online environment. This presentation also shows

REALTORS® that it's important to tailor your message to fit the needs of your target market.

In addition to these options, members can download audio from Swaranjit Singh's presentation "Understanding the Sikh Culture." Singh, a REALTOR® and president of the World Sikh Peace Foundation, discusses the importance of understanding other cultures and religions. He also explains common misunderstandings about the world's fifth-largest monotheistic religion, Sikhism.

For REALTORS® looking to stay up to date on pertinent legal topics, NYSAR also has added two webinars to the Media Center: "Advertising and Issues Relating to the MLS" and "Independent Contractor Agreements and Broker Responsibility to Licensees." The former discusses the dos and don'ts of advertising, fair housing and DOS requirements; the latter helps brokers understand the requirements of an independent contractor agreement and their responsibilities as brokers.

In memoriam: Thomas Wills Jr., NYSAR past president

NYSAR Past President Thomas Wills Jr. passed away Feb. 21. Wills is survived by his wife of 66 years, Bryl, three sons, one daughter, two sisters, five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Wills served as president of NYSAR in 1980, president of the New York State Society of Real Estate Appraisers (NYSSREA) in 1962 and was a past president of the Rochester Real Estate Board.

Fair housing education requirements take effect July 1

As of July 1, 2008, real estate licensees renewing their licenses must take a Department of State-approved fair housing course that's at least three hours in length. Licensees who have completed 22.5 hours of continuing education credit, but have not completed approved fair housing coursework must take the additional course in order to renew their licenses. For additional information regarding licensing changes, see the article on page 22.

NYSAR is offering its members a special discount on the REcampus online fair housing course, which provides 3.75 hours of DOS-approved fair housing instruction. Throughout 2008, NYSAR members may take the course for just \$25. The required fair housing training can also be earned by taking NYSAR's RI409 course, "Equal & Ethical Service for Today's Consumer." For more information, visit nysar.com.

Five ideas for making technology changes

By Matthew Ferrara



When was the last time you took stock of the technology you are using in your real estate practice? Have you resolved to use better technology to increase your efficiency, improve your ability to be responsive to your clients and customers and bring your marketing to the next level? Here are five ideas for making technology changes that can help you be more productive.

Get a BlackBerry

Statistics show that more than 77 percent of real estate agents last year were wireless-less as they went about their daily duties. In fact, the *NAR 2007 Member Profile* shows that as the number of years in the business went up, the percentage of REALTORS® using a smartphone went down. If you don't have one, then you definitely need a shiny new BlackBerry Pearl. The Pearl was recently upgraded to include a cool 2-megapixel video camera with 5x digital zoom and built-in flash. Plus, its new GPS features will keep you on track. The Pearl continues the BlackBerry tradition of faster, better and smaller by integrating a SureType keyboard, EDGE-speed web browser and wireless synchronization into a package that's just as small and thin as those RAZR cool flip phones.

Try something new; if it's not for you, try something else. The key to reaching your goals is to set realistic expectations and be flexible enough to make modifications along the way.

Add videos to your listings

Check out Canon's SD850 IS digital camera, featuring super-cool Internet marketing options like the new 16:9 widescreen shooting format – perfect for those wide-angle shots of large rooms and curbside views. While the Canon's 8-megapixel resolution isn't the highest option on the market, its special image stabilization technology definitely takes its 3.8x optical zoom to best-of-class ranking. Add in the ability to take 30 minutes of VGA-quality video with sound at 30 frames per second on a 2-GB memory card, and the 850 is a mighty marketing machine that still fits inside a tin of Altoids. From store to website, adding two videos per listing becomes a breeze with the help of your new digital camera in 2008.

Get a blog (or three)

A great goal for your company's website would be three themed blogs – one for sellers, one for brokers and one for current affairs. Why three? Well, one blog isn't enough. Visitors don't want to sort through different postings to find what's pertinent to them – and funneling them to subsections of one blog is simply too much to remember. So, split the thoughts and the visitors off into blog channels based upon the visitor's interests. Address separate issues and trends in buying, selling and current affairs with well-edited, company-friendly postings.

Unleash the wordsmiths in your company – from the marketing department to savvy agents – to add freshness and build the relevancy of your website. Free tools from blogger.com or realtown.com let you design blogs that fit your company's color scheme without programming knowledge or cost. And blog-posting takes customer communications to a different level by ending the "mailing" concept and substituting the more powerful "broadcast" process. You can send an announcement to subscribers for every new entry of interest. In the meantime, every word written in your blogs helps improve your website's search-engine ranking, which is a great way to promote your site without paying for clicks.

Get four webcams

Yes, four. One for the laptop, one for the assistant, one for the manager and one for the office administrator – all of whom now use free instant messaging software

like Yahoo! or MSN Messenger. Adding a Logitech QuickCam Pro 9000 to your instant communications is like going from dialing Murdock5, 8608 to the Jetsons! Face-to-face chat isn't something that's coming soon – millions of Skypers, YouTubers and Ustream.tv users are video chatting in real-time all across the planet. These kids are next year's first-time homebuyers, so sending them a text-only e-mail is old school.

The QuickCam Pro features Carl Zeiss optics, autofocus and high-definition video in a camera small enough to snap onto your laptop screen but smart enough to track your face and keep you centered at all times. Intelligent auto-contrasting maintains optimal lighting in almost any condition, while the built-in microphone eliminates the need for a separate headset. Priced under \$100, Logitech's latest webcams deliver on the promise of highly personal online communications.

Upgrade five programs

Spend a few minutes upgrading to Microsoft Office Suite 2007, featuring completely redesigned versions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and Publisher. Smarter menus and consistent processes in all five products make it easier for new users to upgrade – and master more features – of the latest editions of the classic Office Suite. Fancy new tools such as one-click themes that redesign entire documents (even e-mails) will help your communications, spreadsheets and presentations stand out. Paper pushers are remembered with an entire tab dedicated to mail merging, while modern marketers can take advantage of SmartArt to add three-dimensional graphics, shapes and art to spice up their documents.

Everyday activities now appear right in the toolbars – like one-click headers, footers and page numbering – while advanced functions like Outlook Signatures get a long-awaited facelift that accommodates company logos and personal photos directly in the options menu. PowerPoint presentations pack new punches with better support for custom animations, video and web page integration, all of which can be exported with the simplified "Burn to CD" command.

Even analytical minds will appreciate the enhancements in Excel, whose new formulas toolbar makes short work of complex calculations. The data

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*J.P. Endres, Broker
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Try something new; if it's not for you, try something else. The key to reaching your goals is to set realistic expectations and be flexible enough to make modifications along the way. Technology is here to make what we do a little easier. Take advantage of it and see how far it takes you on the road to your success!

Editor's note: Matthew Ferrara is the CEO of Matthew Ferrara & Co., a technology organization that delivers training, consulting and technical support to real estate companies worldwide, including its new "Support on Demand" help desk service available at 866-95-FixPC or www.matthewferrara.com.



The BlackBerry Pearl 8130



The Logitech QuickCam Pro 9000



Microsoft Office Professional 2007



Chris Simonds

Audrey M. Johnson

Diane Birrell



Canon's SD850 IS digital camera

REALTORS® answer: What's one technology gadget you couldn't live without?

Technology has come a long way in 20 years. Gone are the days of rotary phones, typewriters and multiple listing books. We're in the age of high-speed computers with wireless Internet access, smartphones with GPS capabilities and Multiple Listing Services with information that can reach potential customers 3,000 miles away.

So what's one gadget New York's REALTORS® can't live without? "I couldn't live without my iPhone," says Chris Simonds, of Johnstown, NY. With its instant notification of incoming e-mails, it allows "me to contact that client or customer immediately. It also allows me to scroll through saved voicemails with a touch of a finger instead of listening [to] several just to get one."

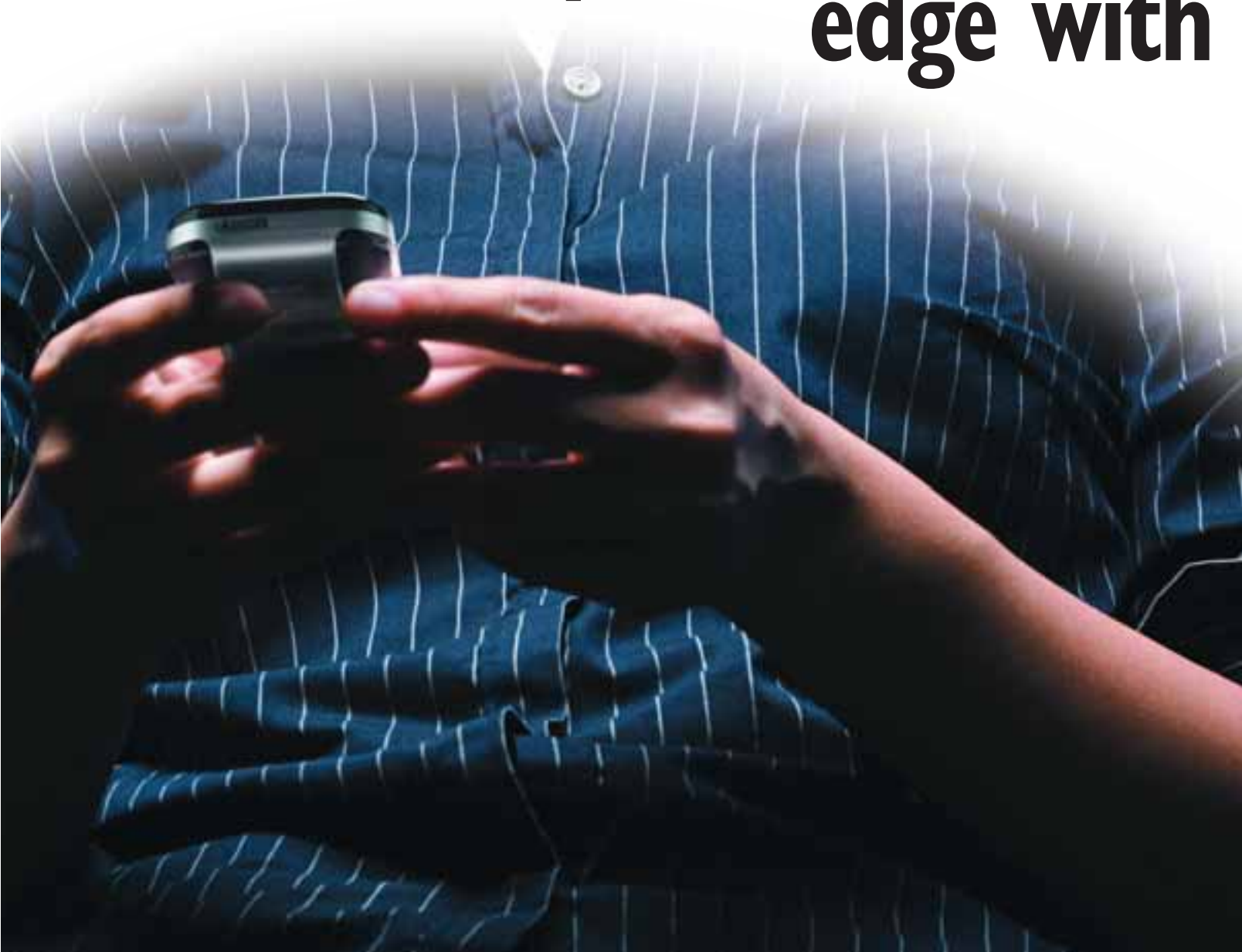
Audrey M. Johnson says she couldn't live without her TREO 650 smartphone. "It is my datebook, contact manager, phone, calculator, lockbox key [and] camera," says the Pittsford REALTOR®. In addition, the TREO smartphone acts as her MLS Smart Key token, wireless quick connection and voice recorder.

Broker/owner Diane Birrell from Staten Island agrees with Johnson, and has been enjoying the benefits of a smartphone since 1997. "I could not do without my BlackBerry," she says, raving about its versatility and ability to encompass all she looks for in a wireless device.



The Apple iPhone

Gain a competitive edge with



The phone you choose should have applications built just for real estate. Our experience is that Palm and BlackBerry currently have the broadest offering of real estate-specific applications.

smartphones

By Marilyn Wilson
Founding Partner, WAV Group

Today's real estate market conditions have caused many real estate agents to rethink their businesses and re-evaluate the tools and techniques they use to serve clients. It is much more difficult to sell properties and motivate buyers to place offers on homes. Faced with these inescapable challenges, every sales tool needs to be examined. Technologies that no longer deliver on their promises must be discarded in favor of those technologies that better meet the needs of clients.

Consumers expect more of real estate professionals today. In the past, many real estate professionals believed their most important asset was MLS information. Now that listing information is readily available to everyone on the Internet, real estate professionals must find other methods for building strong client relationships and securing new customers.

Improving one's responsiveness to clients can help real estate agents build a stronger customer base and achieve competitive advantages. Leveraging the power of the Internet is a fundamental part of this approach. According to the California Association of REALTORS® 2006 Survey of Home Buyers, satisfaction levels for buyers who used the Internet in their home searches were significantly higher than those using traditional methods. When consumers were asked about the one thing they would change about their traditional agent, 35 percent said "faster response time from my agent." Consumers today, especially younger consumers, have little or no patience. They expect answers quickly or even instantly when they request something via e-mail or text message. To succeed with these consumers, REALTORS® need tools that help them provide real-time responses to their clients.

Prompt communication is the key

Prompt response to clients is vital to success in real estate. Statistics from the National Association of REALTORS® indicate that 78 percent of the time, consumers will work with the first agent who gets back to them. According to study results, the first agent to respond to an Internet inquiry is by far the most likely to secure a new client. The second person to respond to an inquiry has a much lower chance of securing a new client, and the third to respond has virtually no chance.

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As noted in several industry studies, real estate agents answer their e-mail anywhere from two to 52 hours after they receive it. Consumers accustomed to immediate responses from websites find this kind of laggard response completely unacceptable. Those real estate professionals who have recognized the need to answer e-mails and website inquiries quickly are the ones most likely to be building market share in their areas. Many of these real

estate professionals now use smartphones to boost responsiveness to their clients and to more quickly field lead inquiries.

Smartphones are becoming the mobile device of choice

Smartphones are quickly becoming the cell phones of choice in the real estate market. According to the National Association of REALTORS® 2007 REALTOR®

Technology Survey, 28 percent of REALTORS® currently use smartphones. Another 30 percent plan to purchase or replace their phone in the next 12 months. Within the next 12 months, approximately 60 percent of the NAR membership – almost 800,000 real estate professionals – are projected to own a smartphone.

Our firm conducted the 2007 WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey to better understand the role smartphones play with the real estate professionals who use them. In a nutshell, smartphone users are top producers. They believe they are more successful because their smartphones allow them to respond more quickly to their clients, giving them a competitive edge. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents said they secured a new client because they responded more quickly than the competition. Most important, they believe their smartphones have helped them sell more real estate.

Maintaining contact with customers, fellow real estate professionals and support staff is crucial to many aspects of real estate sales, along with answering online lead inquiries and scheduling meetings and appointments. Using a variety of communication devices often results in a disjointed, unsatisfactory experience for clients and potential clients. Voice mail messages, e-mail communication that can only be checked at the office, handwritten notes scribbled on phone message pads and conversations with the person on floor time can lead to slower response time to clients. Periods of being out of reach also complicate communication and reduce responsiveness.

For many real estate agents, their smartphone has fundamentally changed the way they do business and has greatly increased their chances of selling properties. An example from an

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REALTORS® in the WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey told us that the most important features to look for in a smartphone are “push” e-mail and long battery life.

agent: “I was with a client showing them properties. We went through the list of houses that we agreed to see, and none of them really excited my client. Instead of giving up, I went online using the wireless MLS and found a couple of other houses that fit her criteria. I punched in the addresses on my built-in GPS navigation receiver on my phone and used the directions to find the new properties. Within minutes we were back on the road looking at houses again. My client fell in love with one of the two houses we found on the MLS and purchased it! I would never have been able to accomplish all of this without my BlackBerry. I love that phone!”

Smartphone satisfaction: BlackBerry ranked tops

Satisfaction levels with the two leading brands of smartphones are relatively high. The BlackBerry was ranked first in satisfaction, with the newer Palm phones with the Windows Operating System receiving lower satisfaction ratings than the older versions of Palm phones. The primary reason is that the newer phones do not seem to interface with the electronic lockboxes quite as well. These rankings are consistent with ratings from CNET and *PC Magazine*, two leading reviewers of technology tools.

While real estate professionals overwhelmingly use the Treo and BlackBerry, according to the study, other manufacturers such as LG, Samsung, HTC, Motorola and Nokia all have their versions of smartphones as well. The iPhone was not released at the time of the study but was subsequently rated lower by CNET for business applications.



The BlackBerry Pearl 8120

What features to look for in a smartphone

When looking to purchase a smartphone, there are a few factors to consider:

- E-mail push technology – Since the primary reason for top producers to use a smartphone is to better serve the real-time needs of their customers, push e-mail, which delivers e-mail to the phone as soon as it is sent, is a must. It is the best way to stay in touch and to receive leads from your website before your competitors do.
- Battery life – The phone should be built efficiently enough to handle data delivery as well as significant talk time. REALTORS® are road warriors and don't want to have to worry about recharging their phones all the time.

- Real estate applications – The phone you choose should have applications built just for real estate. Our experience is that Palm and BlackBerry currently have the broadest offering of real estate-specific applications.
- Ease of use – Select the phone with the largest screen and the largest and easiest to read buttons. Also, be sure the phone allows you to adjust the font size on the screen if you need larger than 8-point type to read something without your glasses. In addition, look for a phone that is easy to use for writing e-mails and text messages. Palm and BlackBerry are both pretty easy to use in this regard. Reviews have found that the iPhone is a little delicate when typing an e-mail.

REALTORS® in the WAV Group Smartphone Satisfaction Survey told us that the most important features to look for in a smartphone are “push” e-mail and long battery life.

Smartphones provide real estate agents with a comprehensive set of tools to stay in touch while traveling, including e-mail, text messaging, instant messaging, GPS navigation and support for leading real estate applications from third parties. Smartphones are smart and affordable tools that can help you grow your business. □

Editor's Note: Marilyn Wilson is a founding partner in the WAV Group, a real estate technology consulting firm specializing in research, marketing, strategic planning, technology evaluations and RFP development. The firm helps drive innovation and growth for its clients, which include state and national associations, technology vendors, multiple listing services and brokers in North America and Europe. For more information about the study, contact Wilson at marilyn@wavgroup.com or 805-504-4701.

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Bloggging

can give your business a
boost, but it's not for
everyone

By Jim Duncan

Blogging about real estate has brought me local and state attention, national recognition and – perhaps of greatest interest and concern to many – closed transactions.

Three years ago, blogging was a fringe activity that was likened to online diaries written for the satisfaction of the writer and for an infinitesimal number of readers. In 2008, the word blog is mainstream. Blogs affect elections, break news, alter the landscape of journalism and, yes, help REALTORS® market themselves, their businesses and their market knowledge. Witness the March 2008 *REALTOR® Magazine* cover story.

Blogging allows me to brand myself and demonstrate my market expertise in a way that no other medium could offer. Instead of gaining market and mind share one client at a time, I am able to write to hundreds and thousands of readers every day.

I don't work with everyone I could, and the blog is a self-selecting tool. Potential clients who contact me after reading my blog generally already have an understanding of who I am and how I work. I never sell myself, my services or anything else. If someone has read my blog long enough or spent time browsing through the three-plus years of archives, they will be able to determine that I have consistently advocated against dual agency, have never spun market data and have always put my clients first. This is an incalculable

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advantage over every other form of marketing available.

Blogging takes time – often quite a bit of time. Blogging is not for everyone; not everyone wants to write as often as successful blogging requires. How much time do I spend blogging? This is a difficult question to answer. I consider blogging to be part of my daily activities. I write. I read many other blogs and news sources. I interact with different forms of social

media. I respond to comments on my blog. After taking these various components into account, I can say that blogging takes up a couple of hours each day.

Local real estate blogging necessarily demands an often delicate balance between providing information and opinions that readers want and not alienating those with whom I work – meaning other REALTORS®, builders and local

politicians. What has been consistent is my dedication to candid analysis, open discussion and an unbiased look at the local real estate market – assets that are unavailable almost anywhere else. A two-minute television news story on the state of the market is but a headline, while a well-written and researched real estate blog offers the reader the ability to delve much deeper into market data and trends.

Readers are intelligent. They are looking for information – lots of information, including market data and trends, neighborhood information, opinion and analysis. For example, the simple statement that there are far too many REALTORS® is astonishing to some members of the public because they don't expect a REALTOR® to be so blunt.

About 50 percent of my business comes from blogging (including repeat business that originated from the blog), but it's often difficult to quantify exactly where the business comes from. While there are certainly various ways to track traffic and responses, it's more difficult to determine if someone is contacting me because a friend recommended my blog; whether a Google search brought them to the site six months ago and they've been a subscriber ever since; or whether they saw me on television or read a story in a newspaper (in print or online). Done well, blogging is a way to enter the public's consciousness. On the flip side, if you make a habit of writing marketing drivel, writing poorly or blatantly asking for business, readers will quickly assess that your only goal is to "sell," and they will never return.

Readers are looking for honesty, and blogs are but one way to trade in this currency. Readers come back to my site because I offer the



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candid, unbiased opinions that generally are lacking from national media and national press campaigns. I provide market data and observations, critiques of general marketing strategies and analysis of local politics that affect real estate – all in a manner that never explicitly asks for business. Blogging offers a means by which to display one's intelligence, integrity and understanding (or lack thereof) for the world to see.

Today's buyers and sellers are seeking out information like never before, and they're generally finding it. They want to research those whom they seek to hire, much as I research prospective clients. Googling someone has become a smart business practice. This is what a blog does: It enables REALTORS® to display their own market knowledge to the world. If you make it easy for readers to contact you, they frequently will.

The conversation has changed in the past six to nine months. The questions are no longer about what blogs are. The questions now center around the acceptance of blogging and how best to integrate blogging into brokers' and REALTORS®' respective marketing strategies. The concept of how, or whether, the National Association of REALTORS® can or should regulate blogs is inexplicably still in its infancy. Time will tell what the association ultimately decides. Blogging is an evolutionary medium that is moving too rapidly to be effectively micromanaged, so I have chosen to rely on common sense and good ethics in my writing.

I have been a writer in some form for most of my adult life, and I have always had an interest and affinity for technology. Blogging was a natural evolution that combined these skills and supplemented

another key component of real estate – networking.

The benefits of blogging are many, including increased education, awareness of local issues and national trends, market knowledge, search engine ranking, recognition from the public and peers and, occasionally, free publicity. These benefits are local, state, national and international in scope. I take fewer continuing education courses because I am able to garner the same or better education from other trusted professionals and learn from their hands-on experience.

Make no mistake, the risks are numerable. By putting your thoughts "out there" on the Internet – forever – you risk being held accountable for your opinions, statements and assertions. For some, this is intimidating.

Blogging is a tool, one of many in the successful REALTOR'S® toolbox, that can generate business.

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Blogging does not replace traditional marketing but can become a significant addition to a REALTOR'S® marketing arsenal. As more and more people realize that print media do not offer sufficient return on investment to justify their costs, they are looking online, and blogging is rightfully near the top of the list of alternatives.

Blogging is easy. Blogging professionally and successfully is difficult. □

Editor's Note: Jim Duncan, a third-generation REALTOR® with Century 21 Manley in the Charlottesville, Va., area, has been a REALTOR® for almost seven years. He's been blogging for more than three years and has built his business and reputation on sound business practices and integrity above all else. He is actively involved in the local, state and national associations of REALTORS®, writes a national real estate blog and speaks to other REALTORS® about the benefits and risks of blogging.

How to get started blogging

First, read other real estate blogs. A great place to start is the following real estate search engine: <http://rembex.mariah.com/>.

Then, learn about the medium you are debating entering. The Common Craftshow website has a video about blogging (<http://thecommoncraftshow.blip.tv/#517547>) and one about RSS (<http://thecommoncraftshow.blip.tv/#209879>), which is the most common means of delivering blog content. Once you've decided to blog, think about your strategy. Who will be your audience? Will you be writing to buyers, sellers, locals, international clients or other real estate professionals?

Do you want to own the blog's brand yourself? If so, buy a domain name, choose a webhost and blogging platform and get started. There is a great tutorial on how to install Wordpress at <http://agentgenius.com/?p=1258>.

Some of the most common platforms are Wordpress, Wordpress.com, Typepad and Moveable Type:

- <http://wordpress.org/>
- <http://wordpress.com/>
- <http://www.movabletype.org/>
- <http://www.typepad.com/>

If you don't mind ceding all of your traffic and branding to another company, take a look at ActiveRain (<http://activerain.com/>).

Blogging is just like any other business activity – it takes time, effort and dedication. If you don't think you can do all three, you may be better off focusing your efforts elsewhere. Make no mistake, blogging is work. If you treat it like a hobby, it will show.

– Jim Duncan



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New continuing education requirement takes effect July 1 for all license renewals

By Anthony Gatto, Esq.
NYSAR Legal Counsel

On Aug. 1, 2007, Gov. Eliot Spitzer signed into law an amendment to section 441(3)(a) of the Real Property Law. The amendment requires all real estate licensees renewing their license after July 1, 2008 to have at least three hours of training in fair housing and/or discrimination in the sale or rental of real property. The three hours of training required under the amendment are not in addition to the 22.5 hours that are already required. Rather, they are part of that 22.5-hour requirement.

The Department of State has implemented the following policies for those licensees whose license expires on or after July 1, 2008:

- Any real estate licensee who renews his/her license after July 1, 2008, will be required to complete 22.5 hours of continuing education, three hours of which must include fair housing/discrimination education. Any licensee who has already completed his/her 22.5 hours, which did not contain at least three hours of fair housing education, will be required to complete the additional education prior to renewal.
- An e-mail will be sent to all real estate schools that teach continuing education, requesting that they send the Education Unit a list of currently approved courses that contain at least three hours of fair housing education. The list will be

posted on our website so that students can determine if they have met the fair-housing requirement prior to renewal.

- In the future, schools will be required to have prior approval from DOS to satisfy the fair-housing requirement. However, for the initial continuing education audits after July 1, 2008, the Education Unit staff will verify that the topic was covered in courses offered prior to that date.
- Subsequent to July 1, 2008, the new courses submitted to meet the fair housing requirement must contain a minimum of three hours of fair-housing education. However, they need not be standalone modules. Alternatively, these three-hour modules may be included in larger course offerings.

As can be seen from the DOS policy, if a licensee has already completed the required 22.5 hours of continuing education and the training did not include at least three hours of fair housing and/or discrimination in the sale or rental of real property training, he/she will be required to complete the three hours prior to renewing his/her license on or after July 1, 2008. At the time of publication, NYSAR is investigating the possibility of offering an online, standalone, three-hour course to accommodate those individuals who require training in fair housing and/or discrimination in the sale or rental of real property.

NYSAR advances the REALTOR® agenda in Albany

The 2008 legislative session is under way

By Michael Kelly
Director of Government Affairs

The New York State Legislature has been back in session since January, and NYSAR's Government Affairs Department has been working to ensure that this governmental body takes no action that would impede New York's real estate market or your ability to make a living as a real estate professional.

NYSAR's 2008 legislative agenda, which guides NYSAR's efforts, includes legislation the association would like to see enacted this year including the Commission Escrow Act. This year, NYSAR is renewing its efforts to advance improved legal protections for earned but unpaid commissions. In

2007, the Commission Escrow bill passed the Senate but did not get out of the Assembly Judiciary Committee. Government Affairs staff members continually work to make sure this legislation gets the hearing it deserves in the state Legislature.

During the Mid-winter Business Meetings, the NYSAR Commission Protection Working Group created contact teams for key legislators in the state Assembly. The REALTORS® who make up these contact teams will be called on throughout the year to make sure their Assembly representatives know how critical this piece of legislation is to their businesses and livelihoods. These legislators will know through our REALTOR® members that the time has come for this balanced and thoughtful proposal.

For more information on the Commission Escrow Act and how you can help in this fight, please visit www.stopcommissionripoffs.com.



In 2008, NYSAR also will seek the approval of legislation that bans all sex offenders from obtaining or holding a real estate license. Although felons are already precluded from securing a real estate license, NYSAR has discovered that misdemeanor-level sex offenders are still eligible to hold a real estate license. We believe consumers deserve to know that the individual showing them a home, sometimes in private situations, is not a convicted sex offender.

The foreclosure and subprime lending crisis has forced many lenders to reconsider the lending packages they offer potential borrowers. Today's potential homebuyers looking for mortgages are experiencing a much tighter lending market as a result. In fact, most lending institutions have returned to more traditional lending guidelines, which require larger down payments. This, combined with New York's high closing costs, results

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in an often insurmountable financial hurdle and a major impediment to increasing homeownership.

In an effort to provide homebuyers with a financial incentive to save for their first home, NYSAR will seek the passage of legislation that would allow individuals and couples to make pre-tax contributions, much like an IRA account, to a savings account dedicated to the purchase of a first home.

NYSAR's legislative efforts are not limited to the Capitol in Albany. During the past few years, New York's REALTORS® have been increasing their legislative and political presence before the New York City Council and mayor's office. As residential housing prices in the metropolitan New York area have skyrocketed in recent years, many New Yorkers have turned to condominiums and cooperatives as more affordable housing options. NYSAR members have reported that possible illegal discrimination by cooperative boards often goes unchecked for a variety of reasons. NYSAR is currently seeking legislation that will curb these injustices by increasing transparency and disclosure when purchasing cooperative housing in New York City.

NYSAR also will seek the approval of legislation that bans all sex offenders from obtaining or holding a real estate license. We believe consumers deserve to know that the individual showing them a home, sometimes in private situations, is not a convicted sex offender.

Working to defeat anti-REALTOR® bills

Often unnoticed, but no less important, are the bills that NYSAR opposes each year. NYSAR, with the support of its 61,000 members, has been fortunate to have the political clout to suppress countless anti-REALTOR® legislative proposals. Although this legislative session is just beginning, there are already three potentially disastrous bills that have been introduced in Albany, including:

- Legislation that would create a more fluid process for the approval of transfer tax increases on a statewide basis. NYSAR opposes all real estate and mortgage recording taxes, regardless of their purpose, as they make buying a home more costly.
- A bill that NYSAR successfully defeated in the past has reared its ugly head again in 2008. The proposal would require real estate brokers to verify that every property (residential and commercial) listed with them is in full compliance with all zoning laws and ordinances.

- A bill introduced in the state Assembly in the fall of 2007 that would restrict the scope of practice for New York's licensed real estate brokers. Incredibly, this proposal would mandate that a real estate broker conduct his business within the confines of his county of residence or the county of his principal or branch office.

Active member participation is the key to success

What can you do to assist in the passage or defeat of the proposals that make up NYSAR's 2008 legislative priorities? One of the most effective ways you can help is by getting involved in the legislative process. While this may sound like an extensive and drawn-out process, it really isn't. Get to know your elected officials and let them know who you are. Most important, let them know that you're a REALTOR® and that you vote.

You may receive a "Call for Action" requesting your support in our efforts to get a bill passed or defeated. Please take the few moments required to respond and send an e-mail to your representatives in Albany through our Action Center.

Another easy way to get involved is by taking part in NYSAR's annual REALTOR® Lobby Day in Albany. Lobby Day is one of the most important events sponsored by

NYSAR in support of the REALTOR® legislative agenda. On this day, REALTORS® meet face-to-face with their state lawmakers to discuss the legislative proposals previously outlined and others of importance to your local board or municipality.

Plan today to participate in Lobby Day 2008 on Tuesday, June 10. Again, NYSAR will be providing breakfast, lobbying orientations and lunch for all participants. In fact, if your local board rents mass transportation such as a bus or van to bring people to Lobby Day, NYSAR will pick up half of the rental cost of the vehicle.

Please contact your local board or NYSAR Government Affairs at 518-463-3000, ext. 217, if you have any questions or concerns about Lobby Day 2008. Take an active role in support of NYSAR's 2008 legislative priorities – join more than 200 of your peers in Albany and participate in Lobby Day. To learn more about NYSAR's legislative priorities, visit the Legislative Section of nysar.com. □

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Q As a principal broker, am I allowed to be a designated sales agent?

A No, a principal broker cannot act as a designated sales agent in a transaction. A designated sales agent works under the supervision of the principal real estate broker. The principal real estate broker must act as a dual agent in designated agency scenarios. Furthermore, the definition of a “designated sales agent” states that the agent must be a licensed real estate salesman or associate broker working under the supervision of a real estate broker who has been assigned to represent a client when a different client is also represented by such real estate broker in the same transaction.

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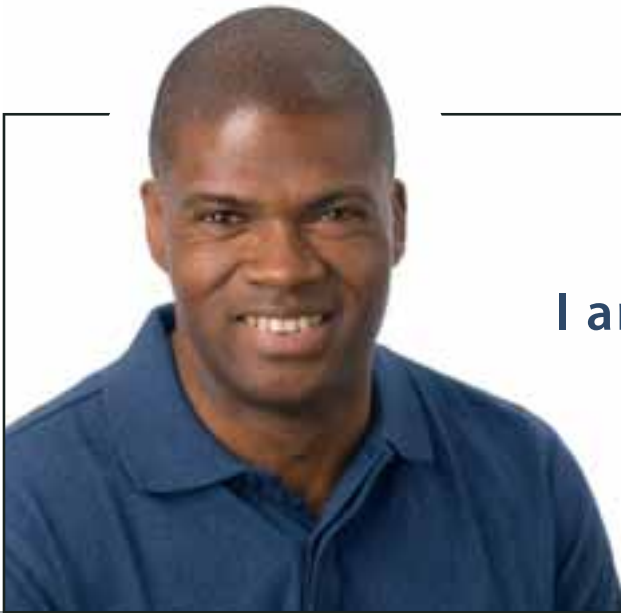
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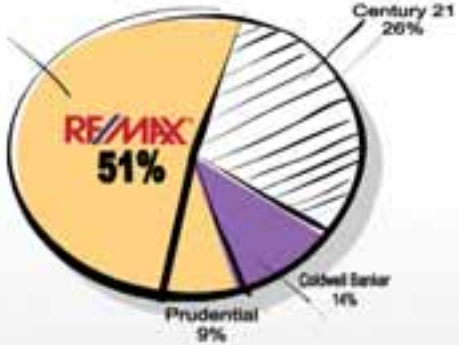
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