

[WELCOME]

to the 2018 REAL Trends Online Performance Study. Inside this comprehensive industry report, you'll find the latest residential real estate industry trends concerning technology, digital marketing and social strategies. Our goal is to provide information and insight so you can equip your brokerage with sound methods to increase overall production, lead quality and completed transactions.

This year, REAL Trends Technology identified timely and relevant areas of interest as well as pain points that our brokerage clients experienced over the last year. The report provides information and statistics about the latest trending topics in the real estate industry and provides insight to help you implement cutting-edge marketing tactics and technology tools in your firm. This study is intended to be a valuable reference guide for you in the year ahead.

The Online Performance Study covers the following key topics:

BIG DATA

Artificial Intelligence and Predictive Analytics: What are they, and how can you leverage this technology to increase the value of your business?

LISTING PORTALS

How to Partner for Success

REAL ESTATE WEBSITES

What's the value proposition of your site, and what trends have we seen that help catapult real estate sites to success?

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES

Evolving video trends

The 2018 Online Performance Study is co-authored by the REAL Trends Technology Team; a group of industry marketing strategists and technologists who specialize in helping brokerages thrive through the use of proven tactics specific to the real estate industry. REAL Trends is committed to staying ahead of the technology curve to bring proven data-driven strategies to our brokerage clients in an effort to make them No. 1 in their markets—both online and off.

All the content and topics covered inside this report has been put together with years of actual client data and real-world experience.



REALTRENDS

THE TRUSTED SOURCE

THANK

to our invaluable sponsors and technology partners who contributed content and insights to make this report possible.









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[CHAPTER 1]

BIG DATA, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE & PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS

The days of advertising in the local newspaper have been replaced by interactive online advertising. The million-dollar question becomes, how do you outperform and outshine your local competitors when consumers are inundated with advertising on social media and the Web? Familiarity and trust should become the foundation of your marketing strategy. Online lead generation is the end goal, but brand awareness provides the scaffolding on which to build your online reputation, reach new customers and establish your brand in your market.

Here are three trends and ways that brokerages can use them to their advantage.

[TREND: BIG DATA]

WHAT IT IS:

Big data is a term frequently mentioned in our industry, but what does it mean, and how can a brokerage use it to benefit its overall digital marketing and online efforts? According to Alissa Harper, vice president of growth with BuySide, an analytic company that helps real estate brokerages turn buyer data into leads, listings and profits,

Way that way that businesses leverage their insights from customer behavior across different platforms.

HOW IS IT USED:

Collecting data is crucial so that companies can market effectively to potential homebuyers and sellers. Take for example, a brokerage that compiles user information including previous customers' names, addresses, email addresses and phone numbers. While these may seem like trivial pieces of information, they may actually provide a foundation for future business growth.

HOW BROKERAGES CAN USE IT:

Collecting the data seems to be the easy part. Figuring out how to interpret and leverage that information proves to be a more complex process. We recommend that you use your datasets by segmenting them into lists and categories (i.e., prospective buyers, past sellers, past buyers, referrals, etc.).

At a minimum, brokers should collect and be aware of the following data sets:

Buying/Selling Patterns

Collect and understand any demographic patterns that can be correlated to specific locations. An example of this would be first-time home buyers being attracted to a particular subdivision over others.

Online User Behavior

Your website is a spider web of information. You can gain insights into the way users interact with your site and what they are looking for. Couples with that transaction history and brokerages can bring their local knowledge full circle by using that information to power their marketing strategy, audience and message.

BIGDATA

Average Length of Homeownership

Understanding the average length of homeownership can lay the groundwork for future seller campaigns or sphere marketing. If homeowners in Community A typically live in their home for six years before upgrading, segment those people into appropriate lists according to their length of homeownership. Then, reach out with targeted messages when the six-year mark is approaching.



Real-time data is the next big thing. We know that today's consumers and marketing professionals expect instant results as often as possible. The challenge we are facing today is how to interpret and store that data.

Consider advanced browsing history. Paul loves to fly fish and wants to live in a community near a river. He visits several websites to learn more about his hobby and, later that day, lands on a brokerage site to explore homes. What if that website used advanced data and browsing history to place riverfront homes in front of him as soon as he lands on their website? Talk about getting his attention!

[TREND: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE]

WHAT IT IS:

Artificial intelligence is defined as the theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision making, and translation between languages.

HOW IS IT USED:

As marketers, we can leverage machine learning capabilities through tried-and-true marketing platforms such as Facebook and Google AdWords.

Google AdWords uses machine learning on a daily basis by incorporating complex algorithms to power the platforms' smart bidding features. Taking into consideration a variety of data signals, including search query, time of day, age and gender, browser, interest, device and many others. Google uses these data points to digest, evaluate and analyze a consumer's search. This capability gives marketing professionals like you more time to focus on the strategy and insights driving your digital campaigns.

SMART BIDDING ON GOOGLE:

So what is smart bidding, and how can you take advantage of Google's doing the heavy lifting on your behalf? There are several smart bidding features that are available to Google AdWords users. Each one comes with its own set of campaign prerequisites to ensure success. These strategies are meant to build on one another, and we recommend using each in ascending order and perfecting that process before moving forward. Google's smart bidding features include these:



Enhanced CPC

(cost per click)
This type of bidding strategy allows you to achieve more conversions (leads) while giving you control of your maximum cost per click.



Maximize Conversions.

Increase conversions but maintain your budget.



Target CPA

Obtain as many conversions as possible while staying within your desired CPA (cost per acquisition). This number should be a combination of historical campaign data and performance as well as company goals and insights.



Target ROAs

(return on ads spend)
Think of this as your
return on investment. Use
ROAs to get the highest
conversion data possible
within your desired ROAs.

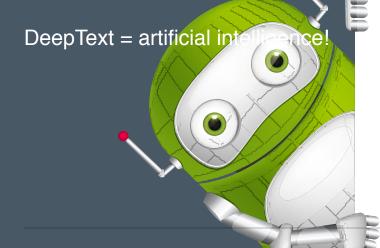
Keep in mind that these strategies require solid data from your campaigns. Before you use any of these bidding strategies, you should have at least 30 to 60 days' worth of data in your account, that you've enabled conversion tracking and that you have your attribution model selected to match your marketing goals. Our golden rule, 30 conversions in 30 days, and you are ready to try your hand at smart bidding!

[TREND: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CONT]

FACEBOOK AND AI:

Facebook is no stranger to artificial intelligence and machine learning. It is continually evaluating its deep-learning capabilities to enhance the user experience and to collect and understand user data.

For example, Facebook's DeepText tool analyzes posts and conversations that users are having to predict the products or services in which they may be interested in buying. That means, the next time you pick a target audience in the Facebook Ad Manager platform, you are likely using Facebook's advanced artificial intelligence and deep learning to target your intended audience. Ever wonder how Facebook knows so much about its consumers? How is it that you can target people based on such granular demographic information and interests? You guessed it,



HOW BROKERAGES CAN USE IT:

Here's how we recommend you get started and Use Al/Machine Learning to Your Advantage:



HIRE AN ADWORDS EXPERT

Whether you decide to hire someone internally to oversee your Google advertising, or you hire an outside marketing agency, we recommend that you have a marketing expert in your corner. While it seems simple to set up and oversee digital campaigns, the complexity of digital marketing requires an expert to help you understand and evaluate your ROI.



PREPARE YOUR WEBSITE

Make sure your website is ready to handle your paid audience. Create landing pages unique to your Pay-Per-Click (PPC) goals to help convert more leads. We recommend tying together your search engine optimization (SEO) and PPC efforts and keywords, but keep in mind that the landing page experience may differ depending on whether or not your traffic is organic or paid. Have a design/template readily available for any digital campaign you choose to run.



EVALUATE AND ANALYZE

Have a team of people who are prepared to evaluate and understand your campaigns, whether on Facebook, Google AdWords or other platforms such as Bing or AdRoll. You've got the data, now, interpret it and use it to perfect your strategy.



[TREND: PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS]

Predictive analytics is all the rage in the real estate industry and is changing lead quality expectations. Gone are the days of paying for a billboard or grocery cart sign and hoping that your message will be seen by the right person at the right time. Today's technology has equipped marketing professionals with the ability to forecast who is more likely to buy or sell a home.

WHAT IT IS:

Predictive analytics programs take real estate, demographic, psychographic, financial and market data to deliver to real estate professionals the most accurate predictions of who is going to buy or sell real estate. This data predicts when homeowners are likely to sell or refinance, making the technology appealing to both real estate agents and lenders.

Americans reach 65 years of age, 83% of their personal wealth will come from their home equity.



-Homebot.com

HOW IS IT USED:

Much like the "What do I do with this information?" question we often hear with Big Data, a similar question is asked when discussing predictive analytics—"How do I get this information?" We all know the statistic that roughly every five to seven years, people get the itch to buy or sell, but there is so much more information at our fingertips to help us predict an even more specific time frame.

For example, tools such as Likely.ai and Homebot both have scientifically driven methodologies to tie together artificial intelligence, big data and predictive analytics to predict when homeowners are more likely to sell or refinance their home.

Homebot also uses predictive analytics to provide homeowners with a detailed report regarding home equity and opportunities to build upon their homes value. These reports are completely customizable and can be as simple as seeing estimated home value and principal vs. interest comparisons to charts on how to reduce your mortgage by renting out your home through Airbnb.

The estimated value of your home is:

\$665,000



That's up 45% from when you bought it. Nice! That means the net worth of your home to you is:

\$353,234

If you sold your home today, this is approximately how much you would put in your pocket.

If you bought another home, how much could you afford?

Based on your \$353,234 in equity

Buy and investment property:

\$1,101,169

Trading up to a new home:

\$1,766,169

[TREND: PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS CONT]

HOW BROKERAGES CAN USE IT:

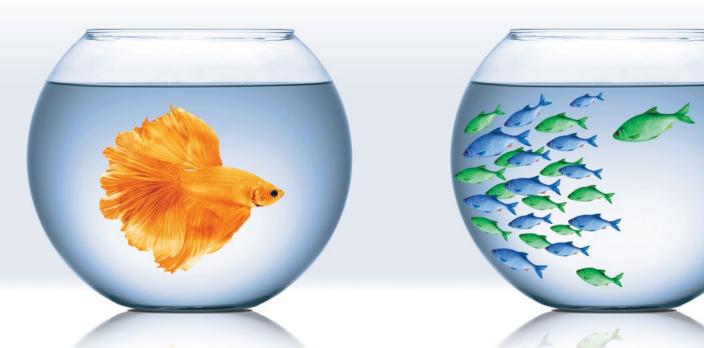
Most of these predictive solutions can be easily implemented independently of your current technology infrastructure (website and CRM) and often work best as ??nohypheN??stand-alone solutions. Data results and analytics can be accessed through proprietary dashboards. Some tools may be beneficial to offer to agents and lenders for their own marketing and sphere communication.

"There's been plenty of progress over the years to bring big real estate data to consumers as information," says Ernie Graham, CEO and co-founder of Homebot. "It's been effective at engaging eyeballs and sometimes it's helpful for buy/sell decision making. By packaging this intelligence in a trustworthy and cognitive way, [predictive analytics tools] help [consumers] make timely decisions for building wealth with the largest asset they will ever own."



Quality OVER Quantity

Every. Time.



Are you tired of paying for poor quality leads?

At Homes.com we're focused on delivering transaction-ready consumers for faster conversions. With over 90% of our page views coming from users searching for their next home, leads from Homes.com allow you to focus on converting quality consumers instead of "lookie-loos."

Ready to connect with quality leads? Visit connect.homes.com or call 866-213-3251



[CASE STUDY]

BOOSTING SALES USING AN ASSET YOUR BROKERAGE ALREADY HAS:

DATA

BROKERAGE: ReeceNichols Real Estate, a Berkshire Hathaway affiliate

MARKET: Greater Kansas City Metro Area, Kansas and Missouri

SIZE: 18 offices and 2,200 sales associates

WEBSITE: www.reecenichols.com

PRODUCT: Buyside



ReeceNichols results on Buyside after just 90 days

408
Seller Leads
(worth \$132 million)

56
Signed Listings
(worth \$20.8 million)

13
Closings
(worth \$3.6 million)

When it comes to predictive analytics and understanding who is ready to sell or buy a home and when, it all boils down to understanding the data. "We met with several companies offering us data analytics, but Buyside impressed us because they wanted to help us better understand our data, not someone else's," says Katie Stephans, vice president of information technology at ReeceNichols Real Estate, a Berkshire Hathaway affiliate in Leawood, Kansas. "We have the strongest relationships with the people in our database, so why not start with that data?" said Stephans, who also got a referral from a sister company who is seeing success with Buyside.

Buyside is a tool that helps real estate brokerages turn buyer data into leads, listings and profits. By aggregating buyer activity from virtually any source (think search activity on Zillow.com, Realtor. com, your own brokerage website, showing and open house applications, etc.), Buyside is able to demonstrate the real-time demand for any property in a broker's market. This, combined with Buyside's ability to identify and showcase matching buyers for a specific property, gives brokerage firms a compelling value proposition for capturing more seller leads, winning more listings and ultimately closing more transaction sides in house.

"Buyside helps us understand our data, which we bring in from a variety of different sources including our mobile app, partnership with Zillow, our websites and what agents are putting in our Customer Relationship Manager (CRM)," she said. "We have 30 percent market share in our area, so Buyside has given us a huge opportunity to identify buyers and sellers and help them find the right home or sell their home faster."

ReeceNichols officially went live with Buyside in September 2017 and has already seen results. "We've closed 13 listings worth \$3.6 million in the past three-months. Those all came in through Buyside's home valuation system which they integrate directly onto our existing site. And, this happened during a slow time of year," she says. About 40 percent of the brokerage's agents logged in to the system in the last three months. "Our goal is sustained usage of around 50 to 60 percent of our agents," says Stephens.

The brokerage has also seen a 7 percent increase in seller leads with minimal marketing. "We launched in the slow season, so all of this is happening organically with agents pushing it. I'm pretty encouraged," she says.



E-LEADS STRATEGY

ReeceNichols Real Estate has an e-leads team, called the Client Care Team, that includes 125 agents. "They help us connect with consumers who come to us unrelated to a specific listing. Otherwise, the listing agent gets the lead," she says. According to Stephens, the company has a complex system that doles out the leads based on a variety of factors including price point, area of town and the right agent for the lead.

The brokerage has a three-pronged approach when it comes to lead generation and using Buyside. The first is using the data the brokerage has from agents' CRMs, website leads and more to identify potential buyers and sellers. "We can then market to those people most likely to buy or sell in the near future," she says. The other two prongs are related to seller leads and buyer opportunities.

GENERATING SELLER LEADS

To increase seller lead capture on our existing website, Stephens says, "we implemented Buyside's home valuation system." The brokerage was using another AVM but it wasn't as effective at capturing seller leads as Buyside. This is driven by Buyside's ability to address the two most important questions every homeowner has: How much is my home worth? And do you have buyers for it? Many AVM tools out there provide an approximate value of a property. Buyside's solution works by providing 3 different valuations—intentionally highlighting a broad range in values and reinforcing that only a real estate professional can accurately price a home. In addition, Buyside uses real-time data to showcase the number of buyers that the brokerage is actively working with, that are a match for that particular home. Addressing both the question of value and buyer demand, Buyside is able to capture more seller leads than we see with traditional automated valuation model (AVM) tools.

"Consumers come to our site to figure out the value of their home. Buyside provides depth and details around not only the value of the property but also insight into the number of matching buyers that ReeceNichols has for their home. Our agents feature Buyside on each of their sites as well," she says. Through the tool, the agent is able to capture the potential seller's address, email or phone number. When following up with these leads, ReeceNichols agents can then use a custom branded report from Buyside which demonstrates real-time buyer activity and showcases buyer profiles matching the home's criteria—a powerful differentiator in listing presentations.

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CREATING BUYER OPPORTUNITIES

ReeceNichols also uses Buyside to take agent networking to the next level, identifying matching listings for their buyers, even before they hit the market. Buyers' agents using Buyside can get their customers the inside track, automatically finding matching listings from across the brokerage. "It helps agents connect with each other on the buyer's side and the listing side," she says.

The brokerage had a rudimentary product in reverse prospecting and listing alerts. "It gave us some numbers, and an email alert about new homes was sent to folks based on their entered criteria, but Buyside's tools provide a better presentation to the agents," she says. With Buyside, agents can immediately see the degree of match. For example, the report will say that a home met 80 percent of the buyer's criteria, so agents can narrow down the properties to show the customer.

"The buyer-seller matching component allows agents to connect with each other, especially with Coming Soon or Permanently Waived listings [listings that won't go into the MLS]. We have an inventory shortage in our market area, and our lower price points are flying off the shelves. Buyside helps us better market our properties and find connections so that we can give our buyers and sellers a leg up," says Stephens.

AN ADVANTAGE IN THE MARKET

Overall, says Stephens, Buyside has helped their brokerage better understand its current consumer. "It creates opportunities for the agents to match buyers and sellers from our brokerage's database. That creates an advantage in the market to sell homes more quickly and find buyers homes more quickly, especially in our low-inventory market."

Stephens notes that "a lot of companies are getting into the world of real estate data. For us, Buyside is giving us value by helping us analyze our own data. Other companies told us they would find data for us, but we already have so much information, let's find out what we have first. Who is already engaging with the brand and our agents? Then, we can create the most value and the right opportunities for everyone."

Like ReeceNichols, more than 50 of the top brokerage firms in the country are now using Buyside to leverage their data, creating leads, listings and an increase in company profit.

To learn more, visit www.getbuyside.com.



[CHAPTER 2]

VIDEO STRATEGIES

Video advertising is the next step to improving online engagement with your consumers. Video ads represent the highest click-through rate of any digital format as online consumers are becoming accustomed to digesting information through various video platforms. Video allows you to provide unique, engaging content to your consumers in the most time-efficient and convenient way possible.

[TREND: COMMUNITY VIDEOS]

WHAT IT IS:

As we've seen in the past year, most people choose a home based on neighborhood amenities as much as the home itself. These videos feature shots of the community, its amenities, local businesses and more. By not emphasizing a community's perks, you're missing a huge opportunity to prove your expertise. Plus, community video is a feature that's not on the portals!

HOW BROKERS ARE USING VIDEO:

REAL Trends has seen video deployed as a social media strategy and as a way to generate leads through buyer or seller campaigns or as a brand identity strategy. Additionally, video is a medium that brokerages can use to create a personal and emotional connection that otherwise could not be established with text and image only.

BEST PRACTICES:

Best practices. Video can present information in a unique and genuine way that can't be done with still images or text. Video is an invaluable tool in showcasing a local neighborhood or subdivision.

If you have a videographer on staff, we advise that you make complimentary community videos that show off the neighborhood culture, amenities, proximity to desirable locations and overall character. Put them on your website, neighborhood landing pages and social media. Make sure your agents know where to find these materials, so they can share on their social media channels. Also, if your videographer is available for independent use to your agents, encourage them to make their own community or neighborhood videos that highlight them as a local expert. If you don't have a videographer on staff, hire a local company that knows the area well. Add the company to your preferred vendor program as you continue to use it again and again, encourage agents to follow suit.



PRO TIP!

Get creative! Try seasonal videos, for example, a video featuring local ice cream and frozen yogurt shops in a specific area.

[TREND: VIDEO FOR ADVERTISING]

WHAT IT IS:

Text ads can be restrictive with the number of words you feature, whereas a video allows for more information to be seen and heard by consumers. With social media platforms such as Facebook limiting the amount of text allowed on ads, getting familiar video advertising is a must.

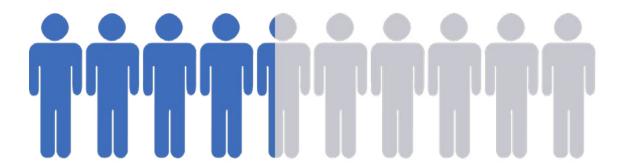
BEST PRACTICES:

Create short, succinct videos that entice viewers to take further action after viewing the video, such as visiting a website. The trend of consumers watching video is projected to continue to increase.

Using video as a means of relaying marketing messages to identified target audiences is not only an effective tool in generating leads and brand awareness, but it is also is very cost effective. For example, advertising on YouTube.com will cost you money only if someone makes it through your entire ad or clicks on the call to action your ad provides. Consider keeping your video ads short and include exciting or inviting footage that would elicit a viewer to see the video through to completion and take action.

of people want to see more video content from marketers.

-Hubspot.com



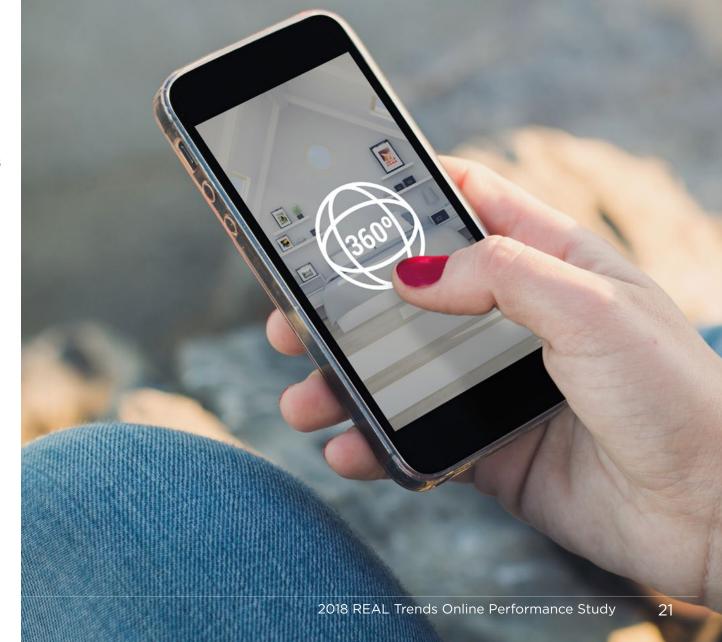
[TREND: VIRTUAL VIDEOS]

WHAT IT IS:

Virtual videos allow users to complement listings with high-definition, professionally shot photos and impressive, state-of-the-art virtual 3-D imagery. Tools such as Matterport are true game changers. Deploying a virtual tour solution to your listings provides potential buyers a unique experience of seeing the dimensions of a property without physically being on site.

BEST PRACTICES:

A best practice for deploying this technology is to ensure that all luxury listings have a virtual tour experience tied to them. If you do this, those who are serious about purchasing the property are more likely to schedule an appointment with an agent.



[TREND: DRONE VIDEOS]

WHAT IT IS:

In the past, traditional still photos or videos gave you only a general idea of the lot size and true look and feel of a listing. With drone footage, a camera flies above the property and films it to give consumers a complete look at it, its lot and how it appears in the community. In many markets drone footage is becoming the norm, and consumers expect it.

Expect to pay about \$250 for one to five still drone photos and around \$300 for a one-to four-minute video.



HOW BROKERAGES ARE USING DRONE VIDEO:

Brokerages are deploying drones in their photography efforts to create a unique perspective on a home and/or property that will set their listings apart from others. Drone photography showcases a property in a way that is impossible with traditional pictures alone. This resource is beneficial to buyers looking at homes. However, it benefits sellers who want to know that their home is appealing to potential buyers and is competitive with other listings on the market

Drone footage can be difficult to capture, and your operator will likely need a drone pilot license. This is true for anyone planning to use drones outside of recreational activity. If your drone exceeds 55 pounds, check FAA requirements for unmanned aircraft before getting started. The last thing you want is for your drone operator to crash into that million-dollar listing! Special effects can also play a part in your decision to hire or outsource your video as your vision may exceed your team's capabilities.

COMPANIES OFFERING SERVICES:

Many areas have local drone video providers that you may consider adding to your preferred vendor list. If your brokerage has offices in many different markets, you may want to hire a national drone company, such as PlanOmatic or Virtuance.



VIDEO DISTRIBUTION:

It is important to have a location for your videos to reside once they're filmed. This platform will be the way most of your videos are displayed and consumed by your audience. Here's a comparison on video storage and distribution channels with some of the pros and cons of each.

Before you create videos and distribute them, create a storyboard to help you organize and plan your video. Write down your goals and objectives and how you will distribute and use your video once it is finished. If you want video to be a regular part of your marketing, hire a videographer to help establish your video identity and maintain consistency.



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SocialBoost, by iTOURmedia, is a fully-automated video and social media content system for real estate brokerages. Our directaccess Facebook marketing platform will save your agents valuable time while quickly generating new listing leads.

LEARN MORE: socialboost.com

Or contact Steve Marques, President, at: steve@itourmedia.com













[CASE STUDY]

ENGAGEMENT THROUGH VIDEO

BROKERAGE: Beverly-Hanks & Associates

LOCATION: Asheville, North Carolina

MARKET: Western North Carolina

SIZE: Nine offices and 350 agents

WEBSITE: beverly-hanks.com

Since 2011, Beverly-Hanks & Associates has made a deep commitment to videos as part of its overall content strategy. "As a small, independent broker, we wanted to add value to our website and compete with the larger players," says Michael Phelan, vice president of marketing. "We also realized that video would play an increasingly larger role in how consumers made decisions about real estate. We began building hyper-local video content, in addition to property listings, based on what consumers would find most compelling and valuable."

HIRING VIDEO TALENT

When Phelan was launching the video strategy seven years ago, he began working with several local contractors. However, a year later, the company hired a full-time professional who had moved to the Asheville area after graduating from New York University.

"Outsourcing was a good way for us to get started, because we learned about different creative styles and cost structures," Phelan says. "But it soon became obvious that we would benefit from more creative control, as well as with managing the scheduling, workflow and expenses."

Because the volume of video production has grown, Phelan has recently begun hiring independent local contractors and online editors through ?? Elance for some property videos. He also hires drone operators for neighborhood aerial videos, because it's a specialized field.

"We use a template for listing videos, making it easier to outsource the production," he says. "Then, our in-house videographer can polish them, adding graphics, correcting colors and strengthening their appeal."

STRATEGY

Phelan and his team started by developing four- to five-minute neighborhood videos, rather than focusing on individual properties. Their goal was to increase the time buyers and sellers spent on their website. "That strategy was successful," he says, "although, the time spent on site has dropped in the past couple of years as mobile has become more prevalent."

Next, the brokerage created videos for select property listings, as well as lifestyle videos that highlighted nearby parks, schools or cultural attractions. The listing videos were integrated with the neighborhood videos, so if a buyer clicked on a link for a community video, the listings in that area would be automatically displayed.

As the video team has built out the neighborhoods in the brokerage's market, the focus has shifted to more property- and agent-specific videos, Phelan says. "We have found that videos that feature our agents are well promoted in the industry, and our lifestyle videos are very popular with consumers. We also developed video holiday greeting cards that generated a nice response."

TYPES OF VIDEOS

Now, the company prepares about 120 videos per year, including community, property, market updates and agent videos. "Some of our agent videos are basic profiles, while others highlight an agent's lifestyle, such as our 'Hike with Mike' series," Phelan says. Agents pay for their property listing and profile videos, which generally run for 60 seconds.

Every quarter, the company creates a market report for its nine-county region. Agents use these videos, which typically run for two minutes, to connect with consumers, and the report also generates interest from the news media, Phelan says.

Phelan also prepares "Coffee with Neal" a video blog from CEO Neal Hanks that runs every other week. "We found our internally focused vlog (video blog) is a friendly and efficient way to communicate with our agents," Phelan says.

The company places the videos alongside individual properties, as well as on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. "We promote them through advertising on these sites, as well as via Google," Phelan says. "We also put advertising money behind our agent videos."

Overall, the company spends about \$50,000 to \$60,000 annually on videos, not including advertising costs. That doesn't include a capital investment of about \$15,000 on equipment and software. "We don't calculate a specific ROI on our videos, but they definitely contribute to our company's success," Phelan says.

Stats chart from article goes here

RECENT TRENDS

The increased popularity of mobile devices has shaped the company's video strategy. For instance, Phelan now produces 15-second open house previews that are formatted specifically for mobile viewing.

Other changes include reducing the length to one- or two-minute videos, and incorporating more on-screen captioning. "We do a lot more animation and graphics now because we want to grab attention right away," Phelan says.

Phelan says developing videos should be part of a brokerage's overall branding and content strategy. "When you do videos right, consumers become more interested in specific properties, helping you achieve your business goals."

"Pay close attention to your analytics, as well," Phelan says. "Pay attention to what users watch and when they drop off. Then, you can adjust the content, length and pacing accordingly."



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

When starting a video program, Phelan suggests using contractors to get up to speed quickly, then moving to an in-house approach for greater control. As for content, he says neighborhood videos can be posted in more places and have a longer shelf life than individual property videos.



We are now closing millions of dollars in listings generated earlier this year via Buyside. Needless to say, we are pretty pumped about this tool.

- Steve Brown, President, Crye-Leike Realtors.

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[CASE STUDY]

BUILDING A VIDEO STRATEGY

BROKERAGE: First Team Real Estate / Christie's International, Irvine, California

MARKET: Orange, Riverside, Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties

SIZE: 22 offices; 1,750 agents

WEBSITE: www.firstteam.com

PRODUCT: iTOUR Media (itourmedia.com)



Terry LeClair, Senior Vice President for First Team Real Estate/Christie's International in Irvine, Calif., was using a video company that just wasn't meeting the brokerage's needs. "I've been in the real estate industry for 22 years and built a few tech tools, so I knew the importance of a flexible, easy video program. We weren't getting that with our vendor. They were slow to process video and didn't allow for live video and other innovative technologies," he said.

That's when LeClair connected with iTOURMedia, a full-service video technology solution to assist real estate professionals and brokers with digital media strategies. "The founders, Mo Moses and Steve Marques were innovators in the virtual tour space, and they had come together from two different Virtual Tour companies to create a unique Video and Augmented Realty experience in Real Estate, so we jumped in right away. Both Mo and Steve have an impeccable reputation in the industry," says LeClair.

"Video content is key to so much of the search engines' ranking and the foundation of what is driving unique leads from Social Media, we as an organization could not ignore this path and needed to embrace this technology," he says. "We know that our agents hire and retain videographers and photographers—we have them on staff along with a green screen studio. We also know that our brokerage is encouraging agents to use more video (local, community, and neighborhood content) to grow search engine optimization Repet (SEO) and consumer awareness of what First Team/Christie's has to offer," says LeClair, who notes it's not all about the listing. "People buy from people—experts they can trust. We see video getting that story across and believe strongly that this will be the forum that will allow that to happen."

LeClair went on to say that although the features of the product are robust, automation is key! It takes time for agent adoption, and certainly launching in phases is a key strategy to any advanced technology deployed to the field. Recently, LeClair noted their company launched Phase One of the automated listing videos in multiple formats including You Tube. Here's how LeClair is using the product today:

key to so much of the search engines' ranking and the foundation of what is driving unique leads from Social Media, we as an organization could not ignore this path and needed to embrace this technology **1**

- Terry LeClair, Senior Vice President First Team Real Estate/ Christie's International



FLEXIBLE VIDEOS FOR ALL EXPERIENCE LEVELS

The product pulls photos of the property off the MLS and enters them into a virtual tour/video format. "Everything is done for them. Agents don't have time to create video tours," he says. Once the tour is completed, it's automatically sent to Facebook. "There is also an auto-syndicate feature so the tour video can be sent to Zillow, Trulia, Realtor.com and other portals. LeClair says that his brokerage hasn't turned on this feature just yet, although they do send the listing videos to the portals manually. "We didn't want to do that until the agents understood the product. When that happens, it will give us more exposure," he says.

The brokerage does a video tour for each of the company's listings. "We also have a YouTube video made as well, and they are distributed to our agents as well as a company push to Realtor.com and other sites," he said.

BETTER SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Because videos are "parsed by the property address, it gives us additional SEO on the address," says LeClair. "With IDX, if someone types in a street address, that property/listing can show up in the search but the link goes to a competitor's website. This gives us the higher search ranking. The ways it's done, Google doesn't see it as an IDX listing, so the first mention of the property address links directly to us—the listing brokerage. It's all organic," he says.

INSTANT UPDATES

One huge benefit, says LeClair, is that the video can be updated easily. Then, that updated video will automatically upload to YouTube. "For example, if I have a listing and I put low-resolution photos in the MLS, my video will pull those lower-quality photos. If the next day, I upload the higher-quality photos into the MLS, immediately the system will recognize that, grab the better photos, update the tour and re-upload it to YouTube automatically," says LeClair, who notes that his old video service updated videos only once a week, but that now their new platform updates them once a day."



APP ACCESS AND EDITING

Editing video tours is easy and quick with the iTOURMedia app, according to LeClair. "We love that you can add cameos to the video," he said. By opening the app and choosing a listing tour, you can see all the photos in your listing tour as thumbnails. "Using your phone, you can add video (a cameo) introducing yourself or commenting on a specific detail of the house," he says. It's as easy as taking a video with your phone through the app. It will save as a thumbnail, and you can drag and drop it to where you want it within the tour. "You hit 'save and submit,' and it automatically uploads the updated video to YouTube," he says. "The video will automatically play music, but if you add cameos with sound, the music will automatically stop and restart to allow users to hear the cameo," he says. Want to do a voiceover instead? It's easy, says LeClair. "I can watch the video on my phone and record my voice talking about the picture that's showing on my screen. It syncs perfectly."

MORE THAN LISTING VIDEOS

While the product specializes in video listing tours, it's flexible enough to be used for local community videos, agent cameos, drone footage and more. LeClair notes that you can go to a local business, interview the owner, create a video and link it to a blog. "The local business loves it and can use it for promotional marketing as well. It gives you a hyperlocal community feel."



In LeClair's next phase of the rollout, he plans to launch the Social Boost product to capture leads and make digital marketing easy. "With Social Boost, agents can post their videos on their social pages. They have options to boost on demand to increase their sphere with Facebook. It's a component we do manually today. But it's all automated with Social Boost." Social Boost autoconnects to the agent's or company's Facebook page, creates the demographics, posts and tags the video, and reaches a targeted audience.

The brokerage also plans to have weekly training sessions for agents so they can maximize the product's potential. "We plan to train at three levels—modest, moderate and advanced—so all levels of agents can benefit."

Overall, LeClair and Real Estate/Christies are excited about the product's potential. Also, he says, "iTOUR's customer service is really powerful. They created video tutorials and easy FAQs to keep our agents doing what they do best—selling real estate, not making videos. Plus, video is key to growth for the younger generation. We haven't even scratched the surface of what the iTOUR platform can do for us. But we have a great partnership with them, and I know they'll do what they can to help get us to that competitive level," says LeClair.

[REAL TRENDS WEBSITE AUDITS]

To discover what type of website you need, start with understanding your current systems, technology, adoption, vendor and forecasting for the next three to five years. Will your current applications allow you to scale in a short amount of time?

A REAL Trends website audit is a great starting point to discover your next best steps. Take a look at your competition and identify pros and cons of their strategies.

Finally, it is key to identify the vendor for your website. Based on your findings, are you focused on user experience? Agent tools? CRM integrations? SEO? These are all discussions and valuable talking points that should be brought to the table when improving your website.

To request more info about REAL Trends Tech Audits

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[CHAPTER 3]

REAL ESTATE WEBSITES

When it comes to the Internet and maximizing your online presence, it's essential to have a website that represents your firm values and provides an experience to convert visitors into strong leads. In this chapter, we'll cover what makes an exceptional website, how to choose the right type of website for your firm and what to look for when choosing a website vendor.

Design holds a prominent position in web design and should always be taken nto consideration heavily when it comes to your website. With a strong design, your brokerage can accomplish goals and reach new audiences like never before, simply by providing a user experience that is second to none. A tactfully designed website will place your brokerage in a position to capitalize in your market and get a leg up on the competition.

[TREND: MINIMALISM]

WHAT IT IS:

The simplicity of minimalism may sound easy to accomplish, but there's a lot more to it than just the less-is-more theory. Minimalism does not mean that there are fewer elements. It means that you use the existing elements in a more meaningful manner, thus making your message shorter and sweeter.

To balance aesthetics with functionality, remember that design is defined by the overall user experience, visuals and focus of the message. Minimalism also speaks to the ability to make the user experience as simple as possible. Users want to get where they need to go as quickly as possible, and that means simplifying everything from navigation, Calls to Action and overall branding to improve website usability.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Aviara Real Estate does a great job of highlighting minimalist design.

Take a look here: Aviara Real Estate

Visit Website



[TREND: VIDEO]

WHAT IT IS:

Quick Internet connection, fast-loading websites and improved browser performance have allowed web masters and designers alike to integrate video into multiple design schemes. Brokerages have begun to recognize the power and versatility of video. Drone footage, community panoramic, movement, transitions—all are guaranteed to create an engaging web presence.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

William Pitt/Julia B. Fee Sotheby's International Realty incorporates video.

Take a look: William Pitt/Julia B. Fee Sotheby's International Realty

Visit Website

HOW BROKERAGES CAN USE IT:

Many brokerages have begun using fully branded videos on their websites. Some videos provide brief insight into the community, values and culture, while others focus solely on the brokerage and cultural values. Extensive brokerage videos are fantastic for developing a highly immersive and engaging user experience that invites the visitor to get to know your brokerage at an emotional level.

Video hover/scroll effects have been used for several years, but are becoming more prevalent in the real estate industry. This type of integration encourages the user to click and access a part of a webpage. By leveraging the effects of a hover/scroll video trigger, you grab the visitors' attention and catch them by surprise, thus forcing the viewers to pay attention to the video and continue watching. This type of effect allows for a seamless integration of video that is much more engaging than a standard YouTube or video player embed. Caution: Make sure it translates well on a mobile device.



[TREND: SCROLLING, PARALLAX AND NAVIGATION]

WHAT IT IS:

Parallax scrolling is an attractive and popular aspect of Web design. With a scrolling parallax effect, a visitor can see the background of the Web page as it moves at a slower rate to the foreground, creating an enticing effect as you scroll down the page. When used sparingly, parallax scrolling can provide a nice, subtle element to a webpage that creates a visually appealing and memorable experience for the website visitor.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Group Kora does a great job of using parallax design.

Take a look here: Group Kora

Visit Website



[TREND: CINEMAGRAPHS]

WHAT IT IS:

Cinemagraphs have bridged the gap between photography and video by combining the two elements into one, creating a powerful blend. By definition, a cinemagraph is a looping GIF (image format) photo; however, it appears much more enticing to the website visitor. It consists of a high-quality-resolution image that has a particular element that is moving, such as a woman's hair blowing in the breeze or steam rising from a hot tub.

The unique value and elemental aspect of cinemagraphs have led to their utilization and implementation in a number of different mediums. Cinemagraphs have been largely successful in advertising campaigns across platforms such as Facebook, which allow the usage of variant media to drive clicks. We designers and developers have also leveraged this functionality into designs as well, importantly across websites where they appear in various manners to engage the user.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

What does it look like? Realty One Group uses cinemagraphs on their site.

Take a look here: Realty One Group.

Visit Website



[TREND: MOBILE/ RESPONSIVENESS]

WHAT IT IS:

Responsive Cap web design and custom-catered experiences for mobile website visitors are popular since so many people are accessing the Internet from their phones. Designing with user experience in mind will continue to be a top priority for brokerage websites. The implementation of content-centered experiences has become a vital aspect of CAP web design and usability. Well-curated and easily accessible content will be the curb of appeal to match the intended users' experience and retain visitors on a particular page.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Kurfiss Sotheby's International Realty incorporates mobile and responsive design in an interesting way.

Take a look: Kurfiss Sotheby's International Realty.

Visit Website



[TREND: BACKGROUNDS]

WHAT IT IS:

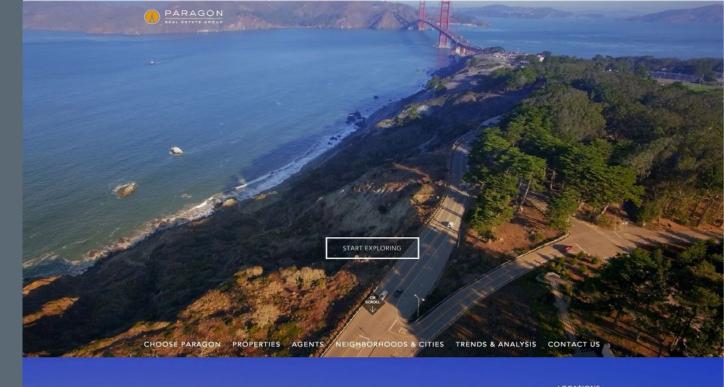
Background videos commonly load with overlaid text and are a popular way of adding a powerful introduction to your website. Background videos can communicate strong values and cultural elements of a brokerage. They can establish a brokerage as a thought leader and influencer within the community. It is a good summary of the company's service, and it visually stimulates the visitors.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Paragon Real Estate Group uses backgrounds to introduce its site

Take a look: Paragon Real Estate Group.

Visit Website







NEIGHBORHOODS & CITIES

The Day Area

[FUNCTIONALITY TRENDS]

TREND: AGENT-DRIVEN CRM AND CMS TOOLS

Functionality and versatility are essentially important in web design and development as it will grow continuously as technology advances. One popular trend is the implementation of dedicated platforms that provide all-in-one solutions (CRM + CMS) while also creating a powerful user experience on the front end for website visitors.

The need for agents to take control of their website and independent lead-generation strategies has been increasing heavily within the last five years. While it is still beneficial to have an agent listed on your brokerage website, it is not a bad idea to have agents set up a dedicated website for themselves to drive targeted leads and improve their search rankings by leveraging an independent domain.

One example of this trend is <u>Easy Agent Pro</u>. Easy Agent Pro is a dedicated agent website platform that takes the art of conversion and lead generation and harnesses those capabilities in one platform. It allows an agent to quickly build out conversion-ready websites that have specific design attributes that are implemented to increase conversions and generate leads through a very systematic website user experience. The platform comes with 16 built-in apps that allow an agent to build a web presence and capitalize on growth. Some of these features include instafarming, popups, scroll triggers, lead locks, tracking pixels, cookies and squeeze pages.



TREND: PREPOPULATED PAGES FOR SPECIFIC CAMPAIGNS

The ability to log in to a platform and quickly implement a campaign is important for agents and brokerages that want to get things done in a timely manner. Not only do these types of solutions save time and money, but, more importantly, they allow you to focus on what is important: selling more homes. Prepopulated pages and landing pages are extremely effective and attractive due to the simplistic nature of integration and the quick ROI that is generated through easy distribution.

One example of this one-click publish technology is <u>Inside Real Estate</u>. Inside Real Estate is a website platform that implemented several features that work seamlessly on the back end to allow for quick creation and implementation of different page types for any type of campaign. The platform also comes with multiple tools that make it simple to execute one-push actions on your website, such as social push, landing page creation and more. The ability to publish with the click of a button will be increasingly important for agents and brokerages over the next few years as other platforms catch up to the latest technology.

TREND: CRM MARKETPLACE & INTEGRATIONS

Website providers are continuing to improve on their backend systems and integrations, and a large part of this process has included the ability to quickly tie into different integrations seamlessly. The technology has become increasingly prevalent and has gained traction, as it is an attractive feature to be able to quickly integrate a software or system in a few clicks or with the paste of a key/code. A common trend has been the existence of a marketplace within individual website vendor platforms that allow backend users to search and integrate their chosen CRM component in a timely manner. With this type of functionality, you can expect to see an uptick in agent adoption and usability on the backend of a website as tasks of leading routing, follow up, campaign tracking and sales processes will become easier to integrate with these types of systems in place.

[SEO]

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Implementing an SEO campaign that allows you to compete with the listing portals can be difficult. Portals will continue to dominate search results and retain the mass amounts of traffic simply due to their national presence and limitless budgets. With this in mind, your brokerage must find ways to capitalize and nurture opportunities not deemed viable by the large portal websites. Here are some ideas:

[TREND: HYPERLOCAL & COMMUNITY STRATEGIES]

WHAT IT IS:

Ever since Zillow, Trulia, Realtor, and Redfin came into the picture, they have dominated top Google rankings for all the broad real estate search terms. Your brokerage must pivot to accommodate for the lack of focus from portal websites on focused content. With a hyperlocal SEO strategy, you can be rest assured that you are hitting on key components of SEO that others are not. The key to capitalizing on what the portal websites are not doing is to leverage your local expertise and presence as a brokerage.

BEST PRACTICES:

A quick, simple tactic you can use is to create top-level landing pages for communities or neighborhoods. When you create these types of pages, you are simplifying the process for a website visitor and providing an extremely specific user experience. You can get granular with your approach and address hyperlocal, whether it be from a community/neighborhood basis or, more specifically, different home types within the community. This will position your brokerage as the leading expert in the space, and drive more traffic to your website.

[TREND: CONTENT CREATION]

WHAT IT IS:

While local content is considered a boon to local rank, a sponsored post on a local news source won't have the same effect on your rankings. Your brokerage needs to go after the large companies that have the resources and means to distribute your content properly. While SEO is a factor to consider in content creation, it's not the only reason that your brokerage should consider hyper-local. Good local marketing doesn't always mean scaling standardized content and messaging to every community or neighborhood.

BEST PRACTICES:

Work out which neighborhoods on which your brokerage and agents should focus. Create content based on these specific locations and subdivisions within a neighborhood. Write some blog posts that offer information about the lifestyle, culture and values of these areas and what attributes are desirable in each neighborhood. When your brokerage creates content that is extremely specific and hyper-focused, Google will see you as the authority on these neighborhoods.

[TREND: WEBSITE SUGGESTIONS AND INTEGRATIONS]

WHAT IT IS:

The growth of hyper-local and long-tail keyword optimization can be attributed to the ever-growing use of mobile devices and mobile application. Mobile searches have passed desktop and laptop searches and will continue to trend upward for several years to come.

The homebuyer's journey is no longer a direct path of predictability and flow. For brokerages to reach potential buyers or sellers, they must be able to accurately predict the user's intent for keywords across all devices—primarily mobile. From there, you then cater your website and content strategy to capitalize on that micromoment with a relevant user experience.



PRO TIP:

Make sure your website is mobile friendly to ensure that your website visitors have a rewarding experience and that search engines give you credit toward your efforts.

To maximize your brokerage's search engine visibility and appearance in search, incorporate community landing pages for each of your neighborhoods. Leverage keywords that are related to a particular neighborhood, such as amenities, events, restaurants, house types, etc. From there, optimize your community landing pages with these keywords to draw in more traffic and communicate to Google and other popular search engines that you are a key influencer within that community.

[TREND: SCHEMA MARKUPS]

WHAT IT IS:

Your brokerage may want to implement structured markup data (also known as schema markup) on its website where you can gain more visibility in search engines. Using structured markup allows your brokerage to stand out in search engines by displaying unique attributes among your competitors such as property images, list items, addresses, open house times and more.

The visual aspect of schema markup makes your website more user friendly and takes away the guesswork to make it clear to search engines and visitors what information is being served on the page. With your data marked up and structured properly on key pages of your website, it becomes easier for your brokerage to rank and appear for focused web searches.

TOOLS FOR YOUR WEBSITE:



Zavvie.com allows real estate professionals to become the leading resource within their chosen community. By leveraging the Zavvie platform, you can quickly provide more value and leads to your brokerage by simply connecting with potential home buyers in a meaningful way. The tool makes it easy for future clients to see that you are a community expert and key influencer, which ultimately leads to more profit for your brokerage.



LiveBy.com allows brokerages and agents to create on-demand, hyper-local content. The neighborhood pages and tools deliver customized and unique content for all your important communities and neighborhoods, all in a matter of seconds. The platform allows for seamless integration that is very easy to use in a true copyand-paste manner. The pages are also designed to drive user experience and retention by providing high-quality visuals/data information to inform and educate users.



SEMRush.com is a premium tool that allows your brokerage to quickly gain access to valuable data and analytics regarding your website. The software comes with a multitude of different tools and reporting for quick feedback and implementations that can be applied to your brokerage website. Quickly discover profitable keywords based on difficulty, compare your domain against your top competitors' to gain quick tips and insights for improvement, and charts that break down what you need to do improve your website.

[CASE STUDY]

CREATING AN ENGAGING WEBSITE

BROKERAGE: John L. Scott Real Estate

LOCATION: Bellevue, Washington

MARKET: Washington, Oregon, Idaho and northern California

SIZE: 100 offices and 3,200 agents

WEBSITE: www.johnlscott.com



John L. Scott Real Estate's award-winning website design reflects the lifestyles of the Pacific Northwest, with tools and features aimed at techsavvy buyers and sellers. "Anyone can post pretty photos on the front end," says Howard Chung, vice president of broker excellence. "But we want to give consumers an engaging experience that keeps them on our site and brings them back."

The site's blend of traditional and innovative features is also designed to attract and retain top agents. "We highlight our heritage of 86 years as a family-owned brokerage along with the tools that let our agents compete with the best technology companies in the world," Chung says.

CREATING A ROBUST USER EXPERIENCE

While the company's site incorporates many of today's design trends—including minimalism, scrolling, parallax and animation—the real focus is on creating a robust user experience. "We hired a designer to do a deep dive into the way a user experiences our site," Chung says. "That includes looking at the way we read, what users want from the site and the development of user stories. We want to give consumers an emotional experience that connects them with our brand when buying or selling a home."

For example, the company refined its search experience to create local "polygons" that match buyers' preferences, rather than traditional geographic grids. A buyer who wants only waterfront, would be given a choice of listings that excludes waterview homes that might be on the other side of the street or a block away. Buyers can also save their searches and get notifications when new listings come on the market.

A FOCUS ON VIDEOS

To engage consumers right from the state, John L. Scott has invested in creating videos for its listings, and is now investing in 3D Matterport virtual home tours. The company is purchasing eight 3D cameras and video tools for its agents and marketing team. The goal is to keep buyers on the site for longer periods of time, while demonstrating the company's marketing prowess to prospective sellers.

Chung has also collected extensive "B-roll" video images of neighborhoods and communities, as well as aerial images taken from drones. That content will be used to produce community spotlight videos that will add more value to the company's site. "Home search is becoming a commodity, but rich video adds an emotional appeal that goes beyond the listings," he says.



ADVICE TO DESIGNERS:

Chung has several tips for designing and implementing an effective website:

- Make sure leadership has a clear vision and defines the goals.
- Give decision-making authority to a project manager who can keep the process moving forward.
- Pay attention to the details, as well as the big picture. Sometimes changing a small icon can make a big different in the user experience.

RESPONSIVE DESIGN

Looking at the back end of the site, Chung says the brokerage last year migrated from three platforms—a full web version, an m.dot version and a mobile app—that had different user experiences. Now, the site uses responsive design technology to provide a similar experience regardless of screen size. "With 80 percent of views on mobile devices, you want to make it easy for consumers to see videos, as well as search for properties," Chung says. "We really like Matterport's big 'play' button."

When preparing listing videos, Chung encourages agents to look at a home's special features, such as a high-end refrigerator or a smart home thermostat. Many manufacturers post videos on YouTube that can be linked to the active listing, further engaging buyers.

THE ROI

Through the years, John L. Scott has spent millions of dollars on its website, including design, development, training and hiring third-party data and service providers, according to Chung. The company has its own development and administrative team, with support from outside vendors.

A key benefit of an in-house approach is responsiveness, Chung says. A new feature or function can be up and running relatively quickly, helping the brokerage keep pace with the competition.

While it's difficult to measure the return on investment, John L. Scott now has about 500,000 users who have made online inquiries or signed up for information from its agents or the company site. "Our investment has also paid off in terms of recruiting," Chung says. "We offer an innovation package with front- and back-end tools that is very appealing to both new and experienced agents."

"Keep in mind that your site should appeal to both consumers and agents," Chung says.

"So, you have to consider both perspectives when planning a website project."



[CASE STUDY]

BROKER LEAD GENERATION AND ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEMS

BROKERAGE: Russell Real Estate Services

MARKET: Northern Ohio

SIZE: 9 offices and 625 sales associates

WEBSITE: russellrealty.com

PRODUCT: Kunversion (now kvCore—Inside Real Estate + Kunversion)

Jeff Russell is the broker/owner of Russell Real Estate Services in Strongville, Ohio - one of the largest regional, independent brokers in the State.

Russell had successfully led his brokerage for years, but about five years ago, he began running into more limitations with his technology. They began to notice their business changing, with prospective clients were coming to them much earlier in the sales process. "We needed stronger, smarter solutions," said Russell. "We needed something with behavioral marketing, prospecting tools, Facebook ads and squeeze pages—something that generates and captures leads, provides auto responses and cultivates to get them warm, so we can pass them along to the agents." He knew he needed a solution that not only helped generate leads, but helped his sales associates with long-term follow up.

Three years ago, Russell searched the solutions available to solve these needs, and landed on the lead-gen platform Kunversion as the best choice. The task of transitioning his brokerage to a whole new system was overwhelming at first, but Jeff worked with the Kunversion team on training and onboarding until his entire company was up and running. His results have been impressive.

With the changes to his marketing program, Russell has seen seller leads increase. "We've probably generated 25 to 30 listings just from the seller lead section," he said. Additionally, before Kunversion, he was paying \$24 to \$40 per lead. Since Kunversion, he's seen that drop to \$3 to \$5 per lead, and the lead quality has improved.

Handling leads is part of the responsibility of his brokerage's internet lead department. They have about 75 agents as part of that team. "If we get a lead on a listing, that lead goes to the listing agent; then we divide them by zip code and area," he said. In real estate, long response times are always an issue. But with Kunversion, he said, if no agents answer via telephone, an email immediately goes out so the potential buyer or seller gets answers immediately.

What's key, he said, is that "we can stay in touch and maintain relationships that may have otherwise fallen through the cracks. Right now, we have low inventory, so we adapted a 'What's My Home Worth,' automated valuation model (AVM). Through Kunversion, we're running ads to higher-end income brackets looking for people who may want to sell. We've generated a lot of listings above our averages sales price that way."

Russell is also teaching agents about the importance of using the CRM. "I want them to make notes in the CRM every time they talk to a prospect. They need to call their top five people every day. The CRM notifies them who those people are," said Russell.

Recently, Russell has been working with his agents to build squeeze pages, web pages that are segmented by interest, such as urban areas, lakefront homes, golf course communities and more. "Users register to get the information, and we blast out those pages on Facebook user groups that relate to the page's interest. We've had a lot of engagement by doing that [plus our] normal Facebook ads," he says.

TRANSITION TO KVCORE PLATFORM

Inside Real Estate recently released the new kvCORE Platform, which has been a beautiful result of the merger between Inside Real Estate and Kunversion over a year ago. Russell, like many other brokers in the industry, are excited for the enhanced and extended capabilities of the new platform.

With the transition to kvCORE, Russell will have even more tools at his disposal to drive higher lead volume and quality, stronger adoption with the smart CRM, and a more robust toolset to power his entire business. The best part is how all of these transition to kvCORE Platform:

- An even wider set of solutions to run his entire business, including transaction management, billing, and other third-party solutions—all under one roof;
- More mobile empowerment to this agents with a mobile dialer, and new mobile notifications;
- An even smarter CRM that puts lead follow-up on autopilot not just for leads, but for SOI, helping agents maintain long-terms relationships with more prospects;
- Ability to scale the solution to serve teams better; and
- A Marketplace where other popular tools can be easily integrated, so the whole brokerage can be running off of one system.

"We've found success with the Kunversion product and can't wait to transition over to the kvCORE Platform," said Russell, who is converting to the new platform in the early Spring of 2018.

CONTACT:

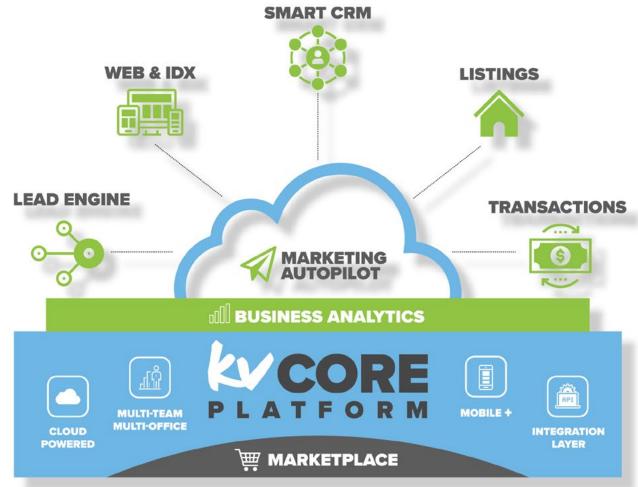
Jeff Russell, broker/co-owner, Russell Real Estate Services, 9 offices; 625 agents, Strongsville, Ohio



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[CHAPTER 4]

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONTENT PLANNING

Social media and content go hand in hand. When paired and optimized to work together, the results are ideal for social growth and engagement. Planning out content pieces and developing a social media strategy is a piece of the marketing puzzle that many brokerages haven't yet mastered. That's because, these two components live on the bottom of the marketing totem pole compared to digital marketing and SEO. What used to be just another task in the marketing department has become a full-time job commitment for many brokerages.

To operate a successful content source (blog) and a social media account(s) it is crucial to narrow down an objective—generate leads or be educational? Once you pinpoint your objective, developing the content and writing that focuses on specific keywords, intentional Calls to Action (CTAS) and ad space becomes easier.

CONTENT: THE STRUGGLE IS REALLY REAL.

The biggest struggle is to know where to start as it can seem overwhelming to begin or revamp your content strategy. REAL Trends often hears questions like these:

- Is it best to create original content or repurpose influencer content?
- Where do you share content once you have it?
- How often do you share content?
- How do you grow your readership and following?

All are great questions and differ from market to market and even brand to brand. Just like your general marketing plan, some basic questions about your company goals need to be answered.

- Who is your desired audience?
- What do they want to read?
- Do you have a designated person to create content on staff?
- Are you willing to hire/outsource?

If you're serious about amplifying your content strategy game, answering those questions will make the initial starting process much easier. Once you determine the answer, you have to determine which social media platforms to use.

PLATFORMS THAT PLAY BEST WITH CONTENT

With so many social media platforms out there, how can anyone possibly manage them all? It's difficult. Even more difficult is deciphering which applications you need and which ones are simply supplemental.

FACEBOOK

PROS:

According to Facebook statistics, the platform has 1.32 billion active users each day. It's the most widely used platform—by a lot.

BEST FOR:

Facebook is one of the easier social media platforms on which to share your content and then analyze which pieces are working and which are not.

BEST PRACTICES:

The brokerages and/or agents who are seeing great success on Facebook are willing to put in the time to understanding what content their customers want to read/watch and developing more like content. As a brokerage, creating original and ??shareable content should be a high-ranking objective due to the fact that your agents need content for their pages too. Train your agents to check your blog consistently for easy-to-share pieces that they can use.

INSTAGRAM

PROS:

The trendier sibling of Facebook. Instagram boasts a large following on its own.

BEST FOR:

Much like Facebook, Instagram is a platform that shares content well.

However, unlike Facebook, Instagram posts are predominantly pictures and videos whereas Facebook content consists more of blog posts and articles.

BEST PRACTICES:

Instagram is a great way to repurpose your written content. For instance, take an interesting statistic or quote from your written material and making it into a visual post for Instagram.

Then change your bio link to your written blog post for further reading. Venture into Instagram stories if you want to incorporate more video and spontaneous posts that can highlight company culture and environment.

LINKEDIN

PROS:

LinkedIn has a reputation as being one of the best social platforms for thought leadership. Many users to to LinkedIn to enhance their job experience and share professional thoughts, making it one of the more important platforms to connect to fellow business professionals.

BEST FOR:

This platform may not be top of mind for some because the content shared has a more professional feel to it but it's a great resource for content sharing.

BEST PRACTICES:

The content shared on LinkedIn features less "fluff," which can appeal to a different customer demographic. LinkedIn isn't the trendiest of social media platforms, but it is incredibly easy to engage with and to share content in a professional manner that may be lacking on your social media accounts.

YOUTUBE

PROS:

Video content is versatile and can be recycled across many of your platforms. Community videos can be shared on Facebook, on your website and also on your personal YouTube channel. What is great about YouTube is that, if you have a large enough video library, it's a great way for customers to view multiple videos from your brokerage.

BEST FOR:

Housing any and all company-approved videos.

BEST PRACTICES:

Repurpose community videos or any professionally shot videos in your YouTube channel. Encourage agents to find created videos to share on their platforms as well to increase video engagement and page following.

PINTEREST

PROS:

If you are on Pinterest, you know it's a wonderful tool to receive inspiration for homes, personal improvement, weddings, health, etc. It's an incredibly visual platform that has endless pins (ideas) for interior design, recipes and DIY projects.

BEST FOR:

Sharing content that is about home improvement like DIY projects, increasing curb appeal and not on home listings. Pinterest is a fun platform to have, but it is definitely not a necessity for most brokerages.

BEST PRACTICES:

Repurposing original blog content, especially if it is about home décor or DYI projects. If you are located within a market where investment properties are prevalent, share before-and-after photos from customers and the steps required to recreate them. If your marketing department makes a lot of custom graphics/infographics, this is a great place to repurpose pieces about desired neighborhoods and communities.

SNAP CHAT

PROS:

It's not a necessary tool to have in your social media tool belt but with its redesign features, Snap Chat's overall objective is to make interacting with your friends and family easier.

BEST FOR:

Individual agents or team. Snap Chat is heavily video focused.

BEST PRACTICES:

You can share videos and photos with only selected followers or upload a video into "My Story" to attract more followers. Brokerages can also use Snap Chat, but gaining a targeted following is much more difficult on this platform than others. Also, it can be difficult to repurpose content on this application.

TWITTER

PROS:

Many people still have their Twitter handles, and although its usage has gone down with the introduction of other social platforms, it's another supporting tool to share and repurpose content. Don't forget the hashtags!

BEST FOR:

Trending topics and breaking news stories

BEST PRACTICES:

Sharing content is relatively easy on this platform as well. Very similar to a Facebook post, you can share any article, photo or video on this application. And often on Twitter, the frequency of tweeting is higher so feel free to share many posts each day.

[CASE STUDY]

BUILDING A COMMUNITY-CENTRIC BLOG

BROKERAGE: Matt Curtis Real Estate

LOCATION: Huntsville, Alabama

MARKET: Huntsville Metro

SIZE: 20+ agents, 37 with full staff

WEBSITE: <u>mattcurtisrealestate.com</u> and <u>rocketcitylocal.com</u>

Matt Curtis Real Estate, headquartered in Huntsville, Alabama, offers a new twist on the blog format. The brokerage hosts Rocket City Local, a blog that is driven by community-centric information. The blog does not live on the Matt Curtis Real Estate website, and you won't see a Matt Curtis logo on the blog. The Rocket City Local logo is a nod to the brokerage logo, but it is meant to stand alone.

When asked why he decided to venture away from the traditional approach to real estate blog pages, he stated, "The average consumer [only has a transaction] with an agent every five to seven years, so it's a challenge to stay relevant to those consumers. After some time, they are going to get tired of the 'your home is worth this much' [type of post]. We wanted to stay top of mind after the initial consumer experience."

Rocket City Local is for past customers with whom Matt Curtis Real Estate wants to keep connected. Over time, he sees the potential for the blog to become an overwhelming lead source tool. "The consumer who is searching for real estate in Huntsville is going to find us. We wanted to write articles about the area so our blog will show up at the top [organically when consumers search for properties and things to do] in Huntsville."

Although this may feel like a step in the wrong direction for many brokerages, it goes back up to the original questions above:

- Who is your desired audience?
- What do they want to read?
- Do you have a designated person to create content on staff?
- Are you willing to hire/outsource?

With Rocket City Local being only a few months old, Matt Curtis knows he is in the beginning stages of a successful strategy.

[THE BLOG 2.0]

"CONTENT MARKETING IS THE ONLY MARKETING LEFT." —SETH GODIN, AUTHOR OF "WHAT TO DO WHEN IT'S YOUR TURN"

In our quest to find innovative ways to develop and distribute content in our industry, we have come across agents and brokers who are veering away from the traditional blog structure and instead focusing on building readership with a major spin on the traditional blog structure.

[TREND: COMMUNITY-CENTRIC BLOGS]

WHAT IT IS:

Think of the blogs that you like to read. Are they strictly about real estate? Probably not. They are typically a blend of your passions, interests and career. So why should your blog contain only real estate or real estate technology information? The purpose of creating a community-centric blog is to communicate with your customers during the time between their purchase of a house and the time when they are ready to sell. Since many people don't buy and sell annually, it's difficult to stay relevant during this period.

PROS:

Creating a community-centric blog also allows you to brand yourself as a multidimensional real estate professional. Not only can you help your customers buy and sell their homes, but you know your area's best events, vendors, neighborhoods, eateries, breweries, kid-friendly outings, etc. While it is more work to write a variety of community pieces, when the time is right, they will come to you for real estate as well.

BEST PRACTICES:

Mor Zucker, with Kentwood Real Estate of Cherry Creek, created The Denver Ear blog in November 2014. The lightbulb idea came while she was attending a conference. She wondered why real estate professionals seem to only share content about real estate. From there, The Denver Ear was born. With 8,000 monthly subscribers her website gets a ton of readership, and it's all organic. She does not include advertisements.

The secret ingredient to The Denver Ear's success? Exclusivity. Zucker starts her blog posts out with a secretive "Psst." This simple way of creating buzz around her content has businesses and local companies scrambling to supply her with exclusive information before anyone else—including other local media outlets! She calls this type of information her "secret investor gold" because her customers can keep their fingers on the pulse of upand-coming attractions before they hear about it elsewhere. How does this help her with customers who aren't investors? Many people who visit the site know Mor before ever using her services. Because they frequent the site, they "feel familiar with me," she says. And they trust her with their real estate needs.

On her blog, there is a real estate tab that drives traffic to her personal website. However, her main objective is to include real estate content only when relevant and interesting to her readers. With approximately 600,000 sessions [visits to her page] each year and 73 percent of those sessions being new, Zucker is sitting on something special.

[TREND: LINK BUILDING/BACKLINKING]

WHAT IT IS:

With a stronger content plan come new opportunities. One of those opportunities worth looking into? Link building.

BEST PRACTICES:

To get the most out of your backlinking and link building, follow these best practices.

- Partner with preferred vendors or companies your brokerage works with naturally. Many will create content that easily links to your brokerage if you write a piece that highlights their efforts and links to them. Agents—never underestimate the power of your customer. You work with a variety of talented people who would probably be more than happy to link to your website, whether that be socially or through content.
- Create original and information content that people want to share with others.
 The links within your content will become immensely more desirable the more SP?shareable your content is.
- Start with linking to powerful and influential websites within your own content and social channels. If repurposing an article from an outside source on your blog, link to that source's website within the content. Link only to websites that are relevant to the content within your article and to your brokerage.
- Don't go link happy. Again the point here is relevance. The end game is to increase backlinking, where articles from credible sources want you to link to them and for them to link to you.
- Be mindful of spam. If you get a request to include a link within your content, investigate. If you link to spam; your links are no longer credible in the eyes of your readers. In fact, Google, Bing and other search engines take into account domain names that have highly trustworthy domains, so linking to other sources simply fro the purpose of growing your link database isn't doing you any good. One link from a local news station or national news publication is more valuable than a handful of non relevant links.
- Go about link building in the right away. You may have heard of buying links, but Google, Bing and other search engines discourage this type of link building, and you may get no benefit.

[TREND: INFLUENCER MARKETING]

WHAT IT IS:

Recently, our industry has been incorporating more and more influencer marketing across social channels, especially Instagram. Leveraging the audience ??following that an influencer has is a tactic that has been used for years by other industries—mainly ??e-commerce. The purpose of influencer marketing is to create a partnership with an individual or company with a large social media following to bring better visibility to your brand/product. By tying in that ??hyperlocal relationship, you can reach the millennial demographic that responds well to influencer marketing.

BEST PRACTICES:

Our industry can use influence marketing to better promote national events and conferences. For now, this type of marketing will be used by national portals or companies like REAL Trends rather than brokerages. However, there is a way for brokerages to tap influencer marketing by focusing on local influencers.

Consider using influencers in your market such as a local interior designer or retail store that has a large following. Ask them to write blog pieces for you. Another idea would be to have a popular interior decorator go through one of your listings and highlight some fun ways to fix up the décor. Film it and place it on your blog.

[TREND: LIVE EVENTS]

WHAT IT IS:

It was reported that by the year 2020, 75 percent of the world's mobile traffic will be consumed by video. According to Facebook's Sight, Sound and Mobilization research, daily watches on video sources such as Facebook Live have quadrupled in the past year across the globe, not just in the United States.

Instagram has a video growth pattern that is parallel to Facebook with a yearly 80 percent increase in videos watched. Perhaps more shocking is that this upward trend is not due to CAPS? Millennial or Generation Z demand. The demand for more online video is across many demographics due to streaming platforms such as Hulu and Netflix, where you can watch content whenever you want it. Content on social media is incredibly shareable, making the video that much more engaging.

Particularly interesting was the study's dissection of the appeal of video. The general appeal of watching video on social media platforms is not only about convenience and flexibility, although that is a large factor. But videos are consumed by many to create a feeling of inclusion. You may have read that Facebook is trying to limit the amount of branded material that is put in front of consumers, even if they meet your targeting specifications. Instead, Facebook wants its visitors to see what their friends and family are watching and commenting on first—before video content from brands and pages they follow.

BEST PRACTICES:

Critique your video. Take a look at what the video is offering your viewers. Are they getting anything out of watching your video, or is it just a tool for repurposing your content?

[TREND: QUALITY LIVE VIDEOS]

WHAT IT IS:

The raw vulnerability that people love about LIVE video isn't going away. However, many are looking for ways to keep LIVE video from going stale. For brokerages that use LIVE video, it's a logical next step to consider a third-party tool such as BeLIVE, which allows you to split screen video interviews and brand your LIVE content by adding a logo or customize screen layouts, frames and text options.

BEST PRACTICES:

Create a budget so you can invest in supplemental mobile and camera applications and equipment to stay current with new trends and features that these platforms have to offer.

[TREND: EPHEMERAL CONTENT]

WHAT IT IS:

Ephemeral content is content that lasts for only a short amount of time. Many automatically think of Snap Chat when describing ephemeral content. Afterall, Snap Chat was one of the first social media platforms to bring this type of content consumption to the masses. But growing even more steadily, with 300 million daily watches, according to <u>TechCrunch</u>, is the usage of Instagram Stories. What makes ephemeral content appealing is that it is raw, spontaneous video but also incredibly short (around 15 seconds) and disappears after 24 hours.

Along with Instagram Stories, WhatsAPP, Snap Chat and Facebook also introduced stories on their platforms. They have fun features to add to images and videos, making them even more personal and engaging. Expect to see this trend embraced even further by national brands, local companies and individuals.

BEST PRACTICES:

Many people want to view stories from their followers because often the content within them is time sensitive and exclusive. Feature things you don't normally feature on a general Instagram page. Instagram recently revealed that it will allow stories to be pinned to an Instagram account page where they can be featured for longer than 24 hours. They are not permanent and can be removed when the account holder chooses. There is currently not a limit on how many you can add to your main account profile.

[TREND: SWIPE UP]

WHAT IT IS:

If you've never watched an Instagram or Facebook story, you may be unfamiliar with the Swipe Up feature. Now, you can even have See More, Learn More and other types of features. Available to business accounts with at least 10,000 followers, this feature allows for stories to have links within the story. This is incredibly beneficial to real estate brands and businesses because it provides another way to drive viewers to a desired landing page.

BEST PRACTICES:

If you have a business that has 10,000 followers, use this feature to promote everything from studies and blog posts to event registrations. It's much easier (and faster) to get link clicks from this tool than it is to send your viewers to the link in your bio.

[TREND: STREAMING ACROSS MULTIPLE PLATFORMS]

WHAT IT IS:

Although posts can be instantly shared to more than one platform, LIVE streaming has not made the jump. Since Facebook and Instagram are now housed under the same roof, It would make sense for a LIVE session that is on Facebook to also be LIVE on your Instagram business page if you choose to do so. We've seen this link system between the two platforms on general campaigns and posts, so it's only a matter of time before LIVE has the same functionalities.

BEST PRACTICES:

For now, streaming on one platform at a time will have to do. And honestly, we would recommend that anyway. There is still a different feel and audience between Facebook and Instagram. What you record LIVE on Facebook, you should offer different from the content you are recording on Instagram.

[CASE STUDY]

FOCUSING ON HYPERLOCAL CONTENT

BROKERAGE: ERA Grizzard

LOCATION: Orlando, Florida

MARKET: Central Florida

SIZE: Seven offices, 250 agents

WEBSITE: www.eragrizzard.com

"Content marketing is the best way to establish your brand online, attract new leads and engage your audience while creating assets that provide a foundation for further growth", says Heather Flack, director of marketing. "Fresh, hyperlocal content is the hallmark of our online marketing," she says. "Our blogs create new opportunities for our brand and our agents in an increasingly competitive online marketing landscape."

A CLEAR STRATEGY

Flack says the brokerage's goal for its content is to generate leads while engaging the audience and growing the ERA Grizzard brand. At the center of the company's strategy is a blog that focuses on providing value to readers who may be potential customers. "We strive to deliver the right message to the right person at the right time," says Flack. "Through the years, we've developed a system to provide solutions to our readers in the form of engaging information. That content is enhanced through a thoughtful SEO and lead-capture strategy for each piece that aligns to our overall online marketing goals."

The majority of the company's content for home buyers and sellers is written in-house by Megan Crevier, marketing coordinator. "We work together to develop the month's topics, and she either writes the topics or works with our team of writers. Megan is incredibly talented at bringing our content strategy to life and creating long-term reader engagement," Flack says. Using a list of two or three top keywords for each of the company's eight local markets, Crevier typically prepares at least two pieces of relevant content a month for each market.

After each blog is written, they work on that piece's final edits, distribution and paid promotion strategy. Their team uses HubSpot to manage its inbound marketing strategy, including social media, blogging, analytics and lead management.

While creating multiple blog posts each month can be difficult from a production standpoint, it's essential to generate hyperlocal content for the reader, Flack says.

For example, content about The Villages, FL, one of the world's largest age 55+ communities, will be quite different from a blog about downtown Orlando. She notes that generic blogs like "10 Tips for Home Buyers" don't pull as well as local content about communities. "Being specific is an asset for targeting your audiences, capturing leads and demonstrating the value of the brand," she says. "We know we are not writing for search engines. We're writing for people."

TYPES OF BLOGS

ERA Grizzard has three different blogs designed for different audiences: HomeTalk for homebuyers and sellers, PressTalk for press releases such as new-agent announcements and AgentTalk for real estate professionals and industry pros. "We recommend multiple blogs only if the content is focused on completely separate topics or if you need to segment your audiences," Flack says.

For consumers, the "Spotlight Home" series takes an HGTV approach to content about listings, including keywords and lead-capture tools. Other blogs might cover topics like historic homes in an area, tips for buying lakefront property and how new developments in the area will impact residents. "We want to be the leading expert on our local communities and showcase our knowledge of the local markets," Flack says. "We consider the purpose of each piece and objectives when creating our content calendar for the month."

USING CALLS TO ACTION

Flack says there are generally multiple calls to action (CTAs) in each of the blog posts. The content is designed to drive traffic to the website, and the CTAs capture the leads. "We have found success in creating multiple types of imagery for the same CTA and using GIFS, thin banners, basic links and traditional larger CTAs, all in one piece," she says. "The trick is not to interrupt the reader's experience. You don't want to look like spam on your own site."

Instead, a CTA should be a logical next step for the reader and flow with the content. For example, it would be a logical CTA to include waterfront homes for sale in a blog post about a lakefront community.

SOCIAL PLATFORMS

Flack says the brokerage's audience responds the best to Facebook, where the company buys ads to promote its content. She's also expanding the brokerage's presence on Pinterest. "One of the best tips is to avoid stock photography and use an eye-catching photo that you take on your phone or obtain from a local photographer."

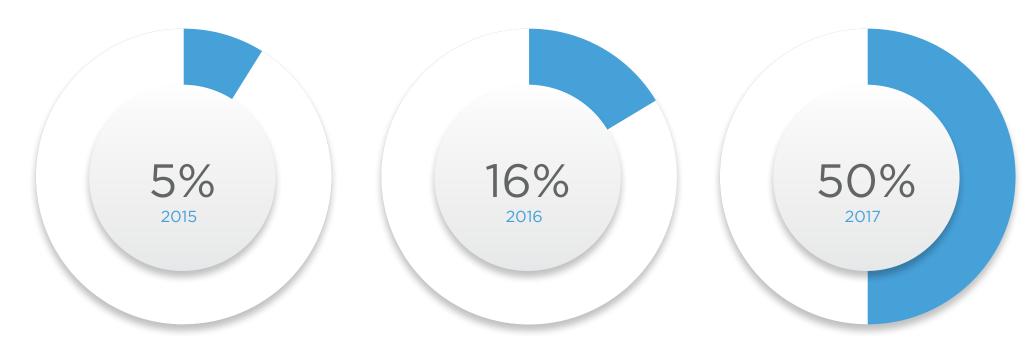
TIPS ON ONLINE CONTENT

Before you can work with an outside writer, it's best to have a clear vision of your brand, your content marketing goals, the objective of each piece and a well-formulated target audience who will be your ideal reader, Flack says. "We've created a style guide for each of our markets that covers tone, branding, keywords and an audience overview," she says. "We also explain how to avoid clichés about the great weather in Florida or our theme parks."

Once a blog has been posted, Flack says, you should think about how to re-optimize that content to get the best bang for your buck. She repurposes online content in brokerage newsletters and agent-branded newsletters, as well as traditional print marketing pieces.

WHAT ABOUT RESULTS?

Three years ago, only about 5 percent of the brokerage's online leads came from blogs. That number surpassed 16 percent in 2016 and should be close to 50 percent in 2017, Flack says. "By investing in unique strategies, brokerages don't need to rely as heavily on purchasing leads from the search sites," she says. "The more you blog and the more people find you organically, the more leads you will acquire. Our broker-owner, Gus Grizzard, always says, "Real estate is a relationship business" and content marketing is an ideal way to open the doors to that new relationship."



[CHAPTER 5]

PORTALS

Since the launch of national portals—Zillow went public in 2005, quickly followed by the likes of Trulia, Homes.com and a revamp of Realtor.com—they have all changed drastically. Why? They're solely driven by consumer demands and expectations. Due to the portals' overwhelming online presence and consumer usage, it may seem impossible as a brokerage to compete. Whether you find yourself working with or simply tolerating national portals, it's important to know what they bring to the table and what you can bring yourself.

Amazon, Google and eBay. Today, these companies are so well recognized and used that it's hard to imagine a time when you couldn't hop online and ask Google a question or find a product on Amazon. What these companies did for ecommerce is the same as what national portals did for residential real estate. They made home searches, as easy as Googling questions.

Even though national portals were late to the online game in comparison (Amazon, Google and eBay all started in the mid to late 1990s), it didn't matter because the real estate industry seemed just fine going about business the way it always has. However, in the past five years, there's been a slow trend to be more competitive with tools such as electronic transaction management, comprehensive CRMs and interactive websites. Real estate is slowly dipping its toes into the digital-age pool. Is it too late? Has our industry waited too long to be competitive?

WHAT MAKES NATIONAL PORTALS SO APPEALING TO THE MASSES?

Since Zillow acquired Trulia in 2015, its monthly visitors per month has skyrocketed to 160 million. Besides great marketing and brand awareness, what makes these national portals so appealing? If only hiring Elizabeth Banks to make a few commercials for you could do the trick, she would own the real estate media space. Obviously, there's more to these portals that speak to the consumer than a few celebrity endorsements. Here are some elements that brokerages large and small are beginning to incorporate onto their own websites:

- User-friendly capabilities
- One-stop shop for market information (crime, schools, community perks)
- Mobile responsive websites and navigation
- Hero imagery and better listing photos
- Agent profile customization
- Community videos

What are the different programs and services brokers and teams should be aware of?

We offer numerous services for brokers and their e-teams. Some of the offerings include:

- Broker Pro A free program that extends and reinforces your brand on Zillow and Trulia through video, text and logo on listing detail pages.
- Broker Boost premium advertising placements to boost brand awareness, engage buyers & sellers and drive traffic to your website
- Premier Broker improve training, productivity and quality lead generation for your e-team Tech Connect: Reviews - a free API that brings agent reviews from Zillow and Trulia to your brokerage website



Look at your broker / team consultant at realtor.com® as a resource that can help you coach your agents into a more productive outcome. They can help your agents take advantage of the basics of realtor.com® including making sure they have a profile and they are using recommendations to drive listings to you...

They can help you plug leaks in your existing online marketing so that you and your agents are getting good return not just on the money you spend but also in the time you spend working with viable customers. It is not one size fits all but typically is crafted around your current technology, culture and plans for expansion.

Our Lead Concierge service pre-screens incoming calls and emails from any of your lead sources and transfers the serious inquiries over to you. This program allows brokers to offer their agents a great value proposition while deferring the extra expense of hiring a resource to screen calls.

At its core, Homes.com is a portal that can be trusted, a portal which is not in business to compete with brokers. Homes.com is focused on always keeping agents and brokers at the center of the transaction while delivering quality leads to its advertisers.



BEST PRACTICES: HOW TO STAND OUT

We hear this question a lot. And our answer is not a popular one. Because in many ways, competing with a national portal is simply not the best use of your time and your marketing dollars. Why? Because portals have the money, brand awareness and resources. Instead, invest your money in growing your reputation as a community and local expert for your market area rather than try to outbid and out-strategize the portals. Focus on keywords that are relevant to your market area but specific to local search terms. The average buyer is searching for homes within a few miles of their current home, making these localized search terms extremely relevant.

The real estate professionals that fill your offices are the best people to advertise your local expertise. Provide them with content and educational materials so that they may portray this to potential customers. Encourage community-centric content, such as the following:

Robust Agent Pages. A brokerage is only as good as the agents and customers that it serves so while having an eye-catching website or an impressive online presence is a great perk, if you don't offer these features to your agents as well, you may be hindering your efforts. What portals such as Zillow's Premier Agent offer are customized and well-organized agent profiles. They are more than just current listings. They offer reviews, a team section, interactive maps that highlight listings and non intrusive lead forms. Don't underestimate the power of a review. Millennials especially are most willing to leave both good (and bad!) reviews. While many brokerages encourage their sales associates to develop their own pages and online presence, many brokerages have a default agent page that does very little to increase their credibility.



of Millennials trust recommendations from friends and family more than claims by the brand.

-Forbes.com

Respond to Your Leads. The Achilles Heel of portals? Closing the cycle, or finishing the last mile. How can your brokerage stand out? Respond to all leads in a timely and professional manner. Control this process as much as you can. Many brokerages find that developing their own structured E-Team is the best way to monitor and track their leads and also reduce the number of responded leads. No matter how you decide to work your leads—begin with simply responding.

Educate Your Customers. The portal is a tremendous resource for real estate professionals. For starters, they get more than 160 million visits each month, so statistics show your customers are already familiar with these websites. Portals can be especially useful for those who have websites that aren't quite up to the standards of the ever-changing portals. This strategy may not be your driving force for bringing in new business, but with repeat customers, we suggest you encourage them to explore the portals. Stress the importance of sending you the properties they find on portals, and continue to offer services such as local MLS portals. Stop steering your customers away from portals. Instead, acknowledge where most Americans are searching for homes.

If you work with the portals, your customers will appreciate your flexibility and will trust your expertise. Focus on educating your customers to use the portal websites as a means to increase communication.

Community Expertise. One major advantage that brokerages have over portals—community expertise. Real estate professionals know about homes and communities in the markets that they serve. Portals know only what the data tells them. Although they have a tremendous amount of data, and know how to use it, they don't live, eat, shop, commute and interact in the actual market—you do. Apply your community knowledge on your website, especially on community landing pages and within the property remarks and photos. Add as much detail as you can to your listings that only professionals in the area can know.

Accuracy. The first thing that comes to mind here may be Zillow's Zestimate. Zillow has addressed the issue as well, even starting a funded contest to find a revised algorithm. Besides the Zestimate, portals have to manage so many properties and contracts that keeping up with which deals fall through and which properties receive offers can be delayed. Brokerages have far fewer properties to manage so by updating your listings and the MLS as fast as you get the paperwork is the wayyou can have the most up to date and accurate information on the market.

HOW TO COLLABORATE WITH THE PORTALS

Don't have an internal structure to handle leads? Or, maybe your brokerage's philosophy is recruiting fresh agents over experienced ones, and you need a resource for building clientele. Many of the portals offer programs where you can partner with them to buy leads—for example: Zillow's Premier Agent, realtor.com and Zillow concierge.

No matter which platform you choose, find the program that works best for your brokerage. Each platform offers different services (see chart above). If you're serious about collaborating with a portal service like FiveStreet or Premier Agent, but are unsure which to choose, don't shy away from A/B testing. In REAL Trends' recent study "A Key Driver in Brokerage Productivity," Scott Parker, vice president and sales manager at John Greene Realtors® in Naperville, Ill., compared Realtor.com, their brokerage website, Facebook and Zillow Group by conducting thorough A/B testing. "Everyone is trying to solve the lead-conversion problem. Realtor.com has FiveStreet, and Zillow Group has its Concierge Service. Lead generation was the game, but it is all about conversion. Conversions count, not the number of leads."

Recruiting. By partnering with online portals, you can increase your appeal to new agents. especially in the Millennial age group. Those who are beginning their real estate careers often don't have a large personal sphere and can find it challenging to grow in the traditional methods of real estate. Also, many new recruits are expected to have that digital presence. Having a direct line to a portal exposes new agents to a lot of eyeballs and provides comfort and security to those just getting started.

Syndicate. Not all brokerages will syndicate with all online portals. For instance, some brokerages will allow their properties to be shown on realtor.com or homes.com, but not Zillow. Being a brokerage that doesn't syndicate with all portals can be a hindrance, especially if competing brokerages syndicate. Also, expect backlash from customers who want to market their properties in as many ways as possible. If your firm does not want to syndicate to portals. make it clear to your agents that they can look into adding their properties onto the portals themselves.

Infrastructure. Arguably the easiest way to collaborate with listing portals is to use a a leadmanagement service. If you don't have a successful internal structure for managing leads, then partnering with portals can be the right move. Many brokerages have found that even starting with this partnership allows them to be more efficient with the way they manage leads and learn a structure that converts leads. A listing portal can help with organizing, accountability, tracking data, performance statistics and time management. Set up a demo with all portals that offer lead-management services to get the best price and idea of how they will best support your brokerage.

[CASE STUDY]

PARTNERING WITH PORTALS

BROKERAGE: Sellstate Realty Systems Network

MARKET: Southwest Florida

SIZE: 25 offices and 800 sales associates

WEBSITE: 100 offices and 3,200 agents

PRODUCT: www.Homes.com



"In today's world, without technology, you're in trouble," says Arthur Darmanin, CEO of Sellstate Realty Systems Network in Fort Myers, Fla. "When we conducted a survey to find out what our agents need, we discovered they needed a full website with IDX and back office—not just a web presence. We went down the list, and they mentioned needing a Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) and preferred listing status for lead generation."

Darmanin found everything he needed in Homes.com. "Homes.com had the best package. They had what we wanted along with single log-in, so information is auto-populated into everything from marketing to CRM," said Darmanin. Since signing on with Homes.com three years ago, about 20 percent of Sellstate's agents use Homes.com extensively. Another 40 percent use the system on a smaller scale.

Sellstate was founded on the basis of three core value propositions—high commission payouts, full technology package and revenue share. "We believe in having productive agents. Our model is different. We attract top producers and help them with their businesses. Everyone needs help, no matter what their experience level," he said.

Because he wanted to offer break-through technology, Darmanin was looking for a partner that could offer a full range of marketing automation and a lead generation system that would scale with his business as it grew. Homes.com checked all the boxes and was affordable too. "We calculated that if we got eight more transactions a year from Homes.com, then the brokerage would fund the technology for the agents. That way, the agents who needed it the most would be able to afford it," he said. Perhaps even more than that, Darmanin said, his sales associates liked that Homes.com always sends consumer leads to the listing agent, whether or not the listing agent is advertising on Homes.com or not. "It's difficult to put an exact dollar value on it, but Homes.com's reputation as the trusted source of high quality leads fits nicely with our business model," he said. "If you want to attract top producers, you have to keep them in the loop on their listings.

We don't compete with our agents and aligning with a partner with the same philosophy was important to us

when selecting a partner."

Homes.com's focus has always been about attracting the "right audience" or a more engaged consumer to its site—with just 5 million real estate transactions annually and 10 million "transaction ready" buyers/sellers searching for homes annually, connecting these consumers to real estate pros at the right time is critical.

And that, said Darmanin, is in line with his business values. "Homes.com believes in being partners with the broker; not competitors."

Just as important as attracting the right consumers is having accurate and timely listing data. With over 3 million listings available through their IDX platform from 600 MLSs and close to 400 MLSs sending listings directly to Homes.com, Homes.com and their marketing products offer brokerages a competitive edge.

ROBUST WEBSITE

Darmanin particularly likes the robust features of the Homes.com Fusion website offered by Homes.com. "It's excellent out of the box, but it can also be customized so that the more you use it; the better the results," he said. What excited him the most about Homes.com is the Neighborhood Envoy product which offers hyperlocal information about schools, crime rates, demographics and other information that is critical to homebuyers.

TRUSTED, HYPERLOCAL CONTENT

"Many times, your first contact with the consumer is via email. Everyone likes to go online. So, how do you differentiate yourself when you're emailing a dozen people? Most agents reply to these emails by showing the consumer more listings," said Darmanin. Rather than do that, through Homes.com, Sellstate sales associates send a comprehensive 40-page hyperlocal report of demographics. "This is the information that is critical for consumers to know when deciding where and when to buy or sell, and it takes our agents just a few minutes to produce that report. All they do is enter the property address."

AUTOMATION

The CRM system included with Homes.com comes with over 40 pre-built email touch campaigns that can be set up and sent out automatically. The system automates the entire marketing process. "I spoke with an agent of mine who told me he worked with a seller several years ago. He sent a follow up email several years later to find out that the homeowner had sold and bought a new house since the last time they spoke—never even thinking about calling him first," said Darmanin. "It wasn't the customer's fault. It was his fault. The value of Homes.com and its CRM helps you generate business that would otherwise fall through the cracks."



LISTING TOOL

One of the things Darmanin loves about Homes.com is that they are interested in improving and innovating. One of the latest features used by Sellstate is the Homes.com Automated Marketing system which helps automate the listing process. "When an agent gets a listing, and puts it on MLS, he or she will automatically get an email from Homes.com with six links. Using the MLS information, they create a full website for the listing, a Facebook post, and several other marketing pieces. It's a fantastic listing tool," he said. So much so, that Homes.com customized it into the Sellstate Powersuite of technology tools umbrella that is offered to their agents which include Homes.com, dotloop and more.

"If you're not embracing technology by using a trusted marketing partner and portal like Homes.com, you will lose sales and referrals. Homes.com helps us keep customers coming back to us and our agents trust that Homes.com isn't selling their own leads back to them," said Darmanin.

Homes.com is a true broker partner portal, providing brokerages of any size and business model with the best products and services to fit their needs. From integrated broker dashboards providing <u>agents with high quality leads</u>, to lead management tools that help them close more transactions. Being a true partner portal means making the broker's success a priority. Offering brokers on-site training for their agents: so they can fully leverage their products and services. Brokers can choose from technical, lunch & learn, and franchise-specific trainings.



Last year's Online Performance Study ended with a recommended plan for a 250-agent brokerage. Over the past year, we've worked with brokerages much smaller and much larger. More than that, regardless of size, brokerages are different based on markets and objectives. This year, our approach is to provide our overall advice to all brokerages, regardless of size and location.

01

DO SOMETHING WITH YOUR DATA

Get really good at what you are doing and be sure to distinguish yourself and brand in way that puts you outside the box. Just as we've seen with predictive analytics, big data and automation, the digital landscape will continue to evolve. Those who don't stray from tradition may fall victim to their tech-savvy competitors and listing portals.

While your piles of digital data may be lying in the darkest corners of your CRM, don't let that daunting sight dissuade you from dejunking your digital gold mine. We know how important data is to your brokerage. The best piece of advice we can offer is: Don't let your data go to waste! You have years worth of information at your fingertips that can be used to build your brand and reputation, establish your community fingerprint and reach potential new clients.

Find the right tools, platforms and systems for your brokerage and learn to use them to your advantage. That might mean a new website to capture and funnel leads, a better CRM integration to store data, or it may mean an intensive agent training session to teach the importance of maintaining client data and inputting information into your system. Take the steps necessary to unlock that data and then figure out the best way to use it. Think, sphere campaigns for previous clients or referrals, snail mail for clients who have been in their homes for five years and may be looking to move, and personal emails or phone calls for quality leads that may have been left on the table. Whatever system works for you, we can't stress enough the importance of organizing, analyzing and using your big data.

03

INVEST IN YOUR WEBSITE

Whether you are an established brokerage or a one-person show, your website is the start and end point of any online interaction you have with potential home buyers and sellers. Your technology and website must adapt in order to allow growth over time.

Deciding on a website should ultimately come down to how you intend to use your website and identifying specific functionalities you want present. For example, a solo broker-owner might not need a robust backend system with a CRM integration. A simple WordPress or basic CMS website might be a reasonable solution as it will cater to a very straight forward way of managing leads, performing updates, maintenance, adding new pages and more.

On the flip side, if you are a large brokerage that handles multiple deals a day, it would be worthwhile to invest in a website that will come fully loaded with different CRM options and agent adoption tools as the amount of agents on your team scales.

A website should be looked at as an investment that will grow over time. You should choose a website based on which direction you see your brokerage heading, whether that be to remain small or grow big. Consider where your brokerage will be five, even ten years from now, and map out exactly what type of technology growth you can expect along the way. A CRM might not be feasible for the first year, but you should understand when to incorporate certain technologies and, then, choose a platform that will allow opportunities for growth over time.

"Virtually every company will be going out and empowering their workers with a certain set of tools. and the big difference in how much value is received from that will be how much the company steps back and really thinks through their business processes ... thinking through how their business can change. how their project management, their customer feedback, and their planning cycles can be quite different than they ever were before."

-Bill Gates

03

MAKE MORE VIDEO

Video can be repurposed in a number of ways making them versatile and necessary assets. The world has made it loud and clear that reading content (at least for now) is the less desired way to digest information. Video is modern and sleek. Visiting a website where you are greeted with a gorgeous high-resolution video of the San Francisco Bay is more pleasing than being greeted by a brand logo and tool and search bar.

Think of opportunities on your website to include video, such as the main landing page, community pages and agent pages. Also, these videos can live on your social channels—making them well worth the investment. Encouraging agents to create their own professional videos can also help increase your video library.

Just making content into a video is not the answer. Again, videos that increase that sense of inclusion will be the videos that get shared and engaged with the most. This is where a well-thought-out content plan will be useful. Create a variety of video, some pre-recorded and some live to keep your video content lively and likeable.

04

TAKE SOCIAL MEDIA SERIOUSLY.

This year will be the year of change for social media platforms. Many adjustments will be made to stop the click bait and fake news posts that plagued 2016 and 2017. This year, we'll see more marketing requirements placed on businesses from the social platforms making it harder to market the way we used to market. We were given a small taste of this change in direction with Facebook's text-overlay restrictions and the content overhaul announced from Snapchat.

Gone are the days were you can log on to Facebook without being retargeted by the retail items that are waiting patiently in your Amazon cart. The days that lie ahead will be filled with clever messaging and undoubtedly lots of video.

Don't abandon your social marketing efforts. In fact, the No. 1 piece of advice we can provide socially is to create an authentic and detailed social media content plan. Ads and business pages can be annoying, but consumers secretly like being reminded of products and services that they need. The obvious challenge will be to get all of your marketing objectives accomplished while also appealing to followers and not getting the dreaded Unfollow.

All signs seem to point to LIVE video being the main communication tool. Producing creative videos, witty and engaging trendier posts that incorporate gifs and memes will also resonate better. Some 82 percent of users would rather watch a brand's live video than read the same company's social-media posts, according to Livestream.com. The same study shows that 80 percent would rather tune in to a live video than read a blog post.

"One of the complaints we have heard on social media is that photos and videos from your friends are mixed in with content from publishers and creators and influencers, but your friends are not content—they are relationships."

-Evan Spiegel

[CONCLUSION]

THANK YOU!

This passion project of digital marketing and industry trends was written by the REAL Trends Technology and Marketing Team. Our hopes with writing a 2018 trends report is that we can provide a useful marketing tool for all our friends in the real estate industry. However, we know how trends are quickly outdated, so we will have our thumbs on the pulse of the latest revisions and adjustments. Please let us know what information you would like to see from us next! E-mail us at Tech@realtrends.com

ABOUT THE REAL TRENDS TECHNOLOGY AND MARKETING TEAM

REAL Trends is the trusted source in real estate technology and marketing strategies. Our team of specialists delivers top technology and digital marketing strategies to help top brokerages, teams and sales associates grow their businesses. Think of us as a full-service advertising and marketing agency with powerful tools driven by results. We can help our consulting clients maximize the efficiencies of their technology solutions and deliver a powerful marketing menu unparalleled in our industry to drive traffic and leads to these clients.