

# REAL ESTATE

## Realtors Face Challenges as Clients Look More to Internet

By Erik Derr

Every time Janet Johnston reads or hears about the real estate market, she gets mad. She had planned to move to Phoenix earlier this year, to live closer to her new granddaughter. But she promised herself she wouldn't leave the South Bay until she sold her home of 35 years, a three-bedroom Craftsman with "a front yard filled with some of the most beautiful flowers and trees anywhere."

That's where much of the frustration lies for Johnston, a former school teacher and part-time restaurant greeter who prides herself on being well-read and "up-to-date" on current events. Despite her desire to join her family in the Arizona desert, she's still waiting to put her home on the market because she has so felt "so intimidated and confused" by what she describes as the "endless stream of reports about the real estate market" over the last many months.

"Some are saying 'sell,' others are saying 'not yet,' and others saying 'you should have sold already,'" Johnston lamented. "You never know what to believe. So I've ended up not doing anything at all." Most if not all of the housing information Johnston reads in newspapers and sees on television "doesn't tell me a hill of beans," she added.

David Keller, an agent with Shorewood Realtors who has served the South Bay market since 1988, feels Johnston's pain. "I don't put any credence at all in any of those market numbers... indicators like average price or median mean nothing to us," he said, adding that the real estate market changes "neighborhood by neighborhood by neighborhood," so "a house at one end of the block won't be the same as a house on the other end of the block." No "national or statewide, county or even city-wide trends" can tell buyers or sellers what they really need to know to make decisions, Keller said.

On the other hand, thanks to the advent of the Internet and popular real estate Websites such as Zillow.com and Redfin.com, there's "enough information out there" for consumers to make knowledgeable decisions, he said. During a recent outing with two of his clients, a young couple looking for their perfect Beach-area house, Keller was reminded just how discerning people who know how to access online real estate data can be.

After exploring the market through his tried-and-true industry channels, the real estate veteran conferred with the duo, who had done their own comparative shopping through various websites --- and had come to the same conclusions Keller had about which properties were best for them.

According to the recent study by the National Association of Realtors, 87 percent of all homebuyers in the United States used the Internet to search for a home in 2008, up from 84 percent in 2007, 77 percent in 2005 and only two percent in 1997. As well, an estimated 32 percent of homebuyers last year reportedly first found the houses they eventually purchased while they were online.

A growing number of Keller's real estate compatriots in California apparently agree with his focus on high-tech, user-driven

marketing. Survey results released earlier this month by the California Association of Realtors showed an estimated 55 percent of all responding real estate professionals used the Internet for their business. Meanwhile, an estimated 45 percent used a laptop or tablet computer in the field, while 39 percent said they used some type of hand-held Internet device. About 46 percent of respondents said they accessed one or more online social networks, like Twitter or Facebook, to make business contacts. "In a time when clients demand both information and expertise from their real estate professionals," said James Liptick, president of the state association, many of his real estate colleagues "have responded to these demands by utilizing and integrating technology into their real estate business."

All that new technology is coming together in "Real Estate 2.0," the nickname for what market observers say is becoming the new model for online real estate marketing, where individual sites not only provide data specific to the hosting company or agent, but serve as dynamic, interactive conduits for an array of real estate information and resources. An article posted last March at Realtor.org quoted Charlie Young, chief operating officer with New Jersey-based Coldwell Banker Real Estate LLC, who suggested real estate websites must grow beyond static bulletin boards for the latest sale announcements. "The listing information really is a commodity now. You have to look at how you can augment and bring value to it," said Young, who proclaimed the end of the era "when real estate professionals could attract business by promoting themselves while holding on tightly to key information about listings." He continued that the best real estate bloggers "promote communities and not themselves. That's a fundamental shift for a real estate professional who has been brought up in a culture of self-promotion."

It seems, however, not everybody in the real estate business is ready to embrace that high-tech transition. Real estate analyst Kevin Lisota, who writes for the Findwell Smart Real Estate Internet blog site, recalled a recent meeting where about 100 real estate agents mulled over marketing strategies. He reports several anti-Internet comments from participants, including: "If we are going to have any control of our customers, we as brokers have to control the data that they see," "Doctors and lawyers do not have a publicly accessible database for their proprietary information... so why should we as real estate brokers allow the public to access our data?" and, last but not least, "Information is power. I need to maintain this power to serve my customers."

Lisota wrote that he was "stunned that this way of thinking is still prevalent in real estate brokerages. From our perspective, the days of real estate agents hoarding information are over." He argues Internet companies will continue to post property and market information, and increasingly more data will be freely available to consumers, whether real

## Open House Directory

OPEN HOUSE			
1.	Sun 2:00-4:00	232 16 <sup>th</sup> Pl, MB	3 Bd. 2 Ba. \$1,099,000
		Bill Ruane	Re/Max Beach Cities Realty 310-877-2374
2.	Sun 2:00-4:00	1215 Ashmill St, Carson	4 Bd. 3 Ba. \$575,000
		Bill Ruane	Re/Max Beach Cities Realty 310-877-2374
3.	Sun 2:00-4:00	1223 Ashmill St, Carson	3 Bd. 3 Ba. \$550,000
		Bill Ruane	Re/Max Beach Cities Realty 310-877-2374
4.	Sun 2:00-4:00	4321 Crest Dr #A, MB	3 Bd. 2.5 Ba. \$1,599,000
		Bill Ruane	Re/Max Beach Cities Realty 310-877-2374
5.	Sun 2:00-4:00	4323 Crest Dr #B, MB	3 Bd. 2.5 Ba. \$1,789,000
		Bill Ruane	Re/Max Beach Cities Realty 310-877-2374
6.	Sun 2:00-4:00	4320 Highland Ave #C, MB	3 Bd. 2.5 Ba. \$1,859,000
		Bill Ruane	Re/Max Beach Cities Realty 310-877-2374
7.	Sun 2:00-4:00	312 44 <sup>th</sup> St #D, MB	4 Bd. 4.5 Ba. \$2,299,000
		Bill Ruane	Re/Max Beach Cities Realty 310-877-2374
8.	Sun 2:00-4:00	312 44 <sup>th</sup> St #E, MB	4 Bd. 4.5 Ba. \$2,299,000
		Bill Ruane	Re/Max Beach Cities Realty 310-877-2374





# Buying?

# Selling?

You're looking in the right place!  
Give one of our advertising Realtors a call!

See Realtors, page 16