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## Wired buyers

Austin Business Journal - by [Shelley Orman](#) ABJ Staff

Real estate agents and technology go together like buyers and money -- the more you have at your disposal, the more you can do.

When it comes to technology, real estate agents are constantly updating their high tech tools to help with their business and customer outreach. Increasingly, it's the Internet that's playing a much bigger role in the industry as services become less expensive and more comprehensive.

Chad Goldwasser, a Realtor with Keller Williams Realty, has begun putting a lot of his team's revenue and resources into search engine optimization and finding ways to drive as many hits as possible to his personal Web site. He says about 50 percent of his leads come from the Web.

"When I started in the business 10 years ago, the Internet was a nonexistent part of my life. Now if we sell 500 homes, 250 will be because of the Internet," Goldwasser says.

He uses a pay-per-click system costing about \$2,500 a month and has also begun video imaging on his site, in which he pops up and delivers a message to visitors to ensure their experience is as personal as possible.

Bernice L. Ross, CEO of Austin-based **RealEstateCoach.com**, a site dedicated to coaching and consulting for those in the real estate industry, trains agents on technology strategies that work best in today's market.

She says technology has taken a step up, allowing real estate agents to do more on the Internet at virtually no cost.

"Right now there's a consolidation of the services being offered. It used to be that you'd go to one place on the Web for flyers, another for lead generation and another for listings. Now all of that's being consolidated into single platforms," Ross says.

Sites that she's particularly fond of include **vflyer.com**, **trulia.com** and **zillow.com** -- all of which are available for free. These sites allow real estate agents to post listings and broadcast flyers and pictures, but are geared primarily toward buyers and enhancing their housing search.

"Consumers are the real audience and who the sites are targeted for. They drive [these sites]," Ross says.

Most buyers begin their home search on the Web, with many also using it to gain an upper hand when selling their homes and to save money, sometimes bypassing using a real estate agent all together.

Paula Biehler, owner of Austin public relations and marketing firm Biehler & Associates, sold her Westlake home on Craigslist in just two days for the full asking price.

Bill Flood, a Realtor at Stanberry and Associates Inc. Realtors, contacted Biehler after her listing caught his client's attention, and he ended up handling both ends of the sale.

"[The Internet] is just one of today's tools," he says. "It doesn't eradicate the need to go see the property and deal face-to-face with people. That's still the most important part of any transaction."

Terrill Fischer, an agent with Prudential Texas Realty, says this scenario is increasingly becoming typical of the house-hunting process today.

"The majority of consumers start their search online and just want to be anonymous and look at what's for sale and how much it costs," he says. "The Internet opens up more conduits, but we have to find ways to capture those consumers and build some kind of relationship and level of trust."

He says he invests about 10 percent of his gross earnings in technology, but the most cost-effective yet still personal forum he's found is blogging.

He started writing his blog a few years ago, posting his opinion about the goings-on in the Austin real estate scene, and he now gets anywhere from 200 to 300 unique visitors each day.

Fischer's also begun taking advantage of the recent text-messaging craze, trying a system where buyers can enter a four-digit code found



Brett Buchanan

Terrill Fischer, an agent at Prudential Texas Realty, sees the Internet as another tool real estate agents can use.

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on for-sale signs and have the house's listing information sent to them via text message, while at the same time providing him with their phone numbers for follow up.

No matter the technological changes and improvements, following up and dealing with clients on a personal level is a part of the business that Ross believes will never go out of style.

"When you get ready to buy, everyone wants to walk on the dirt or go in the house, because how something looks on the Web or on paper might not be anything like how it looks in person," she says.

#### Technology products used by realtors

The typical Realtor spent \$858 on technology, \$254 on technology services and \$257 on technology training.

97 percent of Realtors own and use a personal computer for real estate purposes.

95 percent use a mobile phone.

89 percent of real estate agents and companies have a Web site.

50 percent of Realtors communicate with their clients by email more than 50 percent of the time.

Source: National Association of Realtors

*shelleyorman@bizjournals.com*

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