

Real Estate Today

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Technology Keeps Testing Agents' Ability to Keep Up

By **JIM SMITH, Realtor®**

It wasn't very long ago — older agents probably remember it well — that listings were all in-house. Then the Multiple-Listing Service (MLS) was devised, whereby each member firm would publicize its listings to all other member firms, promising "cooperation and compensation" in the selling of each other's listings. Until lockboxes were introduced, a showing agent would pick up the key at the listing company's office and return it after the showing. Electronic lockboxes now exist which not only safeguard keys on-site, but track which agent showed the house and when. The six metro area Realtor associations have thus far rejected this technology.

Once the MLS computerized its listings, the obvious next stage of evolution was for agents to have dial-up access. Next came web-based access, which brought with it the ability to upload up to 10 color photographs (and a virtual tour link) for each listing, plus a slew of ever expanding additional options that were not available via the dial-up system. For now, at least, this "legacy" dial-up system lives on here in Denver — a concession to those agents not fully ready to adapt to a web-based system.

The fax machine could be described as a key technological breakthrough, supported by the legal acceptance of faxed signatures. Now even this workhorse of our industry is

becoming obsolete with the introduction of e-fax service, which delivers faxes as email attachments via phantom fax numbers.

Nowadays, with listings from virtually every MLS aggregated on Realtor.com, both buyers and sellers have benefited from greatly increased features, both nationally and on their local MLS or "IDX" sites. Now a buyer can not only do his own searches online but can automatically receive an email alert whenever a new or changed listing matches their search criteria. If done through an agent like myself, these criteria can be extremely specific.

It used to be that consumers could only access active listings, but zillow.com now makes sold data available, although not always current and lacking many details.

Google Earth and Google maps have certainly improved the ability of buyers to visualize a home and its location better. As a result, you'll see more and more satellite photos linked to individual listings.

Cell phones are now so widespread in their use that they're taken for granted. But how about Internet telephone service, such as Vonage? I had such a phone and transferred my cell phone calls to it before I went to Paris a couple years ago. Able to receive calls as if I was in Golden, I can point to \$15,000 in commissions that would not have come to me if I had not had that phone during my trip. Similarly, I wrote this column (and sold one of my listings) while at a campsite in Idaho over Labor Day weekend thanks to the cell-based wireless broadband "air card" on my Tablet PC.



Other Examples of Technology Used by Computer-Savvy Agents

1. Virtual Tours. A virtual tour is nothing more than a web-based photographic tour of a house, using panoramic as well as still photographs, including 360-degree photos where appropriate. While agents can hire a company to do all the photography and create the tour online, others shoot the pictures themselves, create the virtual tours on their computer, and then upload them to the hosting company.

2. PDA's, Blackberrys. These souped up cell phones with mini-keypads allow an agent to receive web leads and email with-

out being at their desk. With my Tablet PC with broadband air card, I have chosen not to adopt this technology, although I find the devices intriguing.

3. Use of Web Space. The great thing about web space is that it is unlimited. I use it in many ways to supplement my overall real estate website, JimSmith.com, including buying URL's for each listing.

4. Email Newsletters. I have virtually replaced my printed newsletter with an email version. I like being able to go from concept to full delivery in 30 minutes!



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