

The Technology Real Estate Professionals Really Need

By ANN BROWN

Imagine having instant access to contracts and documents, as well as the functionality to get them signed in minutes.

Today's typical real estate customer is younger, more tech savvy and demands a quick response to e-mails and messages. A surefire way of differentiating yourself from your competitors is to have the technology that speaks the language of the 21st century client. It is also a key factor in growing and maintaining your customer base.

With all that is available and with new products being introduced seemingly daily, what technology do you really need as a real estate professional? You can certainly purchase the latest equipment with all the bells and whistles, but let's look at the essentials that every REALTOR® should use in her business.

Laptop Computer

Nowadays, it's rare for clients to meet at your office. A quiet table near the fireplace at a local coffee shop, for instance, is more often where consumers want to do business.

Get a laptop computer to use at your appointments. PowerPoint is a quick and easy program for creating your listing presentation, and you can save it to your desktop for easy access at meetings.

If it is available in your area, wireless Internet access is a must for your out-of-office meetings. Before your client needs a refill on her latte, you can turn on your computer, do a quick search on your local MLS and show her the properties of greatest interest.

Also, your laptop should include access to your database, which should hold all of your client notes, appointments, lists of follow-up calls to make and future schedules. One of the most difficult transitions for me years ago was getting rid of my appointment book and putting all of my customer info into my PC database. Once you do this and learn to take advantage of all of



the database tools that will make your life easier, you will never go back to paper.

Many database programs allow you to sync your appointments and notes with a PDA. If you use a PDA, check for that option before investing in database software.

Get a decent carrying case for your laptop and make sure it is professional looking. Your laptop's computer wallpaper should be either basic black or navy. If your wallpaper includes a photo, be sure it is something that is appropriate for clients to view.

Check your keyboard, too. If you decided to eat lunch while working on your laptop, get rid of the crumbs and dust off your screen before you go to your appointment. While it may seem obvious, you would be surprised how dirty some computers are. Do a quick check of yours first, so that you will make a good impression.

Cell Phone

It seems that most people today carry a cell phone. In real estate, it is an absolute must. Remember, today's consumer wants a response from you quickly, and if you have to wait until

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you get back to the office to return a phone call, you might lose the sale.

Have your cell phone with you at all times and be prepared each time you answer the phone. If you are driving, you cannot write notes or look through papers, so do not answer your phone if it rings. Your phone should have voicemail, so wait until you have stopped driving, check your messages or caller I.D. and then make your return calls.

This is also a good time to review basic phone etiquette, so let us begin with the ringtone you have. As tempting as it is to have a fancy or loud song on your cell phone, stick to a simple ringer. The basic sound of a phone ringing is much more professional than a blaring Top 40s tune.

If you have call waiting on your cell phone, get rid of it. Let's say you are talking to a client when another call beeps in. You tell the current caller to please hold because your other line is ringing. What you are basically saying is, "Please hold while I decide if this other caller is more important than you." Call waiting is rude and unnecessary; your voicemail will record any messages you might receive while on the phone talking to someone else.

Finally, if you are in an appointment, turn off your cell phone. Again, if you have taken the time to sit down and meet with someone, give them your full attention. Answering your phone during an appointment is the equivalent of call waiting in person; do not do it.

If it is available in your area, wireless Internet access is a must for your out-of-office meetings.

A 'Wish List' Item: Tablet PC

A tablet PC, or convertible notebook, gives you the mobility of a laptop combined with the flexibility and creativity of a writing tablet. You can use it like a laptop for all of your day-to-day computing needs or swivel and switch the display to tablet form and then start writing directly on the screen.

Imagine having instant access to contracts and documents, as well as the functionality to get them signed in minutes. For example, if you are showing properties and the client falls in love with a particular place, simply pull the contract up on your notebook, turn the screen and have them sign it right there instead of waiting until the next day.

Clients and potential clients will be impressed when they see you using this type of technology because it distinguishes you from the competition and gives you a more professional image.



Handheld Computer

A PDA or palm pilot is a handheld device that provides you with instant access to information and productivity tools while working out of the office. It is also a fantastic time management and contact management tool.

With Internet capabilities, your PDA can give you remote access to the MLS, maps and driving directions. In addition, with a variety of add-ons available, you can do everything from tracking the steps of the real estate transaction and the necessary documents to completing appraisal reports, property sketching and area calculations directly in the field.

If you are unsure how you will use a PDA, start with a lower priced model. You can buy one with decent functionality for as little as \$100. Start off slowly by adding contacts and scheduling meetings.

If you are accustomed to having everything on paper, using a PDA regularly will take some time. At first, you might even have to force yourself to use it. Once you do, however, you will be delighted not only at its simplicity, but also at its efficiency in your business.

Having access to the latest technology is important, but knowing how to use it is even more crucial. You have to move with the times and learn how to use the technology your customers are using.

The traditional paper-intensive real estate industry has given way to a technology revolution that gives you many options and products never available before. Resolve today to take your business to new heights using the exciting technology available to you.



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