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## **Technology Can Be a Double Edged Sword**

Published on Wednesday, December 9, 2009, 4:59 PM Last Update: 6 day(s) ago by [Mike Parker](#)

Few “absolutes” exist in the world of adapting new technology to the real estate business, but almost everyone will tell you that you must embrace more technology than you will ever really need to.

Those experts—and most webmasters and web designers—are operating with the now-obsolete concept that your website must give every possible piece of information that might be real estate related to all visitors.

That entire concept has resulted in a universe where 90% of agents and brokers fail in their Internet marketing efforts. In most industries, failure rates of 90% results in a complete change in the way things get done. In real estate, however, the same old things that don’t work continue to be treated as “must haves” for every agent. It’s as if someone is trying to homogenize the agent base and make us all offer the same thing the same way to anyone who comes to us. It’s as if someone decided that technology can replace personality, skill and service, reducing the real estate agent to a commodity—interchangeable with any other real estate agent; hence the artificial emphasis on “brand” and franchise.

Real estate sales have always been and will always be about individual agents, not corporate monoliths, and once that realization dawns on the agent base, perhaps the rate of failure will decrease as online marketing innovation increases.

### **The persistent effort to devalue full service realtors and the services they perform**

Much has been written about commissions, the role of the realtor in future real estate transactions, technological monstrosities that bring the techies to rapture but that consumers consistently reject, and how agents wanting to succeed

online in the new paradigm must embrace all the new technology-- video, IDX, avatars, audio, mapping solutions, satellite views being made available of every property-- all sorts of things that have the effect of reducing the sale of a property to something that 'doesn't need a sales professional as much as it needs technology.'

I'm here to tell you that all those people have it wrong.

In a world where forces are attempting to make the sale of real estate be a function reduced to a commodity (thus, 'commissions should be lower and personal service is less important') you will not succeed online by following the flawed methods that the National Association of REALTORS® reports that fail: 90% of agents are unhappy with as to the results of those methods, according to the NAR. What will guarantee your success online and in the real world you work in daily is to return to providing what the client wants. What does the client want? The client wants you to do the heavy lifting at helping them find their home and acquiring it.

### **What does this have to do with technology?**

Consider this simple thought: after you succeed in bringing the Internet shopper to your personal website, do you really want them going to another agents listing? Do you want to give the message "Hey? All agents and their websites are the same so just look at these listings and see if you like anything"? Or would you rather give this message: "Please tell me what you are looking for and I will do an MLS search for you and email you the results today! Don't waste time trying to interface with various technical house-finding tools, interface with ME!" When you do the former, you are basically telling the consumer that your value in the process is showing them a listing they found online. When you embrace the latter, you are showing them true value: real service.

Your local MLS is a fabulous tool and you are skilled (we hope) in how to use it. The average consumer is not. What you need to do in your online marketing is to get your site found by Internet shoppers, to get them to register with you and ask you for what they want so that you can give it to them with alacrity. Most Internet shoppers respond well to your offer to be their personal helper—provided that you call them and that you respond within 30-60 minutes to their

inquiries and questions. Most Internet shoppers can find the local listings on any other agent's website, too.

What sets you apart? What sets you apart is the same thing that has set professional real estate agents apart for the last 50+ years: local knowledge, personal expertise, and personal service. It's back to basics time, folks, and if you don't believe it, I've got a passel of agents you can talk to who will tell you how they are succeeding because they have bought in to what I am telling you: online marketing success is not due to whiz bang technology and \$10,000 websites, it is due to complying with the four basic principles of online marketing success.

### **The four basic steps of online marketing success**

- Maintain a good marketing platform with information available to the consumer upon request; get them to tell you what they want and give it to them;
- Make certain that people searching the web for homes can find your site with their favorite search engine;
- Build traffic and convert 5-15% of visitors to your site into registrations;
- Learn the proper way to follow up these leads; the timing, the methods and the follow-up techniques

### **A radical concept is gaining a toehold in online marketing today**

It may be radical in thinking, but it is simple in execution. The website you have is a billboard, so use it that way. Stop trying to make that site bring you leads and use it for people you are already working with; that is, once you have developed a prospect through their becoming your lead, use your conventional site (or your brokers, or your franchises) to show them around.

The second part of the concept is to let professionals be responsible for obtaining your leads for you—not by purchasing leads, but by developing your own leads to your own branded and professionally managed lead site (the kind where professionals do all the work and management). I guarantee you that

professional Internet marketers are more skilled at attracting Internet buyers than the vast majority of professional realtors, and that's the way of the world.

There are experts at selling and listing homes, and there are experts at Internet marketing for realtors. It's quite difficult and very unusual to be both in one person. This is one reason that you will notice more emphasis on leads and less on features and benefits in most vendors marketing materials going forward: no one but the techies really cares about anything but leads and sales.

### **Why is technology a double-edged sword?**

The phrase "double-edged sword" was originally used to wryly illustrate that such a sword—while handy in a fight—the wielder of one could kill people on the forehand and on the backhand (!)--was as likely to cut the person using it as the person they were fighting. (Conventional swords originally had only one cutting edge with a blunt other edge to prevent accidents, much like the carving knife in your kitchen today.)

The point I am attempting to put across to you hardworking agents is similar: before you add features to your personal website, ask yourself if they are likely to benefit your competition in any way, or if that feature might hurt your efforts by mistake. If so, that feature is the proverbial "double-edged sword." Ask yourself: "am I instituting this feature because everyone says I must or because I want the consequences of what this feature does?"

It is far better to put your efforts into establishing a bond with your Internet visitor and the easiest way to accomplish that is to get them to ask you for information. Once that happens, you have the golden one-time opportunity to respond immediately with what the visitor wants.

Research shows that when you do just that, fully 81% of the time that Internet shopper stays with you until the sales cycle is completed. No single technology makes that happen. You, the professional real estate agent, are the only one who can make that happen. Make every lead count. Concentrate on obtaining leads instead of adding features to your website. In the end, it's not features that make success, it's leads converted into buyers. Keep that in the forefront of your mind every time you look at another "must have" feature for your website. If it won't bring you more leads, you don't need it.

*Mike Parker ([www.theblackwatercg.com](http://www.theblackwatercg.com)) advises thousands of agents and brokers on the subject of online marketing services for realtors. If you'd like to investigate having professional help with online marketing or to find out if your website is set up to deliver buyers to you, [click here](#) and fill out the form. We'll tell you confidentially and for free.*