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Interview with Mark Lesswing — Second Quarter 2006



Mark Lesswing is the Vice President of the National Association of REALTORS® Center for REALTOR® Technology. He directs the affairs of the Center, an entity created to serve the membership as an industry advocate, implementation consultant and a technology information resource. Mark has been a featured speaker at the last three COMDEX.

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[Listen to the interview \(mp3 format, 17MB\).](#)

The Center for REALTOR® Technology

1. Two focuses of the center are particularly important for Commercial practitioners; one is its advocacy of the adoption of technology—the center encourages the industry to accept change.
2. In this regard, the center is contributing to efforts to come up with standards for the industry, specifically, OSCRE and PISCES, a group of standards for moving data around in the commercial space; standards will bring down costs.
3. A new initiative in 2006 is a search for ways to provide recognizable digital identity, which would allow digital signatures and promote a smoother and faster transfer of paperwork between entities for closing.

How to Build Your Image Through Technology

1. It is important to recognize the Internet as a different medium from the spoken or printed word that works differently; the ability to click around a web site to make things happen is central to its appeal to users—good image building through web sites takes advantage of this characteristic.
2. Features that give website users power include mapping (of properties and surrounding areas) as well as blogging and tagging; all three key into the idea of building community on the Internet.

3. Blogging taps into consumers who are very familiar with the Internet and who like to acquire information from the opinions of others; already popular on the Residential side, blogging should be gaining prominence on the Commercial side this year.
4. Tagging contrasts with the power of search engines; search engines provide a list of hits that match search words (key words) derived from information on the web site as authored by the website developer; tagging allows web surfers to search other people's bookmarks—thereby taking advantage of what other people objectively think is relevant.
5. A classic blog is two-way communication in which another person posts to a comment already posted so that a collection of opinions is built; some blogs are one-way postings (actually a web site that is refreshed often); two-way blogs connect better to the Internet community.
6. Blogging can leave you open to legal challenges of libel and slander, so use software for your blog that has a Moderation feature, which allows you to review postings before putting them up.

Progress Towards the Paperless Transaction

1. The acceptance of doing paperless transactions will take time, just as the adoption of using credit cards and ATM cards took time.
2. Until all the players in a transaction can handle digital transmission, the paperless process can't work; people need to gain an understanding of the process and develop trust in the electronic structure.
3. However, paperless transactions are such an advantage to commercial practitioners that it is likely that the shift toward them will gain momentum rapidly—more rapidly than the adoption of web sites; people who may be reluctant will be pulled into paperless transactions because involvement with others who are doing them will be unavoidable.

Building Trust on the Internet

1. The Internet was built as an anonymous environment without a structure for doing business; enterprising business people have created a business structure as an overlay.
2. What is missing is the true identity of the players—names and passwords identify the machine and not the person; an anonymous element remains that hackers and viruses exploit.
3. A trust structure for the Internet that can identify the person, similar to what is used in the credit card system, is required

Getting Yourself Noticed Online

1. Search engine optimization (SEO) is a group of techniques used to improve placement in searches; search engines use robots to read web sites, break them down into pieces and catalog them—searches are conducted against the catalogs.
2. One important criterion, often overlooked, is the wording of hyperlinks on your site—use keywords that identify the concept of the link, not generic terms such as “Click here” or “For more information”—the robots read what is highlighted; note they cannot read images at all, so be sure to use text.
3. Internet consumers are visually oriented, so photos, 360-degree virtual tours, maps and other images that add color and texture to a web site attract attention.
4. The new medium that is likely to become very important is digital video; most businesses and homes (Lesswing estimates 70%–80%) now have high-speed Internet connections that can handle video.
5. Video allows the listing agent to provide personal insight about the space

available—have yourself taped walking around and describing the property; small handheld cameras are inexpensive but perform well.

Podcasting as a Potential Commercial Tool

1. Podcasting is the technology of launching MP3 audio files from a web page; it is a way to get an audio stream to the consumer.
2. The technology lends itself well to describing a process—i.e., as an instructional tool; it can be useful in conveying an informative speech or interview to consumers; RCAs first annual online convention will be an excellent example of podcasting being used to transmit information.
3. Zahara Mossman, a Residential agent from Miami, has done an effective job in podcasting brief audio notes as a supplement to photos; she uses RSS feeds (real simple syndication) to push her audio reports directly to clients. [See PodCastRealty.com.]

Favorite Web Sites

1. Curbed.com (New York City) and RainCityGuide.com (Seattle) are two powerful examples of blogs providing lifestyle dimension for an area.
2. Slashdot.org is a good source for staying current with the latest technology developments.
3. Lesswing has all three of these sites tagged for himself.

Projection for the Future

1. In the next two or three years, more information will become available directly to consumers, so they will be more educated than ever before by the time they come to your listings.
2. Industry professionals will be facing a choice of adapting to or fighting the information change; those who can accept working on a higher level with smarter clients will excel.
3. Within 18 months, expect digital identity to be perfected to the point where sensitive documents will be easily moved over the Internet with signatures as though they were in the mail.
4. Major changes in office systems will result, and computer security will become an even higher priority than today because the electronic form will be the real document.

Products and Sites mentioned by Mark Lesswing:

Realtor.org: www.realtor.org
PodCastRealty: www.podcastreality.com
Curbed.com: www.curbed.com
RainCityGuide: www.raincityguide.com
Slashdot.org: <http://slashdot.org>

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