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## **BUYER'S GUIDE: Web Site Enhancements**

**BY MICHAEL ANTONIAK**

### **Bring them back**

The competition for Internet shoppers has never been more intense. That's why practitioners who market themselves online are constantly looking for tools that'll draw visitors back to their Web site.

With the goal of encouraging repeat visits, Hector Rivera's site includes real estate tips, daily real estate news items and mortgage rate updates, interactive presentations for buyers and sellers, area school statistics, and IDX and Google Maps search capabilities linked to home tours.

To accommodate all the add-ons, Rivera, broker-owner of Web-based brokerage Virtual Real Estate Associates ([www.vreas.com](http://www.vreas.com)) in Stratford, Conn., went with Web site creation software Point2 Broker (<http://broker.point2.com>), which he says allows him to incorporate various components seamlessly into the site's design.

"We needed the flexibility to customize our site as much as possible while maintaining a consistent look," Rivera says. "I learned there's no single Web site developer that offers everything you want."

David Weiss (<http://Chicago.YourInternetAgents.com>), who partners with wife Risa at Chicago's Koenig & Strey GMAC Real Estate, toyed with standard approaches to a Web site before deciding to make a blog, organized by neighborhoods, the centerpiece of his site. "The blog architecture from Six Apart ([www.sixapart.com](http://www.sixapart.com)) makes it easy to provide information that's important and to keep it fresh. I try to update the content weekly—as often as I can, really," Weiss says. "Navigation throughout the site is simple, with my posts organized in topic-specific categories."

As site visitors explore topics, they can also search for homes and view video tours of the Weisses' listings. He creates the tours himself with his digital camera. "The tours are what really keep them coming back," says Weiss. "I also provide information on recently sold property from my MLS. That's something that really interests people but that most [practitioners] don't seem to offer."

Another sure draw for a site, says broker-owner Mike Bradley, of Metro Brokers Eagleview Properties LLC ([www.MikesClients.com](http://www.MikesClients.com)) in Littleton, Colo., is a closing costs calculator. "Sellers can play with figures and see how different commissions, sales prices, and closing dates affect the money they can expect to walk away with," he says.

Bradley's calculator, which he commissioned a programmer to create, has attracted Web surfers from all over the country. "And it's not uncommon for people to use the calculator, then follow up to ask me about listing their home," he says.

Bradley and the others have learned that providing useful tools at their site helps them convert leads. "It's important to provide consumers with whatever they need for as long they're interested in buying or selling property," Rivera says.

### **Building a Web site that reflects you**

What separates good from great real estate Web sites? It's not what you spend, but what you offer and how you present it that make all the difference. As a marquee for your services, your site should announce what sets you apart from everyone else.

- Do you pride yourself on responsive service? Demonstrate that with quick links to contact you via e-mail, instant messaging, and phone calls launched from the site. (And then live up to your promise!)
- Want to be recognized as the area authority? Combine school and community profiles with a regularly updated blog to demonstrate you've got your finger on the pulse of your market.
- Do you have an uncanny knack for knowing how to highlight the unique appeal of each home? Don't settle for standard virtual tours. Add audio or video—even blueprints—to show buyers you know what you're doing.

A search engine query will turn up plenty of resources for enhancing your Web site. First, though, check with your Web solutions provider. Most offer step-up content, features, and tools for enhancing a site.

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### Area Information

Providing information on community resources demonstrates your local expertise.

**eSchool Profile Free** [Itsaboutleads.com](http://Itsaboutleads.com), [www.eschoolprofiles.com](http://www.eschoolprofiles.com), 866/609-6369. "Subscription" includes profiles of schools in up to five counties in a market area. A Web link gives site visitors access to company's database for ordering a 12-page report on area schools.

### Blog

A blog, or Web log, lets you provide regular updates about the local real estate market. And because blog content is often refreshed, it can aid your search engine ranking.

**TypePad Pro** \$14.95 per month or \$149.50 annual subscription Six Apart, [www.sixapart.com](http://www.sixapart.com). Blog solution for professional users includes customizable templates with design editor for incorporating text, photos, audio, and video. Fee covers unlimited number of blogs for total content storage of up to 1GB and data transfer of up to 10GB of bandwidth per month.

### Calculators

Bring consumers back again and again to explore the numbers that impact the sale or purchase of a home.

**MoneyToys Internet Calculator Suite** \$139.95 for suite or \$39.95 for individual calculators Wheatworks Software, [www.moneytoys.com](http://www.moneytoys.com). Suite of 11 financial calculators can be added to any Web site. Includes amortization calculations, loan comparison, annual percentage rate, closing costs, seller's proceeds, refinancing, and cost of renting vs. owning a home. One-time fee also entitles purchasers to new calculators as they're developed.

### Content

Articles and advice on a range of real estate topics make your site a resource.

**Real Estate Web Site Articles** Price varies, depending on article; many are free of charge Constant Content, [www.constant-content.com](http://www.constant-content.com), 734/468-0594. Free or fee-based articles that can be added to any site. Custom content creation services also available. Quality varies, so thoroughly read content for accuracy and timeliness.

### IDX searching

Make your site a gateway to your inventory.

**IDXsearch** Pricing starts at \$200 for account setup and \$10 per month for individual users SkyeMark Business Solutions, [www.idxsearch.com](http://www.idxsearch.com), 952/544-1505. Users can search based on home features, location on a map, or MLS number. Results include property summary with thumbnail photo and basic description, linked to detailed MLS data and virtual tour link. Search pages can be branded with contact information for company or salesperson. (Check for local availability.)

## Maps

Once buyers narrow their selection to specific neighborhoods, interactive maps and satellite images can show them the area and location of the home in relationship to landmarks and resources.

**MapTeam for Google** \$199 per month MapTeam Inc., [www.mapteam.com](http://www.mapteam.com), 847/838-5371. Company creates and hosts map linked to searchable database of local MLS information. Users point to or roll over map icons denoting available properties for listing information. Supports searching by a range of factors such as price or area. One-month free trial.

## Multimedia Presentations

Audio and video help visitors grasp and retain information.

**Sellers' Website Presentation** \$198 Real Estate Power Tools, [www.realestatepowertools.com](http://www.realestatepowertools.com), 866/708-6657.

Presentations guide sellers through the sales process, reinforcing the value of working with a practitioner. Segments can be branded with contact information. Optional registration system available to require visitors to share information before viewing content. Presentation can also be burned to branded disc. Buyers' presentation also available.

## Web Solutions

Web creation and hosting packages often include unique features.

**REALTOR Benefits(sm) Partner eNeighborhoods WebSite** \$29.95 per month, plus \$199.95 setup fee eNeighborhoods, [www.eneighborhoods.com](http://www.eneighborhoods.com). 877/363-4442. Customizable Web site and in-depth information on area home sales and neighborhoods for use on site or in reports for consumers.

**Obeo Bronze Tour with SpaceDesigner** \$188 per tour Obeo, [www.obeo.com](http://www.obeo.com). Virtual tour creation/hosting solution with SpaceDesigner feature. SpaceDesigner provides interactive floor plan, allowing site visitors to experiment with furniture placement. Movable furniture icons can be reshaped and resized, then placed around the room. Layouts can be printed or saved on CD.

**Showcase Web Site** Pricing based on features [REALTOR.com](http://REALTOR.com), 800/878-4166. Part of the REALTOR.com marketing system. Includes a suite of site features that can be combined for a more effective Web presence. Options include home search (IDX Listing Gateway), site content and news updates, CMAs, premium listings for homes and salespeople, and marketing packages for both homes and communities.

Prices are the vendors' suggested retail prices and are subject to change. This list isn't comprehensive; there are additional product options in many of the categories. NAR doesn't evaluate or endorse these products and isn't responsible for changes in company info.



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