

November 11, 2002

REALTOR.com Leads The Virtual Pack

by Michael J. Russer

Using Internet technology to market your properties doesn't require a degree in computer science. But even if you recognize that these technologies aren't difficult to learn and could significantly improve your profitability, that doesn't mean you want to spend valuable time fiddling with the ever-expanding array of options for marketing your services online. As a result, most real estate practitioners don't begin to tap the wealth of resources at their disposal.

REALTOR.COM's answer to this dilemma is simple—and may be the start of a trend: Train independent virtual assistants (VAs) to become experts on its flagship iLead XL marketing products. Then give real estate practitioners the opportunity to hire these trained VAs to enhance their online listings with additional photos, add custom advertising copy, monitor online traffic logs and reports, and send property information to home searchers using built-in tools. By using a VA to handle the mechanics of their online marketing, salespeople can focus on listing and selling while still getting the most from their online investment.

According to the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS 2001 Member Profile survey, only 14 percent of all sales associates have an assistant. But those who do are typically top producers.

A virtual assistant helps you with your business in the same ways that a regular assistant does, but works remotely using the Internet, phone, and fax. Because they don't require space in your office and usually are available on a flexible schedule, VAs may offer a quicker turnaround and cost less than a traditional assistant—typically \$15–\$35 an hour.

In fact, REALTOR.COM estimates that these specially trained VAs will need only about an hour or so per week to update listings and track leads for the average practitioner. The VAs who are being trained are independent contractors, not employees of REALTOR.COM.

You'd hire a VA directly to perform online marketing, and perhaps other business functions, at a price agreed upon by you and the VA.

A pilot VA program, offered jointly by Staffcentrix LLC, an online network of virtual assistants; REALTOR.COM; and Russer Communications, launches this fall. Initially, trained VAs will be available to real estate practitioners in select regions. For a list of trained VAs, visit <http://imarketing.realtor.com>.

An interesting note: Among the first trainees will be members of Staffcentrix's Military Spouse Virtual Assistant program. This program enables military spouses to develop "portable careers" as virtual assistants. It's a win-win situation for all involved, especially when you consider that our military can use all the support we can give.

REALTOR.COM's move paves the way for other technology providers to train VAs on their products.

In turn, skilled VAs can help you take advantage of business-generating solutions without sacrificing your most precious commodity: time.

Copyright © 2002 Realty Times. All Rights Reserved.

With an award winning staff of writers providing up to the minute real estate news and advice, thousands of REALTORS® in North America reporting daily market conditions, and a nationally broadcast television news program, Realty Times is the one-stop shop for real estate information. That's why over 10,000 real estate professionals have turned to us for their publicity needs.