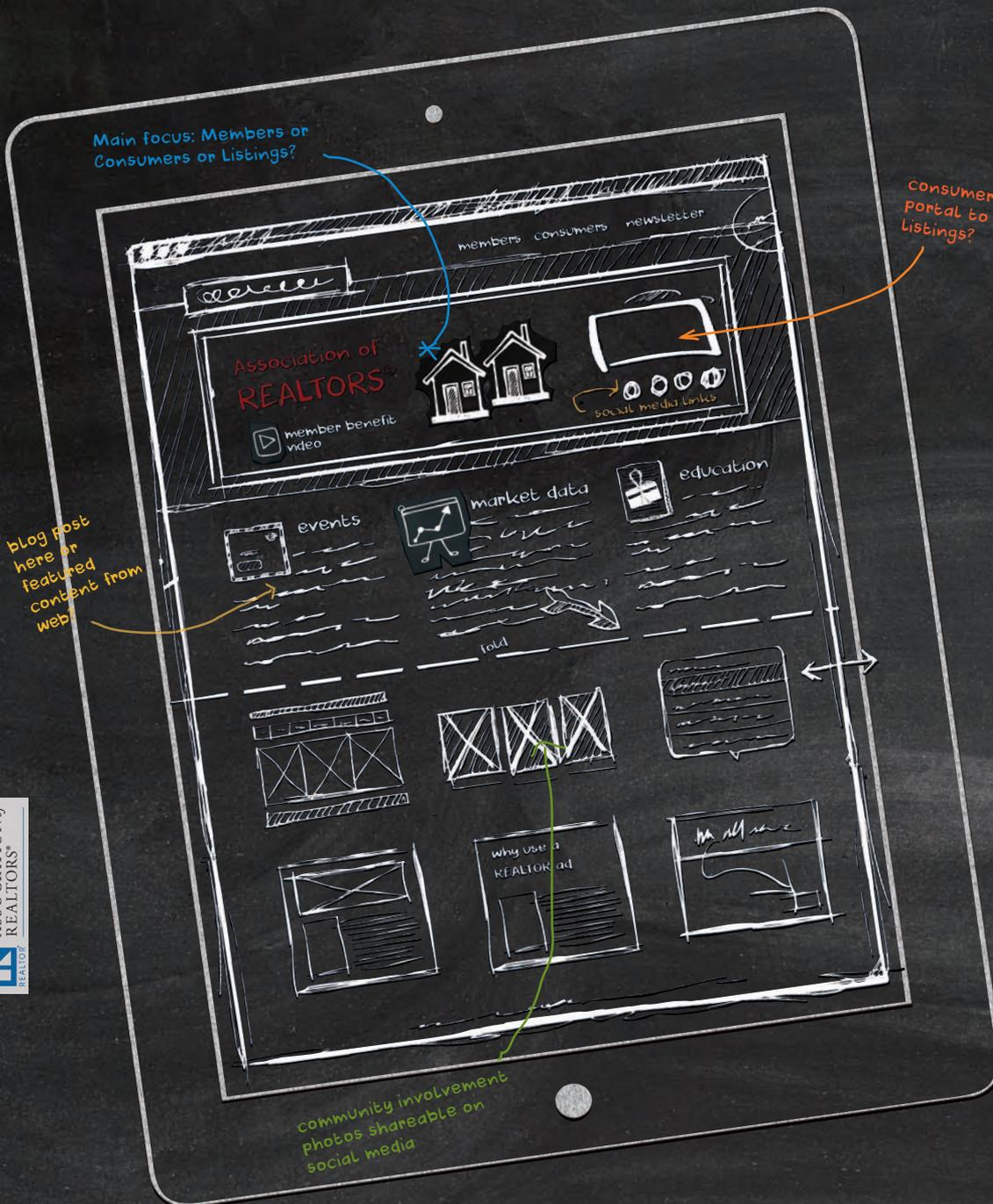


# REALTOR® AE

REALTOR.ORG/RAE

## Rethinking REALTOR® Association Website Design

Attract members with consumer content, listings, and responsive design. Page 12



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### Three-step Online Remodel

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### Are You Using Facebook Effectively?

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# REALTOR® AE

## Spring 2015

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Three winners of the 2015 best REALTOR® association website contest show that great websites are born from a clear purpose.

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#### Association Café

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### need to know



#### TECH

#### Are You Using Facebook Effectively?

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Although it may only be a matter of time before we start seeing drones flying over every listing, we are not there quite yet. [Page 26](#)

# Tech Tools to Improve the Volunteer Leadership Experience



**Jarrod C. Grasso, RCE,**  
CEO, New Jersey  
Association of  
REALTORS®, 2015 chair  
of the AE Committee

Inside and outside the office, the hyper-connected existence that we now all know to be normal has proven to have its ups and downs. As leaders, it's up to us to develop ways to use technology in a positive, thoughtful way that positions our associations to stand out among the crowd and help us all get back in sync.

As nonprofit associations, we are uniquely composed of staff, committee chairs, committee members, leadership and—most importantly—our general membership. The need for all of these key groups to communicate easily and often is paramount to the success of our individual associations.

At the New Jersey Association of REALTORS®, we decided to embrace technology across the board this year to keep our staff, committees, and members knowledgeable and engaged.

## Collaborative project management

Our incoming leadership wanted a way for committee chairs, vice chairs, and local board leadership teams to communicate effectively. Basecamp (basecamp.com) is a collaborative online environment that serves as a powerful project management tool. Members can create discussions, generate to-do lists, and share files and calendars. The space can be broken down by project or group and is accessible from any web browser, and from iOS and Android devices.



## Easier meeting minutes

Committee meetings serve as the brain trusts for the progression of each respective arm of our association. After a committee meets, the attending division officer, chair, or vice chair submits an online meeting minutes form through Wufoo (wufoo.com).

Leadership receives the minutes via e-mail so they can stay abreast of the many moving parts of the association.

## Online committee documents

A big hurdle we overcame last year was the cumbersome dissemination of important documents to committee members. When a member was part of a committee, they used to be e-mailed all of the corresponding documentation such as agendas, minutes, and items to be reviewed for discussion. E-mail proved to be too inconsistent and unreliable, as well as inconvenient. As a result, we had our technology department create a back-end system on our website that allows staff to upload necessary documents for committee meetings and send customizable notifications to members when new resources are added. Since it is fed from our customer relationship management platform, committee rosters are always current.

These are just some of the platforms we've started using at the association to make it easier for everyone to work on association-related business. What have you implemented lately?



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## Protect Members and Consumers from Housing Scams

Online housing scams are persistent. After years of news reports alerting consumers to never wire money to rent a home they've seen only in photos online, they still do. News reports of families now homeless after being scammed out of a deposit are not only still prevalent but increasing, law enforcement agencies say.

"More needs to be done to protect people from online housing scams," says Jessica Perry, association executive of the Greater Manchester/Nashua Board of REALTORS®. "At least once a month we receive a call from a frustrated member who has experienced some sort of Internet scam involving their property listings," she says. "They have contacted the MLS, Federal Trade Commission, Internet Crime Complaint Center, and the proper authorities, but they really feel that they have no effective recourse to address the issue."

There are countless ways that scammers and con artists (many based outside of the United States) try to cheat people when it comes to homes and property.

The most common property scam involves scammers taking legitimate property listings along with photos from websites including realtor.com® and Trulia and repost-

ing them on sites such as Craigslist for rent or for sale at a much lower price. Scammers will typically make up a plausible story that requires the consumer to wire or mail them money without ever meeting in person. The problem comes when all the renters try to move in and discover the property was never the landlord's to rent in the first place. Other swindles occur when the scammer rents a house or apartment with the intention of re-renting it to dozens of people.

Many REALTOR® associations use social media to alert members when a scam is spotted in the area. Other associations, including New Orleans and Toledo, post information on their websites for members and consumers, educating them about how the most common scams operate. The National Association of REALTORS® has a video ([realtor.org/videos/how-to-protect-your-property-listings-from-rental-scams](http://realtor.org/videos/how-to-protect-your-property-listings-from-rental-scams)) that walks members through setting up technology tools (including Google Alerts) to proactively track listings and protect photos from being lifted.

For more information on housing scams, visit [www.usa.gov/topics/consumer/scams-fraud/family-home-community/rental-fraud.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/topics/consumer/scams-fraud/family-home-community/rental-fraud.shtml).

## RPR® Data Fuels Neighborhood Profiles

Even local real estate pros may not know every neighborhood in their city. That's why the St. Louis Association of REALTORS® launched a new interactive neighborhood profile application on its consumer-facing website ([stlhomeresource.com](http://stlhomeresource.com)) powered by information from the REALTORS Property Resource®.

"Members use the tool to learn about different neighborhoods they were not previously fully aware of and get to know yet another neighborhood that could have their clients' dream home," says Lauren Smith, the association's director of marketing and communications.

The online tool features drill-down maps of St. Louis and its 79 neighborhoods and surrounding counties featuring profiles of 91 municipalities and 9 unincorporated areas. Click on any neighborhood for information about the median home value and neighborhood population. Then drill deeper for a printable multipage report including a trove of other statistics, such as the population of children by age group, household income, occupational categories, average commute times, and even presidential voting patterns.

Before the online tool launched, the association used RPR® data to create neighborhood profiles in its print magazine. "In each magazine feature we mention that RPR® is the source of the data and that it's a database members receive at no cost," says Smith. "Due to that partnership, I think RPR's credibility among our members is quite high."

Smith credits the magazine profiles with increased member engagement with the publication. "I've received feedback from members asking me to feature their neighborhood or a neighborhood that they're very familiar with next." Visit the St. Louis neighborhood interactive tool online at [stlhomeresource.com/whystl/map-of-st-louis](http://stlhomeresource.com/whystl/map-of-st-louis).



# Successful Programs

Consumer Outreach: Enhancing the REALTOR® Image



## Meeting ADA Requirements with GRI Course Sign Language Interpreters

The Oklahoma Association of REALTORS® is helping Courtney Gentry, a REALTOR® from Oklahoma City, receive GRI training by providing two American Sign Language interpreters throughout the courses. Gentry first inquired whether the GRI training would be held online with captions so she could follow along. But that option was not available. Gentry was still interested in taking the courses, so the association went to work finding the right solution for her to participate.



Courtney Gentry (far right), managing broker of Dragonfly Realty & Management LLC, expects to earn her GRI designation in June aided by a sign language interpreter provided by the Oklahoma Association of REALTORS®.

“When Courtney reached out to us, we immediately began researching different options so we could assist her,” said Lisa Noon, OAR’s CEO. “We believe it is important for all of our members, no matter their disability, to have the same opportunities to learn about and improve their craft.”

OAR staff found an interpretation service that was able to sign the GRI classes. Gentry, owner and managing broker of Dragonfly Realty & Management LLC, expects to earn her GRI designation in June.

As much as this is about meeting all members’ needs and being understanding and empathetic, it is also a legal requirement that associations comply with federal regulations regarding equal opportunity. According to the Americans With Disabilities Act, all public accommodations and businesses must ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal access to all the programs and services that it offers.

“Whether it is adding captions for online educational seminars or providing interpreters for the deaf, we want to make sure all our members feel supported and ready to take the next step in their careers,” OAR education coordinator Melissa Marshall said.

“I was thrilled OAR provided sign language interpreters to help me, and now I hope to educate the deaf community on real estate and show them what their options are for buying, selling, or renting a home,” Gentry said.

## REALTOR® Service Volunteer Program

Now in its 14th year, the REALTOR® Service Volunteer Program is a community outreach project of the San Mateo County Association of REALTORS® and its affiliates that provides cost-free assistance to elderly or disabled home owners and renters who lack the ability and financial resources to get general household tasks accomplished. REALTOR® volunteers donate time over a three-day period each May to turn mattresses; replace light-bulbs and smoke detector batteries; and trim shrubs, among other projects. San Mateo hopes to expand the program to even more associations in California and around the nation.

Consumer Outreach: Enhancing the REALTOR® Image



## Association Enhances New Library with Welcoming Outdoor Space

Richmond, Maine, is an idyllic New England village—but its public library was in a sorry state of disrepair. So when the town rebuilt it last fall, the local 213-member Merrymeeting Board of REALTORS® stepped forward with a Placemaking Grant from the National Association of REALTORS® to build an attractive new reading garden next to the library. The Merrymeeting board donated \$500 of its own funds for the project and received \$2,200 in grant funds to create the outdoor space, which includes a large stone patio. An additional grant from the Lowe’s Community Foundation helped with the cost of the pavers, and installation labor was donated by a local landscaping company. “The REALTOR® community will be hands-on involved in the spring planting,” says Patti Lawton, a member of the association’s board of directors. For more on using Placemaking Grants for your association projects, follow the Spaces to Places blog at [spacestoplaces.blogs.realtor.org](http://spacestoplaces.blogs.realtor.org).

## St. Louis Association Responds to Ferguson Unrest with Innovative Fair Housing Campaign

As the nation was gripped by news of the violence that followed the Ferguson, Mo., shooting last summer, relief for the riot-torn suburb of St. Louis came from the local REALTOR® organization. The 6,600-member St. Louis Association of REALTORS® first

spelling out the importance of integrated communities, maintaining home values in a crisis, and fostering fair housing in the St. Louis metro area. In January, SLAR held a standing-room-only town hall forum called “STL 20/20: Perfect Vision,” the first in a series of four planned for the year.

Focused on how the crisis in Ferguson would affect St. Louis and its housing market, the event featured a panel of professionals from non-profits dedicated to diversity, stable communities, and home ownership. Panel members discussed fair housing laws and resources, local programs that promote a better St. Louis, and how to navigate difficult client conversations regarding race, discrimination, and racial residential segregation.

“St. Louis has a sad history of legislative actions and other systemic issues that encouraged racial isolationism,” says Dawn Kennedy, CEO of the association. “We cannot erase the past, but we can change the future.”

The next event in the meeting series will revolve around Spanish Lake, a local community devastated by white flight.

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of St. Louis are leading diversity efforts, visit [stlrealtors.com/fergusonimpact](http://stlrealtors.com/fergusonimpact).



Conrad



Hultz

## NAR Debuts New Award for Young AE Leaders

Two REALTOR® association executives were awarded the inaugural AE Leaders of Tomorrow Young Professionals Award from the National Association of REALTORS® during the 2015 AE Institute held March 13 to March 16 in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Ryan T. Conrad, RCE, CAE, ePRO, CEO of the Greater Lehigh Valley Association of REALTORS®, Pa., and Tessa Hultz, RCE, CAE, ePRO, CEO of the Raleigh Regional Association of REALTORS®, N.C., were recognized for fostering greater involvement and increased professionalism among AEs 40 and younger, providing greater exposure and awareness of REALTOR® association management as a career to attract young executives to the profession, and promoting young member involvement at all three levels of the REALTOR® organization.

Know an inspirational young AE? Award criteria and nomination forms are available on [realtor.org](http://realtor.org) or contact Courtney Wilson, [cwilson@realtors.org](mailto:cwilson@realtors.org), 312-329-5972.



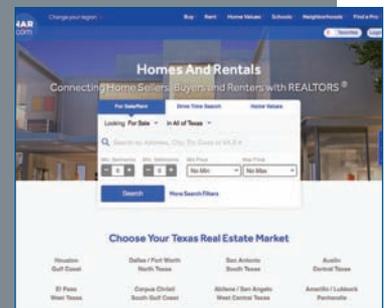
REALTORS® attend a meeting at the St. Louis Association of REALTORS® conference center to discuss the impact of unrest in Ferguson.

helped with deliveries of basic supplies to the residents of Ferguson. Then they sought to replace fear with information by using a \$5,000 Diversity Grant from the National Association of REALTORS® to launch a widespread educational campaign, beginning a dialogue about the need for fair housing practices.

The centerpiece of the effort is a brochure for SLAR members, their clients, home owners, and other stakeholders,

## HAR.com, Houston's Listing Portal, Goes Statewide

The Houston Association of REALTORS®' property portal, HAR.com, began using ListHub to receive listings from other Multiple Listing Services in the state, establishing it as a statewide listing portal. Until now, agents from other markets could put their properties on the site but they had to become members of the Houston association to do so, association President and CEO Bob Hale told the *Houston Chronicle*. Now, all REALTORS® in Texas can use the popular HAR.com platform for free. The decision to go statewide was driven in part by competition from Zillow, said Hale, noting that HAR.com is owned and controlled by REALTORS®, does not contain FSBO listings or property estimates, complies with the Realty Alliance Fair Display Guidelines, and sends all leads to the listing broker and agent.



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## Association Defeats Transfer Tax Proposed for High-End Properties

In a campaign involving volunteer and professional phone banks, online advertising, yard signs, direct mailings, and door-to-door work, the Beverly Hills/Greater Los Angeles



Association of REALTORS® soundly defeated a proposed transfer tax increase on properties worth more than \$1 million in Santa Monica. The proposed tax would have put the sole burden of funding the municipality's affordable housing efforts on property owners. With a major Issues Mobilization Grant from NAR, as well as significant support from the California Association and other local associations, the 7,000-member association prevented the proposed tax hike from becoming law, setting the stage to defeat similar proposals in other California cities. "Our hope is that [legislators] will find

a permanent funding source for affordable housing that will spread the burden throughout the greater community," says James Litz, the association's government affairs director. "When they do, we'll support it." Read more at the REALTOR® Party Success Stories page, [realtoractioncenter.com/realtor-party/tools-and-resources/mrp/success-stories.html](http://realtoractioncenter.com/realtor-party/tools-and-resources/mrp/success-stories.html).

## Arizona Fights Multilicensing Requirement

Some towns in Arizona have developed a new revenue source: requiring real estate professionals to apply for business licenses in order to work with buyers or sellers within their boundaries. These municipalities are requiring additional licenses despite the fact that each real estate agent is licensed by the Arizona Department of Real Estate and licensed by the municipality where their physical place of business is located. In response, the Arizona Association of REALTORS® launched a campaign to support Senate Bill 1368, which would prohibit cities from forcing a business license requirement on agents if they are licensed in another Arizona city and also are licensed by the Arizona Department of Real Estate.

## Association Defeats Wave of Questionable Rental Ordinances

The Akron Cleveland Association of REALTORS® tapped into NAR's Land Use Initiative to help fight troubling and overly restrictive rental housing proposals in two communities. The association brought the proposed laws, which included provisions banning renting to anyone who had engaged in "neighborhood integrity violations," to the LUI for legal review. The resulting analysis made convincing arguments against the ordinances and got the proposals tabled in one jurisdiction and referred back to committee in the other. Read more at the REALTOR Party Success Stories page, [realtoractioncenter.com/realtor-party/tools-and-resources/mrp/success-stories.html](http://realtoractioncenter.com/realtor-party/tools-and-resources/mrp/success-stories.html).

## REALTORS® in Chicago Suburbs Adopt Ratings Platform

The Mainstreet Organization of REALTORS® began offering its members a customer service satisfaction platform in February designed to help enhance their performance and professionalism, said the 15,000-member association in a statement.

Mainstreet was one of the participants in the National Association of REALTORS® pilot program of the platform last year through a partnership with Quality Service Certification Inc., a third-party customer satisfaction and performance evaluation service for the real estate industry.

Preferring to call it a customer satisfaction platform—instead of the more controversial "rating" or "ranking" label—Mainstreet says the tool enables members to provide better service and become better agents by listening to customer feedback.

"In today's highly competitive real estate market, it's all about consumers and their experiences with agents," MORE CEO Pam Krieter said in a statement. "Agents need to know what they did well during transactions, what could be improved, and how to manage their online reputations."

The RealSatisfied platform sends customer satisfaction surveys to home buyer and seller clients on behalf of REALTORS® at the close of transactions. It then allows MORE members to publish client recommendations on their own websites, share those recommendations automatically to [realtor.com](http://realtor.com)® and to their social networks, and provide third-party validation of customer satisfaction.

"As an organization, we want to be known as an industry leader for our investments in tools that help our members evaluate their performances," said Krieter.

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### In Memoriam:

## John J. "Mike" Bernardo

John J. "Mike" Bernardo, former executive officer of the Pennsylvania Association of Realtors from 1969 until his retirement in 1994, died Saturday Feb. 14 at the age of 82.

## Tommie Jackson

The former executive officer of the Atlanta Board of REALTORS® and a 1993 Magel Award recipient, Tommie Jackson, CAE, died Jan. 17 at age 94. She served the Atlanta board for more than 54 years. In 1989, the association's board of directors named the REALTORS® building in her honor: The Atlanta Board of REALTORS® Tommie Jackson Building.

## Andy Rapattoni

The founder and CEO of the Rapattoni Corporation, a real estate associations and MLS software provider, Andy Rapattoni, died April 8 at age 75 from complications following surgery.

# From the Bottom Line to the Digital Dotted Line

Electronic forms and signatures help associations provide financial and legal benefits

Many real estate associations provide digital signature tools and electronic forms to help their members get ahead, be more efficient, and close more deals. These tools provide critical benefits but also compliance and legal protection. This article outlines key features and protections that associations can provide members with digital signature tools and electronic forms.

## Signed, sealed, delivered

By using digital signatures and electronic forms, agents and brokers can create systems and procedures to clearly define the steps of a transaction and capture crucial information to ensure legal and policy compliance. These are vital touch points for, among other reasons, the legal protections they convey.

When we capture a digital signature, it brings along with it a variety of key details about the transaction itself. Using a product such as zipLogix Digital Ink® provides the complete DNA for each signature, including

Although many use the terms digital and electronic signatures interchangeably, the digital variety offers much more information, security, and legal protection than its electronic counterpart.

the time stamp. It also permanently attaches the signature to the document itself. If there is any future legal action, this connection is key to verifying the validity of all information involved.

It's also important to distinguish the difference between digital and electronic signatures. Although many use the term interchangeably, the digital variety offers much more information, security, and legal protection than its electronic counterpart. Digital signatures are embedded into documents, ensuring that they can not be changed or separated. By contrast, many of the paid and free e-signature solutions often lack these same legal protections. An electronic signature is any signature that is in electronic form as opposed to paper-based ink signatures. For example, a scanned image of an ink signature, a hand-signature created on a tablet using a stylus, or even a video signature. By contract, a digital signature is an encryption process for demonstrating the authenticity of a digital message or document.

## Getting into form

The other crucial legal and compliance impact that digital tools can have is ensuring that forms are updated, completed, and filed the right way, every time. As an association executive, you want to know your agent and broker members are using the right, most up-to-date forms for all transactions. As local, state and federal regulations change, the verification is becoming increasingly complex, making the automation of this process more important than ever.

At zipLogix, ensuring that the right forms are updated is done largely through our



vast network of legal licensing agreements. For associations, this is an essential point of connectivity between the compliance side and the membership side. The right tools enable associations to take a strong supporting role, helping their members stay at the center of transactions and their broker members in the compliance driver's seat.

## Preserve and protect

Security is always a key issue when choosing the right tool provider. Your partners should use redundant servers and follow best practices for information security. They should also guarantee that your data—and, most important, your members' data—will never be sold.

Also, consider the strength and stability of your digital partners. If they go out of business, are there protections in place to ensure your members' archived documents are secure and accessible? Working with technology partners that are part of the real estate industry means that you know your data, forms, and signatures will be safe, secure, and there when you need them most.



**Lisa Mihelcich** is COO of zipLogix and a licensed real estate agent. Contact her at 866-693-6767 or LMihelcich@ziplogix.com.

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Pictured: Other outstanding entries in the 12th REALTOR® Association Website Contest.



# Best of the Web

Great websites are born from a clear purpose.

**P**urpose is the focus of the 2015 Outstanding REALTOR® Association Website Contest: What is the purpose of your association website? What need are you trying to fill?

For many associations, and especially our winners, redefining the purpose of their web presence led them to remove the clutter and focus on a singular objective.

It starts with the members. Through surveys, work groups, focus groups, retreats, and other dialogue, associations asked members what they wanted. Through usage analytics, they tracked members' actions.

Members want a user-friendly public property search and somewhere to refer clients for area information, contest entrants said. They want a calendar of events, easy class registration, local market data, forms, and searchable member profiles—and all of it mobile-ready.

The strong request to provide property and consumer

information (and, in many cases, combine the association site and the MLS site) was surprising, many entries noted, because their sites had been mainly association-focused. They were reluctant to push association products and services to the background. Yet the choice became: Attract members with what they want while still making association information available, or see site visits (along with your value proposition) continue to drop.

The three winning sites (in no particular order here) display purpose, but, coincidentally, three different purposes. They have a clear objective, and their sites meet that objective with effective architecture, design, and content.

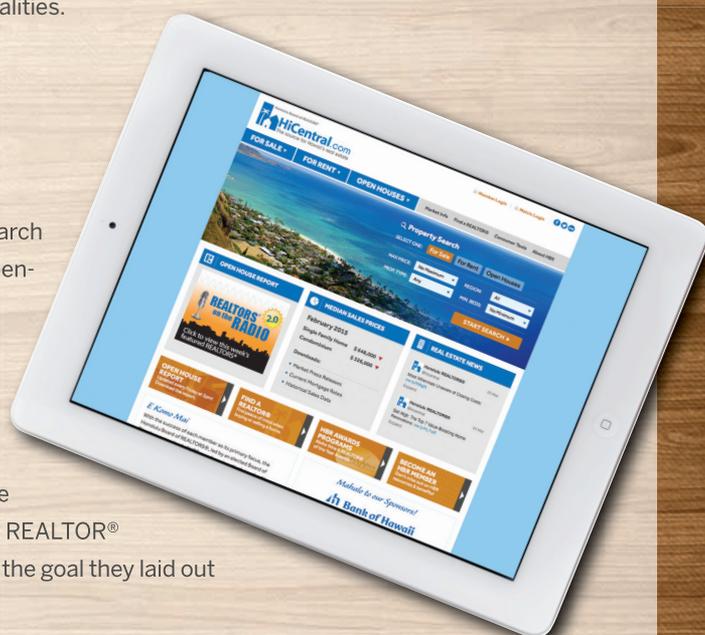
Judges were impressed with the way associations have overall uncluttered, streamlined, and simplified their web presence.

Visit these sites online to experience their winning qualities.

## Honolulu Board of REALTORS® hicalentral.com

**Mission:** Have the most comprehensive and up-to-date property search allowing prospective home buyers and renters to easily plan their open-house visits and search by island, neighborhood, new listings, and more—whether using a laptop, tablet, or smartphone.

**From the judges:** “The association nailed its story by showing the beauty of the island, which is what their members are selling. I found myself actually looking for property in Hawaii. The mobile site is set up very well. I don’t see much content really geared toward the REALTOR® members (education, RPAC, professional standards), but that is not the goal they laid out in the site. They wanted a consumer site, and they achieved that.”





## Oregon Association of REALTORS® oregonrealtors.org

**Mission:** Communicate information and resources to members and to secondary audiences of local associations and consumers. Make an online repository of tools to enable members to help themselves at their own convenience, and think about the needs of the customers to align the site architecture with their most frequently requested information.

**From the judges:** "This is a members' site first and foremost. Extremely well-organized and very user-friendly. I found the content right where I thought I would. Data is very fresh and the calendar at the top of the page is great, very timely. It really captured the broad state focus while sharing local information where needed and pulling it all together in a concise package. Good use of video enhancements."

## Knoxville Area Association of REALTORS® kaarmls.com

**Mission:** Effectively communicate with members, whether in regard to their day-to-day business or services that the association can provide, such as education, MLS, professional standards, and much more. Although members' business is the primary focus, recognize the role the association and its members play in the community. Highlight community involvement, RPAC, and all other ongoing major news and events by incorporating these on the home page so that members are reminded to help serve the community.

**From the judges:** "The website offers an outstanding user experience. The wallpaper is consistent throughout the website and is aesthetically balanced and pleasing. Clean, simplistic, and focused. Interesting shift away from consumer-focused to more member-focused with more emphasis placed on community outreach from NAR while still delivering valuable consumer content. Valuable, accessible content overall. There seems to be something for all REALTORS® who might visit the website. The navigation menus are consistently placed and understandable. You get what you want with only one click."



Twenty-eight REALTOR® associations entered the 2015 Outstanding REALTOR® Association Website Contest. Judges included REALTOR® AE magazine's editorial board and staff from the National Association of REALTORS®.



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# Website Remodel

How to build a better online home for members and consumers.



We started by sketching out the site with a simple pencil and paper.

How do we show value to members, paint a picture of better careers through education, and tell the story and power of the REALTOR® Party?

"We need a better website!"

The renovation of our Birmingham Association of REALTORS® Web presence in 2014 set out to deliver to members a comprehensive member information site offering access to an up-to-date property search. Here's how we did it.

## Stage 1: Purpose

The first part of our redesign process was learning what members cared about and tracking their activity online. We gathered a small task force of tech-savvy members to give feedback on what our current website was doing well or doing badly. Did they like the content? Could they find events easily?

We asked what content they wanted and what

the site should do for them. Did they want content focused on them and their business or content that they could share with consumers and clients? They wanted both. We saw that our new website needed not only to reach our members but also to provide trusted industry content for consumers.

When it came to consumers, the task force members said they wanted a clear and easy path to listings as a primary focus, and then to finding REALTORS®.

Since the cost of the new website was shared by the association and the MLS, we wanted to drive traffic to our public-facing MLS site, Greater Alabama MLS. Plus, our analytics showed that the top search for site visitors was "Birmingham REALTOR," so we could safely assume that there were consumers landing on our association site wanting to search listings.

For member content, the task force said the main focus should be events, and then what the

An advantage of WordPress is that it is "mobile first," meaning it looks and works great on smartphones and tablets, so we don't need an app or a mobile version of our site.



# Introducing the MLS Tax Suite

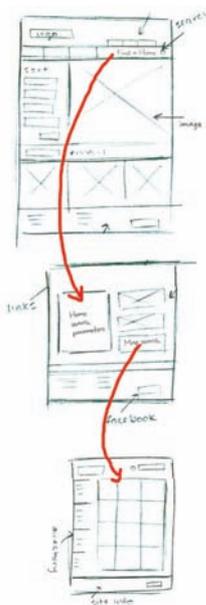
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*Meet us at booth #315 at the REALTORS® Legislative Meetings & Trade Expo*

Rather than planning the design, we planned the interaction with the site we wanted the members to have. Interaction design focuses on creating engaging websites with the understanding of how users might interact with it. Mapping the route (pictured below) you expect users to take to get to a particular destination is one aspect.



association was doing on members' behalf in the community and legislatively. News is a dominant feature on our new site. We also added an easy sign-up for our weekly newsletter using a free app called SumoMe to manage our subscriptions, opt-outs, and distribution.

Next, using tools such as Google Analytics, we were able to see where our users hopped on and off the site, what pages attracted views, and how long visitors stayed on these pages. Google Analytics is free and requires only a line of code in the footer of your site to begin pulling information. We learned that Facebook and Twitter were the main traffic drivers to our site. So by using social media to promote our biweekly blog posts, we saw page views increase 272 percent last year.

But an association site can't be 100 percent driven by member demand. We knew we needed to promote and feature other things, such as the REALTOR® Political Action Committee and affiliate member information. The trick was to feature them in a way that was interesting and convenient, such as through our blog articles.

## Stage 2: Building

Starting the design process can be hectic. Too many features get overbearing (and overpriced) and too little design leaves everybody feeling like they've invested in something that doesn't shine.

We started by sketching out the site with a simple pencil and paper. Knowing what you're building first will dictate the time and money you need to spend.

We chose to stick with our current platform, which is the economical WordPress, for the development of our site. WordPress is a very agile content management system with an easy-to-use back end. It's free software (although there's a small annual fee if you don't want it to place ads on your site), so unless you hire someone to design and develop your site, a small association can deploy WordPress relatively easily. We designed and built our site in-house.

Another advantage of WordPress is that it is "mobile first," meaning it looks and works great on

smartphones and tablets, so we don't need an app or a mobile version of our site.

Rather than planning the design, we planned the interaction with the site we wanted the members to have. The best website is the simplest; it maximizes readership and utility and minimizes work (work finding what you're looking for, work scrolling, and, for staff, work constantly updating).

We accomplished these goals through good pathway planning—that is, how the user will navigate through the site. We placed membership information and "Join the BAR" links on the home page under the banner graphic. We implemented the property search portal as the dominant feature on the home page, which has driven a 250 percent increase to our member MLS search.

There are other content management system solutions, of course. Platforms, such as SquareSpace, Weebly, Drupal, and others offer a wide range of features. There are even third-party companies that will link your website to your member management software, such as RAMCO or Rapattoni. This is a useful option but was out of our budget.

## Stage 3: Launch and Evaluation

After the build, you're not done; there's the user testing. We wanted to make sure our predictions were correct about where people would land, what they would read, and what they could find easily. Remember that while going into "launch mode," your website will change.

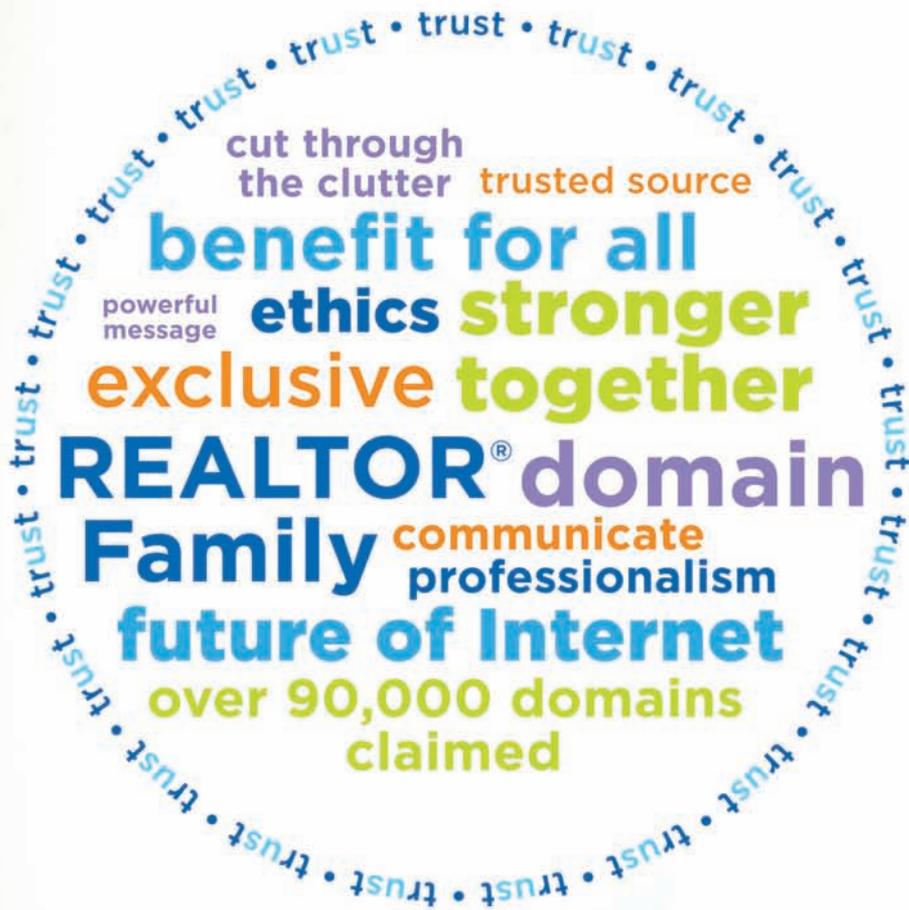
We know now that we want to boost the visibility of the blog content, and we're committed to daily online content shared several times via social networks and a bimonthly newsletter driving more traffic to our site. It's tempting to overcommit to unrealistic goals in the months following a launch. Unless you have a lot of time and a lot of material to share, it's unrealistic to try to post five times a day.

Just like when you build or buy a house, you immediately want to see where you can start adding value. Where can you improve on this investment? Websites are never finished.



By Andrew Sims,  
Communications  
Director, Birmingham  
Association of  
REALTORS®

# Your Association Can Join the Circle of Trust on May 7



# .REALTOR

We're all in this together. Our members have their **.REALTOR** web addresses — now you can too!

Launching to Associations on May 7 at 10:00 a.m. CST  
Learn more at [www.about.REALTOR/associations](http://www.about.REALTOR/associations)



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association  
**Café**

A Social Networking Space for Members . . . That's Not Online



**W**ould members want to come to our association office to drink coffee and check their e-mail?

We asked ourselves this question when we were designing our new Scottsdale Association of REALTORS® building and wondered whether we should include a space for members to network or do business with free Wi-Fi.

“After lengthy strategic planning discussions with our facilities task force about what an association headquarters should be, we knew we wanted members to enjoy the space we were building,” notes Rebecca Grossman, the association’s president and CEO. The planning group talked about a traditional business center but decided that a space with a coffeehouse feel would be better received and give members an even greater sense that the association’s investment in a new building was for them. A Wi-Fi café seemed like the perfect way to accomplish this goal.

### Why a Wi-Fi café?

In the days when deals are done at Starbucks and real estate agents use their offices (if they even have one) less and less, we felt there was a great opportunity for a REALTOR® organization to become a part of members’ everyday work routine.

The new Wi-Fi café in our building features a variety of comfortable seating options, including bar stools, couches, and tables. Soft music plays from the speakers, and anyone is welcome to lounge (or work) in the space. There’s also a patio with seating and TVs, and visitors can buy fresh food and coffee.

Similarly, the Fort Collins Board of REALTORS® in Colorado offers a coffeehouse feel in its headquarters. CEO Clint Skutchan says that members use the association space instead of the crowded Starbucks next door. In addition to free Wi-Fi and a single-cup coffee brewer, the Fort Collins Board also offers free wireless printing in the space.

We believe that SAAR will greatly benefit by having an inviting space where members like to hang out. Members bring their own portable wireless devices and relax there before and after classes and meetings.

The space is in the lobby and members joke that we “have a bar in the lobby.” It’s the first thing

you see when you walk in, and it’s been great for connecting with members. It reinforces to the members the value they receive for their dues.

There are also more tangible benefits, such as increased foot traffic to our retail store and more exposure for classes or other non-dues sources of revenue. We use digital signage to promote classes, events, and calls for action.

And it’s not just for members. I have meetings with staff and members in the café instead of in my office, and often you can find me working there on my laptop.

### Saving money and making money with a café

Offering coffee and setting up a sound system to create a nice vibe may seem costly, but when compared with the purchase and maintenance of computers in a business center or computer lab, it is surprisingly affordable. Plus, having a space that members will actually use and feel good about means more people in the door and more exposure to your services.

A Wi-Fi café can be a source of revenue and a savings. For example, we just signed on with a vendor partner that will sell fresh food and coffee any time the association headquarters is open. We’ll get a percentage of revenue from this arrangement. We’ll also have a liquor license through this vendor so we can host after-hour socials without having to rent a space and pay the inflated bar prices of a hotel or other facility.

Although we haven’t yet, we could also sell advertising space on any TVs in the lounge area. Devices such as Google’s Chromecast and Samsung’s SMART Signage TV are surprisingly affordable ways to customize the content of TVs and displays. We could also sell space on the screen visitors see when they first log into the Wi-Fi.

We’re developing social events to introduce members to the space, such as a First Fridays at SAAR open to all members to network and get to know the staff. Our YPN has a class running from 1 to 4 p.m. with a happy hour in the café afterward.

Although we’ve been open just a short time, so far there have been no complaints. Everyone is ecstatic and we love having a space for the whole community.

### Affordable Wi-Fi

We worried that offering members free Wi-Fi in our café would slow down our staff connection and be expensive. But using OpenMesh, a low-cost, cloud-managed guest network system, the Internet connection for staff is sectioned off into a secure private network. Visitors to the building can connect to the guest network customizable with a branded login page. Depending on how many people are logged on and how fast your Internet connection is, you most likely won’t notice slowdowns for your staff when members use the Wi-Fi, yet you can limit the bandwidth (reserving the fastest speeds for staff and ensuring members aren’t using your Wi-Fi to download movies).



By Amanda Sue Piltz,  
Communications  
Director, Scottsdale  
Association of  
REALTORS®

# Are You Using Facebook Effectively?

The challenge with Facebook doesn't stop with writing and regularly posting fresh content.

To use Facebook effectively, associations must understand the platform's ever-changing policies and features. It's no wonder full-time social media specialists are not uncommon among association staff today.

Facebook is a strong traffic driver to association websites and listing portals, and, overall, it's a good way to communicate with members, representatives of a cross-section of associations said in a recent *REALTOR® AE* magazine survey. Yet, associations have experienced changes in their ability to reach members via Facebook as its business model shifts and members' use of the social media site evolves.

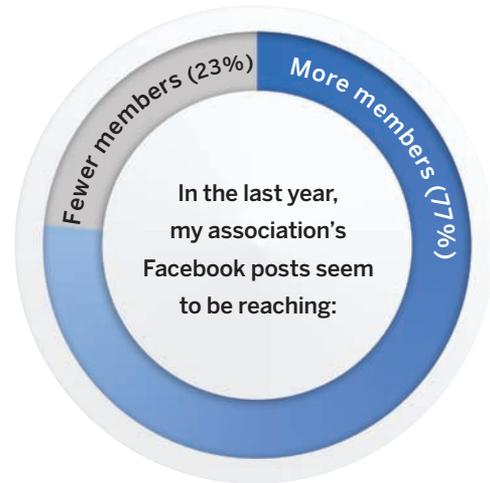
In January, Facebook strengthened a push that began in 2013 to limit distribution of promotional posts from businesses, which includes associations, nonprofits, charities, and societies. This means your association's promotions on Facebook (buy a ticket, attend our event, take our class, and so on) are most likely filtered out of members' news feeds. Even if 1,000 members "like" your association page, your posts are reaching

only a small fraction of members, according to a Forrester Research report from January. Forrester, the technology and market research company, found posts by well-known brands (those with more than 500,000 likes) on Facebook reach only about 2 percent of their fans and followers and that the average is much lower for small businesses. Even when your posts are shared by individual members, Facebook is still likely to filter them out.

Why is Facebook filtering your news feed? It's estimated that the typical user would get 1,500 posts in his or her news feed every day if there were no filtering. Facebook filters this average to about 300, prioritizing the family, friends, and pages you interact with most. Facebook says its goal is to give users what they've asked for, which their surveys show is to read stories from family and friends, not businesses they've liked.

As a result of filtering, many associations have turned to buying advertising and boosted posts on Facebook to reach members and consumers. *RAE's* survey shows that of the associations that have purchased advertising on Facebook, 43 percent say they seem to help the association reach more members; yet 12 percent say their ads didn't seem to help boost their reach at all.

Forty-five percent of the survey respondents haven't tried advertising on Facebook, possibly because it can be confusing. First you select the audience you want to reach



such as by age, location, and interests (such as real estate, if users declared their interests on Facebook), and by a number of other categories. There are also "custom audiences" you can create by giving Facebook your membership e-mail or phone list. Facebook will try to match that data with Facebook users. You can also direct your ads to just those who have liked your page.

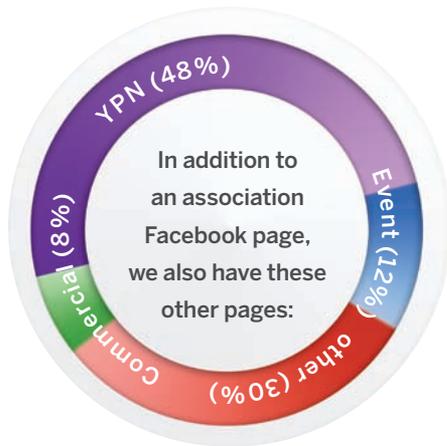
Next comes cost. Here's where it gets tricky. Your ad competes with others to get on your audience's news feed. Facebook will not include your ad on your audience's news feed if other businesses pay more to get there. It's an ad auction. You choose your maximum budget (most associations report spending between \$11 and \$50 every month on Facebook ads); then Facebook "bids on your behalf to reach your audience and make your ads as effective as possible," it says in its advertising overview. As your ad reaches your audience, your budget is spent. You may reach many people or just a few depending on how many other advertisers wanted to reach the same person—yes, you're competing with Amazon.com and Zillow, here. You can track your ad's effectiveness on an analytics dashboard.

"It seems as if I was getting more engagement with our Facebook posts before we ever paid to boost a post. Now that Facebook knows we've paid before, it's like the posts receive much less engagement so that they can force us to pay again," says one survey respondent, echoing several others' suspicions of the platform's reach algorithm.

"We advertise to underscore our core



*REALTOR® AE* magazine conducted an online survey of association executives and staff in March about their Facebook usage. 53 associations completed the survey.



In addition to an association Facebook page, we also have these other pages:

◀ Other responses include Facebook pages for consumers, charity, RPAC, advocacy, and members by region.

dar, office meetings, e-mails, Twitter, MLS message of the day and more, so members can see it on the communication tool they use the most,” says one survey respondent.

Overall, associations’ view of Facebook was summed up in this response: “We’re struggling to use Facebook to convey important information. It works well for events and photos, but not for critical information and association updates. Not enough members see the posts without [our] paying for ads.”

“Facebook has allowed us to help brand ourselves as an information resource for members and as a high-tech association that is reaching outside the box to reach our members.”

—AE SURVEY RESPONDENT

### Do you need a Facebook group?

The newest Facebook change to wrap your head around is the power of Facebook groups.

Forty-three percent of associations surveyed said they have created groups for their members, such as YPN, GRI graduates, regional groups, MLS, advocacy, and others. Members often create and monitor their own discussion groups, and association staff are often members (your association page can’t interact with groups directly; only individuals can). The benefit of a group or being a member of a group is that your posts aren’t filtered out; they are only monitored by the group administrator who can delete or edit them.



My association posts to Facebook:

Red bar = Other, 2%

Unfortunately, most associations (61 percent) say their groups are just “somewhat” active, and 40 percent say their groups aren’t active at all. Yet that could begin to change.

Groups have become so popular overall that Facebook spun them off into a stand-alone mobile app in late 2014. Now your members can use their phones to access just their groups—not their news feed—with an app called Facebook Groups, designed to make interacting with groups easier.

Another plus for association groups is a feature of the Groups app that recommends groups to users based on their current ones and other factors, which may boost your group’s potential reach.

In addition to building group activity, Ogilvy & Mather, the international advertising, marketing, and public relations firm, recommends these strategies for staying relevant on Facebook: 1. Subdivide your current audience (into, say, leadership, socially active members, thought leaders, and so on) and target paid ads to them, track the effectiveness, and retool ads as necessary; 2. Publish fewer but better targeted posts and vary images and time of posting; 3. Establish an editorial (not promotional) focus to content creation.

Like everything else on Facebook, the rules and policies surrounding new features and groups could change without warning. REALTOR® associations on Facebook overall advocate a diverse approach to member communication.

By Carolyn Schwaar

value and role in advocacy for home owners and private property rights,” says one survey respondent. Several others mentioned legislative advocacy as the main focus for paid ads and boosted posts. The Nevada Association of REALTORS®, for example, used an Issues Mobilization Grant from National Association of REALTORS® in part to fund a Facebook video ad advocating the defeat of a state tax on businesses. The ad received 11.7 million impressions (there are only about 3 million people in Nevada) and 1.2 million video plays. In the end, 78 percent of Nevada voters weighed in against the tax.

### Promotional posts versus informational posts

How does Facebook know whether your posts are promotional or informational? It won’t say, exactly. Recipients who click on the “I don’t want to see this” button on the top of your post may report it as spam, which will lower your reach for all posts, but there are other factors in Facebook’s reach algorithm, including how many recipients click on your post.

Even though all associations reported that they are investing the same amount of time or more in Facebook posting as a year ago, only 4 percent say it’s the best way to communicate with members. Direct e-mail blasts are the most effective tool, say 51 percent of survey respondents (e-mail newsletters came in second place at 24 percent).

“Facebook alone is not enough. We try to have every avenue of communication available for our members: website, calen-

# Countdown to Compliance

Associations meet the challenge of Core Standards.

More than 25 small local associations in Missouri participated in a statewide strategic planning session facilitated by Malcolm Young, former CEO for the Louisiana Association of REALTORS®.

It has been a year of positive change for associations since the Core Standards were implemented in May 2014. Associations have boosted participation in public outreach activities—from charity drives and community beautification to housing fairs and media engagement. They've updated their web presence, strengthened financial oversight, and heightened political awareness. Many associations have a strategic plan for the first time and many others have established shared services programs with neighboring boards. As of the end of March, there have been 37 mergers involving 84 associations, and association executives have increased their own expertise through professional development education.

"REALTOR associations have stepped up and accomplished tremendous things in the last year and the organization is stronger for it," says Jarrod Grasso, CEO of the New Jersey REALTORS® and chair of the AE Committee. "Many who viewed Core Standards as the proverbial mountain to climb just a year ago now realize that they were already providing most, if not all, of the services required to meet the standards."

All that's left now for many associations is to certify their Core Standards compliance through the online compliance tool. More than 1,000 associations have started the compliance process and submitted their affidavits and examples, and many have already been certified. The deadline to certify is June 30.

The compliance aspect of the standards is rooted in trust more than proof, as stated

in the Core Standards online guidance: "It's important to keep in mind throughout the process that trust—at all levels of the REALTOR® organization—is essential to successful implementation of this effort. The profession itself exists on trust. Clients and customers trust the REALTORS® they work with. REALTORS® need to—and do—trust each other. Associations rely on the word of their members. Members need to be able to rely on what their association tells them. The representations made via the compliance database will be attested to by each local association's elected president and president-elect (or equivalent officers) as well as by the association's chief staff. Except in the most unusual circumstances, their assurance that the information shared via the compliance database is truthful and accurate to the best of their knowledge should be sufficient 'proof.'"

As with any multistep process, there have been common questions regarding the compliance tool. Here are some tips to help you complete the compliance certification aspect of the standards.

- Only AEs, presidents, and presidents-elect can delegate access to their association's Core Standards compliance form.
- Although access to the compliance tool form is reserved for certain people, any local or state staff person may, for the purpose of preparation, view a sample of the form here: <http://coe.realtor.org/corestand.nsf/samplecore>
- Associations are encouraged to print a hard copy of the Core Standards criteria

(<http://coe.realtor.org/corestand.nsf/samplecore>) when preparing to access and use the compliance tool.

- The compliance tool functions on these browsers: Internet Explorer 9 and later, Chrome, Firefox, and Safari. Some functionality may be lost using older versions of Internet Explorer.
- Changes made in the NRDS system (for example, to the name of the executive officer) will sync overnight and appear in the Core Standards compliance tool the next morning.
- Associations can expedite "governing documents" compliance by adopting the 2015 NAR model governing documents verbatim. If adopted, all that is needed is written confirmation with the date of adoption by the association. Access the NAR Model Bylaws at: [realtor.org/governance/governing-documents/model-bylaws-for-local-boards](http://realtor.org/governance/governing-documents/model-bylaws-for-local-boards) and Model MLS governing documents at: [realtor.org/policy/mls-policy/model-mls-governing-documents](http://realtor.org/policy/mls-policy/model-mls-governing-documents).
- AEs and presidents need to be careful not to log in to [realtor.org](http://realtor.org) (and by extension, the compliance tool) using a NRDS ID number that has been assigned for Point-of-Entry use. Only ID numbers tied to AEs, presidents, and presidents-elect will gain access to the tool.

After June 30, 2015, the annual Core Standards cycle starts again. Find news of changes and updates in the INS e-newsletter, and consult the online Core Standards FAQ document on [realtor.org](http://realtor.org).



# WHAT'S NEW FOR ASSOCIATIONS



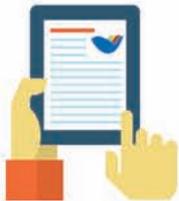
## CRISIS COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST FOR ASSOCIATIONS

A crisis can have a serious impact on your Association. Use the Crisis Communication Checklist for Associations to create a crisis communication plan or incorporate into an already existing plan.



## MARKETING MATERIALS

From web banners to flyers, it's easy to share the message of safety with your members. Use these materials on your website and in e-newsletters, share via social media or at meetings.



## WEEKLY SAFETY TIPS

Every Monday, new safety tips are shared on NAR's Facebook and Twitter accounts. Make sure you're following NAR on social media so you can easily share these tips with your members.



## SAFETY COURSE

Host "Real Estate Safety Matters: Safe Business = Smart Business"<sup>\*\*</sup> at your Association. Classroom materials provided **FREE** of charge.

You can also take the course for **FREE** at the REALTORS<sup>®</sup> Legislative Meetings & Trade Expo in Washington D.C. on Tuesday, May 12 from 12:30-3:30 pm with instructor Dale Carlton, CRS, JD.

\*presented by Center for Specialized REALTOR<sup>®</sup> Education (CSRE) and REALTOR<sup>®</sup> University

Visit [www.REALTOR.org/Safety](http://www.REALTOR.org/Safety)  
to view all these great resources and more.



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REALTORS<sup>®</sup>

# Drones: Soon, But Not Yet

Although it may only be a matter of time before we start seeing drones flying over every listing, now is not the time.

Real estate professionals may be eager to get those amazing aerial shots, but keep your members informed: It is illegal to use drones for commercial purposes (unless you have a waiver from the Federal Aviation Administration).

One REALTOR®, Douglas Trudeau with Tierra Antigua Realty in Tucson, Ariz., did receive a Section 333 waiver from the FAA in January for the purpose of real estate marketing. However, it is important to note that the waiver was issued to Mr. Trudeau, and did not mean the FAA loosened its rules concerning the commercial use of drones. Trudeau spent months of time and thousands of dollars on his waiver process. Even after securing the waiver, Trudeau is required to hire a licensed aircraft pilot to fly his drone for him since he does not yet have his pilot's license. A few aerial photography companies for real estate marketing and inspections of home exteriors, including Capital Aerial Video in Texas and FalconSkyCam in California, have also recently obtained waivers.

## Drone rules on the way

Congress tasked the FAA in 2012 with integrating the commercial use of drones into national airspace. The FAA has made major steps to achieving this directive. In February, it issued its notice of proposed rule-making on the operation and certifi-

cation of drones, but these rules have not taken effect yet.

The proposed rule focuses on three main areas: operational limitations, operator certification and responsibilities, and aircraft requirements. At a high level, the proposed rule limits the unmanned aircraft to no more than 55 pounds, requires the unmanned aircraft to be registered and display markings in the largest practicable manner, and requires the operator to maintain the drone in safe condition for operation and inspect the drone before flight to ensure safe operation. The rules would further limit drone operation times to local official sunrise to sunset and to no more than 500 feet above ground level. The operator (or the visual observer where one is used) would be required to maintain constant visual contact with the drone without the assistance of any device. The operator of the drone also would be required to obtain an unmanned aircraft operator certificate with a drone rating.

As of today, unless a member's drone use falls within the FAA's guidelines for hobbyist or recreational use, or a Section 333 waiver has been obtained, any impermissible use of a drone could result in an enforcement action by the FAA, along with substantial fines and penalties. In fact, the FAA brought an enforcement action against one drone enthusiast and leveled a fine for the careless or reckless operation of an

unmanned aircraft (*FAA v. Pirker*). The FAA has specifically stated that commercial use includes for real estate marketing purposes.

## Drone anticipation

Soon drones may enable real estate professionals to enhance their marketing practices, particularly as they relate to uniquely suited properties, such as large farms, properties with breathtaking views, and large commercial properties.

The FAA is seeking comment on all aspects of the proposed rule and NAR will be filing a comment letter advocating for the adoption of a final rule that allows real estate professionals to use drone technology in an efficient manner, while taking into consideration the safety concerns the FAA is balancing in drafting a rule.

For now, continue to remind members that unless they have a waiver or hire a company that does, using drones for real estate marketing purposes is illegal.



**Lesley Walker** is an associate counsel at the National Association of REALTORS®. Contact her at 312-329-8834 or [walker@realtors.org](mailto:walker@realtors.org).

For the official government word on drones and updates, direct members to the FAA website at [faa.gov/news/updates/?newsId=76381](http://faa.gov/news/updates/?newsId=76381). Also, link to the [realtor.org "Field Guide to Drones and Real Estate"](http://realtor.org/field-guides/field-guide-to-drones-and-real-estate) at [realtor.org/field-guides/field-guide-to-drones-and-real-estate](http://realtor.org/field-guides/field-guide-to-drones-and-real-estate)



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# On Top of the Trends

**Tricia Thomas** on social media, RPR®, listing syndication, and Core Standards.

You're more likely to find Tricia Thomas, CEO of the Bay East Association of REALTORS®, Calif., speaking to members in the field than in her office. A frequent presenter at gatherings around the San Francisco Bay Area, Thomas addresses industry hot topics such as social media and listing syndication. Bay East has a strong track record of constantly developing and promoting new programs and services that enhance the REALTOR® image and members' ability to successfully conduct their business.

Thomas, who recently celebrated her 26th anniversary with Bay East, shares her insights into four hot topics.

**Q. Facebook is fading in popularity among small businesses. What do you think is the next platform to watch?**

A. Social media is a critical component of our member and community communications, but we don't rely solely on Facebook. We track our social media statistics to measure the level of engagement and connection on multiple channels including Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram, and make adjustments to our social media strategy. What seems to work best is continuous incorporation of creative images, videos, and recaps for various association events. We use hashtags in tweets and Instagram posts and display signage for our various social media channels in all of our communications and on the website. Finally, we analyze optimal times for posts with Hootsuite, Facebook Insights, SocialBro and SumAll.com. Our Klout score (measuring our social media influence) of 61 remains relatively high for a local association.

Social media to watch is anything mobile and livestreamed. Apps such as Periscope and Meerkat allow livestreaming of events from an iPhone. Users can engage with us and ask questions during the stream. This could be used to livestream presentations from a meeting or stream a class and post it as a webinar to the website later.

**Q. Your MLS partners with RPR. What benefit to members has this technology tool brought?**

A. Most of the members who use RPR love it, especially the mobile version. The depth of information there is outstanding. But it's not as widely used as we'd like, so we've launched a member benefit campaign to promote it through videos, webinars, live classes, presentations at office meetings and marketing meetings, and website features.

**Q. What percent of members are concerned with how their listings are displayed online?**

A. Our members will pay more attention to this issue after the effects of ListHub no longer feeding MLS data to Trulia and Zillow really sinks in. In speaking with brokers and agents, I've found that the vast majority are not clear on the terms of the syndication agreements they signed with the major listing portals. When I explain that they're allowing the portals to resyndicate listings, create derivative products, and sell leads, members are shocked. When brokers and agents go directly to the syndicator and accept unfavorable terms, it compromises our ability to protect members' rights. When



associations and MLSs engage in syndication negotiations with listing portals, they can take advantage of the collective bargaining power of multiple brokers representing thousands of listings.

**Q. You served on the 2014 AEC work group tasked with developing resources to help associations meet the Core Standards. What's your impression of the first cycle that's almost complete?**

A. My association is located in a large metropolitan area that has 14 local associations, and I frequently heard REALTORS® talk about how frustrating it is to move from one association to another and not know what level of service to expect. There weren't consistent standards in the association environment. While I recognize that creating and implementing the Core Standards has brought considerable hardship for some associations, I've been really impressed with the commitment of associations to change. Finding the time to implement and track each of the standards added more to every AE's long list of tasks. But I think this will become easier each year. I believe that the Core Standards will achieve their goal because they have forced all of us to have a laser focus on basic services. Complying with the standards will strengthen associations and our relationship with our members.



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