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New listings caravans go virtual

Agents save time, money with online house tours

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Inman News

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Does your office dutifully pile into their cars every week to look at your company's new listings? Or are there too many listings in your service area to see them in one day? If you would like more people to see your listings and skip the hassle of having to be there to show the property, "virtual caravans" are a 21st Century solution to saving both time and gas.



I spent part of last weekend in my old stomping grounds in Brentwood and Santa Monica. The traffic was horrendous when I left back in 1997 and it is even worse now. It took almost an hour to do an eight-mile round trip from the 405 Freeway to Santa Monica and back. As I was sitting in the gridlock, it occurred to me that with all the advances in technology, there has to be a better way for agents to preview properties. This is especially a problem in metropolitan areas or in those areas where listings may be spread over a wide geographical area. When it takes 30 minutes to drive between listings, previewing and showing property is a nightmare.

Jeff Thompson, a top manager for Windermere, as well as a member of our coaching team, has come up with a great solution to this challenge. This week, Jeff's office will be doing their first "virtual caravan." Jeff's office is doing so well that seeing all the new listings on a single Tuesday caravan had become a challenge. The "virtual caravan" is a great way to circumvent all of these problems. Here's how it works.

First, many agents already pay for a 360-degree tour. If this is the case, the office can preview the property easily through this technology. In the case where the agent doesn't provide a virtual tour, the agent takes 10-15 digital pictures of the property. The administrative staff compiles all the pictures into a slide show presentation. At Jeff's Tuesday

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morning meeting, each agent will have about five minutes to "sell" the new listing to the office. Everyone at the meeting will "see" all of the new office listings.

Before implementing this system, Jeff had to cope with the sellers' expectation that agents from his office would personally preview their property. Jeff combated this by taking a picture of all the agents in his office and having it printed on a postcard. This postcard can be sent via e-mail or regular mail. The caption reads, "We visited your home today and you didn't even have to unlock your door."

Because the top producers in Jeff's office were so busy, they often had trouble getting out to see all of the new inventory. Since time is critical for this productive group, Jeff helped them make the shift to the new system by emphasizing how this will help them better utilize their time.

Although Jeff's Tuesday morning meetings will be longer, each agent in his office will pick up an additional 2-3 hours per week by not "touring" new listings. For 38 agents, that means an additional 76-114 additional hours Jeff's agents can use each week towards increasing production. That's the equivalent of having 2-3 more full-time agents working in his office.

After the Tuesday meeting, the "virtual caravan" is posted to the office intranet where the agents can review it when needed for a CMA or to "preview" the property prior to taking out a buyer.

Whether you are an agent or a manager, once you have put together a "virtual caravan," you can now begin holding "24/7 Open Houses." For example, if you have several listings in one subdivision or if there are several listings in the same location in your office, you can now post a "24/7 open house" to your individual and your company Web sites. Listings can also be arranged by price point. Web site visitors can preview properties from the convenience of their computer. Better yet, if they do contact you, the number of properties you will need to show them will be greatly reduced. These "24/7 open houses" can also be a great tool for relocation buyers since it allows the buyer to eliminate properties prior to the time they begin their search in person. Needless to say, the sellers love the idea that their house is "open" 24/7, especially if they don't have to go to the trouble of opening the front door.

While seeing a property first-hand is desirable, using a "virtual caravan" is the next best way to keep agents current on the inventory with a minimal amount of time and effort.

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