

On Becoming an e-Agent— Online Advertising at Its Best! Part 30

By Jo Becker, BA

The sales industry continues to see much activity, but I hear from colleagues that the multi-offer phenomenon has slowed from the frantic pace seen last year. Marketing properties and attracting an offer may take more work than we got used to with last year's frenzy.

In the rental market, I'm encouraged to have heard anecdotal evidence that the market is firming up after a long soft spell. This is good news for those of you who work with clients who invest in rental properties, as well as those of you who own rental properties yourself. All the same, competition is tough! Years of record sales activity have minimized the renter pool as young families and first time buyers stretched their means to get a piece of the American dream.

How can you, as a listing agent, promote your clients' properties without busting your budget? How can you and your investors maximize promotional dollars, minimize vacancies, and keep a hold on profit margins? My advice: make use of the resources readily available to you!

I would like to introduce you to HousingConnections.org. The site was created by the City of Portland to serve the metro region (including Clark County, Washington) and allows the posting of properties for rent or for sale, free of charge.

Now, in the spirit of full disclosure, let me say upfront that I service a contact with the City of Portland to spread the word about HousingConnections.org. That being said, I don't receive any commissions or kickbacks if you try the site and all use of the site is completely and wonderfully free!

One caveat: Portland created the site with an emphasis on accessible and affordable properties in mind. The rental caps run fairly close to market rate and are based on 80% or below of the region's median family income (MFI), also known as area median income (AMI). The sales cap, however, is based on the Federal Housing Administration's (FHA) maximum mortgage limits and is currently set at \$284,600.

Note that any property with accessibility features may be added to the system, regardless of sales or rent price. So, keep this resource and this article handy for just about any rental property you work with or for those listings you have that fall under \$285K; and remember that accessible properties (ranging from "Fully Accessible" to "Possibly Adaptable") trump pricing. A glossary of the accessibility terms used is available on the site.

One really neat way the site treats for sale properties is that it will include them in the search results along with for rent properties (based on the renter's estimated monthly housing budget) saying, in essence, "had you considered buying?" It's a little sneaky but I love this approach to expanding consumers' expectations!

The stats: Since its launch a couple years ago, housing providers have posted over 59,000 units for rent or for sale on HousingConnections.org. Housing consumers have performed ten times as many searches as there are properties, averaging about 4,000 searches per week. The demand is high and HousingConnections.org is a phenomenal tool for each of the audiences it serves.

Here's how it works: Point your browser to www.HousingConnections.org. Once there, RIGHT click once on the "Landlords" tab as shown below. (Note, even if you're interested in promoting property for sale, you'll want to start on the 'Landlords' tab.) Start with the section headed Registered Users Log In on the right-hand side of the 'Landlord' screen and RIGHT click on "Sign up for a free account!" Step through the subsequent screens in order to establish your account.

Once you've set up your account, you're immediately able to begin inputting properties. This is a detailed 12-step process that allows you to provide as much information as you like including

uploading floor plans, pictures, screening policies, etc. The site will automatically generate an interactive map based on the property address entered, illustrating to housing consumers where local amenities such as parks, transportation, schools, and grocery stores are located.

Once you've input one property and confirmed its information, you're free to include any additional properties you or your clients have available. Better yet, the site will send you weekly reminders to see if any information or the availability of your properties have changed and to prevent them from expiring before they are rented or sold. Another great feature, the properties are never purged from the system so if you experience a dreaded sale fail or that rental becomes available again, all you have to do is simply log in and update your posting!

If you have any questions about the site, setting up your own account and properties, or details about price caps, etc., contact the HousingConnections.org Support Line at 503/823-4141 or staff@housingconnections.org. If you would like a staff presentation on the features and use of HousingConnections.org, contact me as indicated below.

If all of this seems too overwhelming, ask for help, but keep trying! Before long you will get the hang of it. In the meantime, *hang it there!*

Jo Becker has eight years of licensed real estate experience. As a former broker, she knows how important, and sometimes scary, technology and self-promotion can be. Jo has provided personalized one-on-one marketing consultation and computer software training to the industry since 2002.

Call or write today for a free monthly eLtr offering helpful marketing hints and computing tips!

Services include relationship selling tips and techniques, data entry, software application training, custom marketing campaigns, design of collateral pieces, and website content design. 503/493-6883; JoByEmail@yahoo.com