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# Internet and Marketing: SIORs Get More Creative as Expertise Grows



*Steve Lewis is the president of Wordman, Inc., a marketing/public relations firm in Atlanta, Georgia. He served as editor of the National Real Estate Investor for eight years. He was also the real estate editor of Business Atlanta and the editorial director of the Real Estate Group of publications at Communications Channels Inc., which includes Southeast Real Estate News, Southwest Real Estate News, and Shopping Center World. His firm represents developers and contractors in the Atlanta area, and he continues to write freelance articles about the real estate industry.*

**By Steve Lewis**

It's hard now to imagine a time when there wasn't an Internet, but not too many years ago SIORs were just getting their feet wet and learning the potential of this marvelous marketing communication tool. Today, their sophistication level has grown to the point where a company or individual Web site is the bare minimum, and the variety of marketing vehicles ranges from listing networks to PDF property fliers to videos. Whatever approach they take, SIORs agree the Internet has changed the way they market themselves and their properties forever—and decidedly for the better.



"It has worked fantastically," says **Geoffrey Kasselmann**, SIOR, an industrial specialist with Op2mize in

Northbrook, Illinois, referring to his soon-to-be-updated Web site. "The reception has been phenomenal; we're growing as fast as we can comfortably grow."



"It's been really powerful—a lot better than cold calling," says **Michael K. Houge**, CCIM, SIOR, Principal,

Upland Real Estate Group, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The idea is to eliminate direct mail,” adds



**Mitchell Katz, SIOR**, with CB Richard Ellis in Saddlebrook, New Jersey. “It’s just like sending e-mail to people; you put a site up and information out there on various search engines, and you very easily get your project noticed.” In addition to e-mail blasts, he says, his company sends targeted e-mails to brokers who focus on a particular market, to select industries, or to specific tenants.

“About 40 percent of the deals we do each year



come through Internet marketing—that’s a huge volume,” adds **Arthur P. Barry III, SIOR**, with Coldwell Banker/Eberhardt & Barry, Inc., in Macon, Georgia.

“When I ask our customers if they use the Internet for commercial real estate information, they unanimously respond, ‘Yes!’ You simply have to be on the Internet in today’s marketplace to compete,”



notes **Jeffrey A. Dreher, SIOR**, Commercial Kentucky/Cushman & Wakefield Alliance, Louisville, Kentucky. Barry agrees. “I’ve been told after the fact that

before people contacted me they went to our Web page to see with whom they were dealing—what this broker is made of, and whether he has the experience or resources required,” he notes. “They could call me to ask me these questions, but that would be very inefficient. The Internet actually allows people to search for a broker.”

This works both ways, according to



**Greg Gunn, SIOR**, Senior Vice President with Coldwell Banker Commercial NRT in Salt Lake City, Utah.

“Coldwell Banker Commercial is a national company with one of the largest bro-

kerage offices in Utah. In addition, most other national real estate brokerage firms do not have offices in Utah because we are considered a tertiary market,” he says. I represent office tenants. How can I connect with

these other national real estate brokerage companies to let them know of my background and ability to work with them here?”

What Gunn does is go to national real estate brokerage sites to find out who the “gatekeepers” are. Then he sends an e-mail to those people individually. “I don’t do a ‘blast’; that’s very ineffective and very impersonal,” he says.

“All of our Internet marketing strategies have been successful for our firm, but it is difficult to determine which one is most successful since it is difficult to track Internet activity and tie it to the bottom line,” adds Dreher. “The beauty of the Internet is that it runs 24/7, so it’s marketing our company and serving our customers around the clock.”

Of course, you can have too much of a good



thing, warns **Gary V. Lindsay, SIOR**, Grubb & Ellis, Dallas, Texas. “Some brokers have diluted the value of broadcast e-mailing,” he says. “I was receiving so many e-mails from a few of these guys that I have blocked them. As long

as brokers and developers announce available properties on CoStar, Xceligent, LoopNet, etc., we don't need to be constantly bombarded with 'marketing' e-mails. Do these senders really believe they are being effective?"

## Running the Gamut

Some SIORs have been on the Internet for years, and the sophistication of their marketing operations reflects that experience.

"When we started Upland in 1998, we were lucky or smart enough [to have]...already bought the name Upland.com and built the Web page," Houge recalls. "We got indexed by search engines—I don't think Google was around at the time. We started coming up high on the search results for our niche—single-tenant, net-leased investment properties."

*"Do not embed huge downloads; use smart, to-the-point subject lines; keep the message short . . ."*

—Randy D. Podolsky, SIOR

Houge, who does a lot of 1031 exchange activity, works with a local firm that has expertise in key words and metatags. "They specialize in keeping us 'sticky' with search engines—and whatever they do works," he says. "If someone searches these keywords, we generally come up on the first page."

He says that over the past 10 years he has probably spent \$100,000 with this company, "But it's worth it," he says, "They always upgrade us and keep things fresh."

Once a person visits his site, the site starts to "database" them and alerts Houge's team to their activity. In the early days, he says, a visitor would get something basic that looked like an Excel spread sheet with price, cap rate, etc. "Now you can pull up an entire fact sheet that has everything you could want—maps, demos, site plans, photos, and we can upload leases or environmental studies," he says.

The trick is that "casual" lookers will not get all that information right away. "They have to provide more information about themselves if they want see more," Houge explains. Once these visitors provide requested additional information, they get access. If their information is questionable, we check out the Web visitor further and perhaps we follow up with a call to clarify any misconceptions we may have. For those that are granted access," he says, "I follow up and talk about their offer. At the same time, we turn the offer over to the seller and start our due diligence."

This makes the Internet "a remarkably efficient way to market properties," says Houge. "We have an online Letter of Intent that comes up; if you want to change prices or change how much earnest money you want to put up, you can do that. Meanwhile, our people have not spent any significant time on that investor yet."



**Randy D. Podolsky, SIOR,**  
Managing Principal and Head of  
Marketing at Podolsky Northstar  
CORFAC International in  
Riverwoods (Greater Chicago),  
Illinois, uses the Internet in a num-  
ber of different ways, including:

- E-mail broadcasts to select users and the brokerage community,
- Web site marketing of properties and services,
- Links to and from appropriate resources/agencies/companies, and
- Periodic newsletters to pre-approved target audiences.

“When a prospect/client/user visits your Web site, they are pre-qualified as they are conducting their ‘search’ or homework and they have sought you out,” he notes. “If you can get them to sign up for any service, questionnaire, or future communications, you have captured a warm lead.”

To increase the effectiveness of your marketing efforts, he advises, “Put your Web address on everything...especially pieces that may last beyond a changed phone number. When you are including a Web site in an e-mail, include the “www” in the address as it will all become a hyper-link (rapid selection) to the recipient. But feel free to lose the “www” in the address when including your Web site name on print media.”

In addition, he says, it is critical to note that all Internet marketing needs to be designed to reach Internet users with all types and speeds of access. “Send a link to a brochure, as opposed to attaching it,” Podolsky advises. “Do not embed huge downloads; use smart, to-the-point (yet descriptive) subject lines;

keep the messages short, and, by gosh, when forwarding e-mails to others, cut out anything (especially long lists of names) that is irrelevant, or even more importantly, proprietary! Use the ‘undisclosed recipients’ method of broadcasting to protect your recipients and yourself!”

## Using Subscription Services

A number of SIORs subscribe to services such as CoStar and LoopNet to help market their properties. “We put every single listing we have on as many Web sites as we can afford [in order] to justify subscriptions,” says Barry, noting that there are both premium and “run-of-the-mill” levels of subscriptions available.

“We found with so many sites available, that just using LoopNet as a sole provider limits exposure. If we go to 10 different servers we increase our productivity, because this is the most valuable and cost-justifiable advertising we’ve ever run across,” Barry says. He notes that he pays LoopNet \$300 month for the base subscription rate. “Then, every agent can interface and pay

an individual subscription,” notes Barry, adding that every \$300 gives him four users. The premium charge gives you multiple photos, floor plans, rent rolls, etc. Barry says he uses a number of services, including Black’s Guide to Industrial Real Estate, City Feet, Dorey’s, and CoStar.

He says all of this “costs a little more” than the old method of advertising in the *Wall Street Journal* and faxing information, but he adds, “an informed buyer knows that they have to get online for the best information available, and the agent who does not know about or can’t afford to be online does his client a serious disservice.

In addition, he notes, “Younger investors don’t look anywhere for projects except the Web.”

## Not Standing Pat

SIORs who are on top of the Internet game are constantly looking for ways to improve their sites and their marketing efforts. “We just allocated a big chunk of money to tear our Web site down and redo it,” says Kasselmann. “We will put a ‘dashboard’ on the front page—what we care about, why, and why the visitor should care.”

The site currently has a client login firewall, and Kasselmann says he “will put a lot more ‘stuff’ behind there.” There will also be an embedded code in each of pages, enabling him to track who visited the site and for how long, how often they returned, and what they downloaded. “These people will not necessarily know they are our prospect,” says Kasselmann, “but we will be able to seamlessly track visitor data.”

There will be a limited number of bells and whistles on the new site, he says, “but we will still have video and audio content—not so much as to cause downloading to slow, but enough to convey something about what we do.”

One of the most engaging videos, he notes, is about intelligent buildings—what they are and their implications to the real estate industry. “We get huge feedback on that element,” he says.

The site, Kasselmann continues, also includes virtual tours of some of the company’s more significant listings. “We did them in a fairly dynamic way, shooting digital shots inside and out,” he says. “The prospect can virtually stand in the space and look at it from the ceiling or the floor, zoom in, and look at the inside and outside space.” Such a virtual tour, he notes, enabled him to land Charles Schwab for their Chicago flagship location. “There’s no question in my mind that [this approach] works,” Kasselmann asserts.

He adds that being so Internet-savvy helps attract the new generation of real estate professionals. “We like the fact that we can attract the first true digital generation—people in their mid-20s who never knew a world where there was no e-mail,” says Kasselmann. “When they see how different we are, they are much more interested after they leave than when they came in.”

What if you are not as Internet-savvy as Kasselmann and his firm? “Talk to your

peers to see what Internet services, tools, etc., they use,” suggests Dreher. “Also, you may want to contact your local board to see what resources they offer to assist you.”

“Read up, folks. Get on line. Search until you drop,” advises Podolsky. “The Internet has made all the raw data available to each and every one of us. What you do with it is what will distinguish you from others, and what will separate you from the pack.”

If you don’t yet have a Web site, creating one “is not



that expensive,” says **Tim R. Ruffin, CCIM, SIOR,** Managing Partner and Senior Vice

President with Colliers International in Reno, Nevada. “Ours cost about \$4,000 to create and \$1,200 to set up and get hosted,” he says. “You can spend \$1,000 or so a year to update it.”

Ruffin has found a unique way to use his site. “We reference other people you might need [in order] to consummate your transaction, such as appraisers,” he says. “This has helped us create a built-in referral network, and these people like to send folks to us, too.”

## Beware of these Internet Pitfalls



While the Internet can be a great marketing tool, it can be used improperly, warns **Nora Hogan, CCIM, SIOR,** Principal at Transwestern in Dallas, Texas. “If you’re a leasing agent, never send more than one e-mail blast in a day; when you send five in a row they all get deleted and you lose any impact you might have had,” she says. “It’s even more important to coordinate within your office; 15 e-mails promoting space from the same office are guaranteed to be deleted if they are all received at the same time.”

In addition, she advises, never send an e-mail from your assistant’s desk. “Have your assistant send it from your desk; the response rate difference between a producer’s e-mail and an assistant’s e-mail is dramatic,” she says. “Besides, many times recipients don’t recognize names of assistants and e-mails are automatically deleted.”

Subject lines, she adds, should be an attention grabber with information letting the producer know if they need to open the e-mail, for example: “Below market office deal in Las Colinas 10,000 square feet.”

Never send five PDF files and expect the broker or your client to open them all, says Hogan. “Remember, you want to make it easy on your customer,” she says. “It takes an extra minute, but you’ve got to combine them all in one file—and don’t send all the ‘fluff’ unless asked for. If someone wants just the floor plan, send the right floor plan and not 16 other spaces that have no potential to work.”