



Jill Jamieson-Nichols is an editor with the Colorado Real Estate Journal, a commercial real estate newspaper. She has received Colorado Press Association awards for column writing, featuring writing and public service.



No Cell Phone? No Email? No Internet? OH MY!

By Jill Jamieson-Nichols

Call it commercial real estate *unplugged*.

At 24, Daniel Close is a tech-savvy industrial broker who does business via iPhone and iPad. He didn't know what an IBM Selectric looked like until one recently showed up on his desk.

As part of Close's training at CBRE, industry veterans **Murray Platt, SIOR**, and **Paul Kluck, SIOR, RPA**, thought it would be a good exercise for Close to spend a week learning how industrial real estate was done in 1984, the year Platt started in the business. That meant no cell phone, no voice mail and no computer, so no email or Internet.

"I think he was very, very reluctant and thought we were kidding up until about two weeks before we put it into place," said Platt.

In fact, everybody thought it was a joke, said Close, who showed up for an interview carrying a folder full of paper, including a printout of his contacts and calendar for the week. "I feel like I'm not very connected with what's going on," he said. "The only way to really find out what's on the market is to drive up and down the street."

Platt and Kluck's motive was twofold: they wanted Close to understand the value of phone calls and face-to-face meetings, and they also thought the experience would give him rapport with senior brokers in the Denver market.

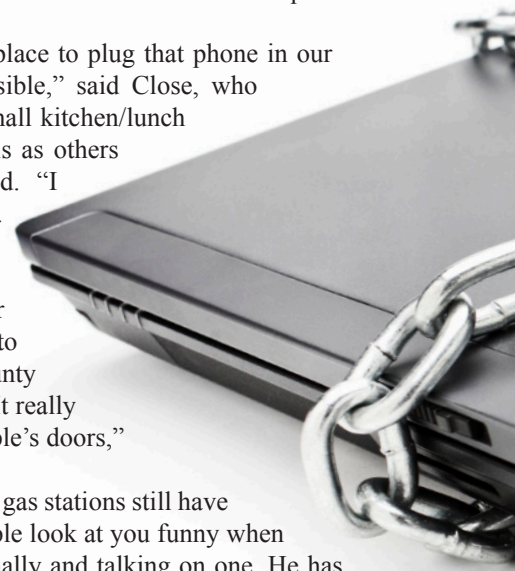
Brad Neiman of Brad Neiman Associates was among those who offered advice. "If you take somebody that age and how they communicate with their peers, they don't talk on the phone, they text everything. The point I tried to make to him is that the commercial real estate business is a relationship business, and relationships are not built by text messaging. You want to be not only talking to people, you want to put yourself in front of people as much as you can and as often as you possibly can," Neiman said.

Close began what became known as "Hell Week" with a typewriter, rotary-dial phone and a box full of quarters for pay phones.

"To be able to find a place to plug that phone in our office was nearly impossible," said Close, who found a fax outlet in a small kitchen/lunch area, where he made calls as others passed by and snickered. "I stand there, and I dial ... and I dial," he said.

He was afraid to leave the office for fear of missing calls, but had to visit clients and go to county offices for information. "It really made me show up at people's doors," said Close.

Close discovered most gas stations still have pay phones, and that people look at you funny when you're dressed professionally and talking on one. He has one client who likes to talk – long-distance. "The phone call went on 15 minutes. Do you know how much money that is? I'm



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so worried about how much time I have left, I only picked up about 50 percent of what he said."

Platt thinks the whole exercise was worthwhile.

"I think he learned the real basics of blocking and tackling in our business – how to get out and make calls. You can't just sit in the office and email and text people, you've got to get out and meet people," he said.

Close agreed. He learned personal conversations often contain useful information that wouldn't be gained in an email exchange and that sometimes a phone call is important to a client.

"It's really important to be able to just call people and get in front of people. I don't know if I would go to this extreme of no phones and email because in today's world, you just can't not have email."

Close was surprised to learn "you can still do business this way if you really had to," but he also said, "It makes you appreciate how things are done today and how efficient you can be, and at the end of the day, the service that can be provided to your client."

Neiman concurred. "People don't sell real estate. They sell information about real estate. That becomes more available now because of electronics. You can't memorize all of the data that applies to commercial and industrial real estate as easily as you can walk around with it on an iPad. That's a real step forward."

"It was definitely an eye-opening experience for him, but it would be for all of us if we had to go back to 1984," said Platt. "In 20 years, he's going to have a great story, and he'll be proud of his background." ^{scb}



Without access to a cell phone, CBRE Associate Daniel Close conducts business on a rotary-dial phone.



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