

# OPTIMIZING FOR MOBILE

**By Michael Hoban**

Up until March of this year, a typical work day for Steve Kapp, SIOR, executive managing director for Newmark's San Francisco East Bay industrial division, began with a commute to the office for an 8 a.m. start. After a few hours of answering emails and pulling together printed materials, there was a half day or more in the field prospecting or conducting tours, a return to the office to do administrative tasks and engage with support staff, then a battle with traffic on the way home.

**Then came the pandemic.**

"Now my commute is 10 steps to the dining room," says Kapp, whose home office has been commandeered by his

school-age kids for remote learning. But the dramatically shortened commute, while a plus, is not the most profound change to his workday routine. Gone is the desktop computer to access the company server; his work phone number hasn't been used in over six months; and printed tour books—once a must-have in a broker's briefcase—are needed only on rare occasions. The transition to his new mobile world may have been abrupt, but Kapp has adapted quickly, embracing the new technologies. "My iPhone is really my primary work device now," he says.

While the iPhone and iPads (as well as Android smartphones and tablets) are





the visible manifestations of what is enabling mobile work life for brokers, it takes a host of supporting technologies to make it a reality. Cloud storage providers like Dropbox™, Google Drive, and pCloud, lets users remotely access servers from their computer, phone, or tablet. The widespread adoption of other existing tools like 3D virtual property tours, electronic signature software like DocuSign®, and digital communication channels like Zoom, Microsoft® Teams, and Slack, allow brokers to not only perform functions previously reserved for in-person office visits—but to do so more efficiently. As Kapp acknowledges, “It was a case of making use of the functionality of the software that was already there but I hadn’t really used.”

For office specialist Melissa Molyneaux, SIOR, a senior vice president and executive managing director with the Reno, Nev. office of Colliers International, the transition was made easier by the adoption of Microsoft® Teams and Dropbox™ not long before COVID hit. The shift to Dropbox™ was made on Jan. 1, and that made a huge difference, she says. “It has a great app for your phone, so if I’m out with a client, and I think of another property that might be a good fit, I can just pull up the flyer. Or if I need to check on something in a listing agreement, I can just pull it up on my phone. And I can also work at night,” says Molyneaux, who, with a baby and a toddler at home, appreciates the flexibility. “We just really wanted to find a file storage system that we could all access remotely and easily that wasn’t housed in a central server somewhere.”

Molyneaux and Kapp are also staunch advocates of Microsoft® Teams (i.e. Teams), the cloud-based collaboration software that comes standard with

some business packages of Office 365. Teams offers video and audio conference calling, file storage, application integration as well as file sharing, which enables brokers to share things like deal information and comps in real time. Molyneaux says that the videoconferencing capabilities of the platform are a substantial improvement over the old-fashioned teleconferencing, particularly in team meetings with landlords. “Teams is just so much better because of the screen-sharing capabilities, and it’s also much better to be able see people, some of whom I’ve never actually met.”

While Molyneaux and Kapp are relatively new to the mobile experience, Kostas Stoilas, SIOR, owner and managing broker of Fortress Commercial Real Estate in Tampa Bay, Fla., is something of an old hand. Stoilas built his boutique firm with mobile in mind, working remotely since founding Fortress in 2016. He believes that having all his work at his fingertips while on the road and in the field is just a more efficient way to work.

“The number one goal for me is efficiency,” says Stoilas. “You realize quickly in our business that what we do is gather, repackage, and distribute information, and the quicker you do that, the better it is for your clients.” He says he is in the field so much—door-knocking, cold-calling, doing showings and listings, meeting with people—that he didn’t want to have to get back to the office to “do stuff, and I knew technology could help me do that.”

Stoilas field-tested the idea before he launched his company, going on vacation to Denver for a week without telling clients or colleagues to see how well he could do his job remotely. In between

hikes in the mountains, he found that he could still make calls and send emails with attachments. “That’s how it started for me, thinking through what it looks like when I’m at my desk and whether I can replicate that in the field.”

He began on a base level with software and hardware—the software being Microsoft 365, “where the applications talk to each other”, and a Microsoft® Surface Pro for his hardware. “It’s a laptop, and it’s also a tablet, so I can write on it. If I’m at a listing or showing and the client wants to modify the floor plan, I can pull up the PDF, draw on the tablet, save it as file and email it as an attachment without printing anything. As long as I have a phone with hotspot or a McDonald’s with Wifi access, I can access my entire desk just like I was sitting there.”

Mark Fowler, SIOR, a managing director with Newmark’s East Brunswick, N.J. office, was also an early adopter of mobile technology. Fowler is an Apple fan, and uses his iPad “for anything and everything.” The process for him was one of trial and error, but it was also through reading and educating himself on the topic that he determined that the use of mobile technology would eventually become a necessity, a process sped up exponentially by COVID.

“I don’t know how a broker can survive if they don’t go this way, and I say that for two reasons: It makes you far more efficient as an individual, and it makes you look far more professional,” says Fowler. “Let’s face it, many of our clients are already using new technology and data to make business decisions, and since we are their trusted advisors, we must have a strong handle on the latest tech to put us above competitors whose refuse to adapt.”

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In addition to brokers themselves taking advantage of the tools that mobile technology offers, it's important that marketing materials on company websites are optimized for mobile. Andrea Cheung, global manager for communications and PR at Colliers International, reports that "Our website is our #1 vehicle for property marketing—it's been optimized to deliver an engaging experience for viewers." Users can share and save favorite listings, subscribe to property searches to receive updates straight to their mobile devices, and access digital flyers and other supporting content. The websites also include interactive tools like Matterport cameras and RealAR<sup>1</sup> which allow people to have virtual walk-throughs of space directly on their phones. Interestingly, she notes that mobile usage as a percentage of web traffic has decreased during the pandemic "because people aren't out and about, but we believe it will rebound quickly when it's over."

Failing to optimize for mobile can also hinder marketing efforts, according to Daniel Cenicerros, CEO and founder of Connect Media. Cenicerros points out that "If you're not mobile responsive, Google will not push traffic to your website." In 2018, mobile searches surpassed desktop searches, and Google began using mobile-first indexing and ranking, which means a lack of a mobile-friendly experience could impact negatively on the rankings of that site.

Beyond the algorithms however, is the user experience. "If things on the page aren't loading or showing right, the user won't have a good engagement, and will click off," says Cenicerros. "You've got about five to 10 seconds to engage

with them and if something is wrong, it automatically triggers in the user's mind that there's something wrong—not only with this website, but with the company. That is the mobile experience, and you have to have the same experience on mobile as on desktop."

As history teaches us, those who fail to adapt, usually don't survive. But the transition to mobile doesn't have to be a painful one, as SIORs are learning. "It's almost like I had to do it to adapt, but once I did it, it was like, 'Wow. This is so much better than the old way of doing things,'" says Molyneaux. "You've just got to try it, and like anything else, it just becomes a habit." ▼

1. <https://www.realar.com/>

## MEET THE AUTHOR

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# TECH CORNER

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## LANDVISION

Written By: Dan Palmeri, SIOR

### WHAT IT IS

LandVision—which is part of the Lightbox group of companies—is a cloud-based property research and analysis mapping program that helps you manage opportunities while unlocking property and ownership information instantly.

### HOW IT WORKS

Via your desktop or mobile-app, LandVision updates over 72 million data records every month, ensuring the most accurate information possible. It provides developers, landlords, and brokers with immediate access to property maps, parcel boundaries, ownership, tax data, transaction history, zoning, traffic counts, and more. You can capture text, photos, and voice memo notes based on location for the properties you're visiting, which will sync automatically back to your desktop in real-time.

### WHY USE IT

LandVision helps streamline the process of gathering property data in one application, saving valuable time finding the information you need in a one-stop solution versus having to navigate multiple websites and applications to accomplish the same task. Additionally, LandVision makes it easy to create detailed reports in a matter of seconds versus, the hours it takes to assemble the data and package it for client delivery. The program is very user-friendly and has an abundance of easy access tutorials and easy to reach customer service. ▼