



## Technology connoisseurs:

### REALTORS® TURN PERSONAL INTERESTS INTO MARKETING TOOLS

By Robert J. Holland

**J**im Duncan's clients know he loves wine. They know where he stands on a proposed amendment to the City of Charlottesville's charter that would make developers set aside land for affordable housing. They even know of his frustration with tech support from the company that provides his online contract forms.

Duncan's clients – and even people who might one day be his clients – know all of this by reading his Web log, or online journal (otherwise known as a “blog”). Duncan figures the better people know him, the more likely they are to do business with him.

Although Duncan is one of the first REALTORS® in Virginia to adopt this new technology, he is not alone. Neither is “blogging,” or online journaling, a new technology adopted by some REALTORS® in search of broader markets, new customers and increased sales. Updated websites, powerful handheld communication devices and other new gadgets are finding their ways into real estate marketing.

“Technology is moving at an incredible rate,” says Duncan, of CENTURY 21® Manley Associates. “I follow technology trends, so I was already interested in it. I love what I do and I love technology and I enjoy finding a balance between the two.”

**Merv Forney** of Choice3 Realty Group in Leesburg was previously a senior executive with technology firm EDS, so he also turned his personal interest into a blog for his real estate practice.

“In today's market, people want more information,” Forney says. “I've been getting rave reviews about this.”

Forney also has been getting a lot of exposure beyond his geographic market. He has been contacted by potential buyers from outside his area who were thinking about moving there. “We live in an electronic world where 80 percent of the buyers in the real estate market are on the Internet before they even make a call,” says Forney. “And when they do a Google Blog Search and enter “Northern Virginia real estate” and “Virginia real estate,” guess whose name is at the very top of the page?”

Forney says the number of visitors to his blog is increasing “phenomenally,” although blogging in the real estate industry is in its infancy. “It is interesting to note that the best known national real estate bloggers all started about a year ago,” he notes.

Because of its newness, many people thought blogging was a fad that would soon pass, says **Dolores Farmer**, vice president and managing broker in the Roanoke/Botetourt office of Long & Foster. “We initially didn’t consider them to be a viable marketing avenue for our sellers’ homes,” she says, but several things happened to change her mind.

“First, Google began offering its blog search. There are millions of blogs, but the ability to locate them has been limited. Now, Web surfers can use “blogsearch.google.com” to find the topics that interest them,” Farmer says.

She adds that a related technology called Real Simple Syndication, or RSS, “gives real value to a blog.” RSS feeds enable Internet users to have content delivered to them so they don’t have to go searching for it, much like having specific news-



paper clippings delivered to your desk. RSS feeds also allow subscribers to get the information they want without revealing too much information about themselves, which decreases the amount of e-mail spam.

Farmer adds that blogs reach younger buyers and specialty buyers – horse lovers, for example – who might not be targeted by traditional advertising. “Real estate companies that are too stodgy or set in their ways to embrace current technologies are missing an important opportunity to gain maximum exposure for their listings,” Farmer says.

Forney has seen new business come his way as a result of his blog and because he posts huge amounts of market data on his website. The results for Duncan and Farmer are difficult to quantify so far, but Duncan believes blogging makes him a better REALTOR® because he must stay on top of market trends in order to post a new entry every few days. Farmer says she often hears prospective buyers say, “We saw it on the blog.” All agree that blogging takes time, but that it is time well spent.

“I wouldn’t be doing it if I didn’t think it was worth the time and effort,” Forney says. “The bottom line is, how do you want to spend your time marketing?” ■

*Editor’s Note: [www.bloggingsystems.com](http://www.bloggingsystems.com) provides services to help create your own blog, including blog strategy consulting, custom design, hosting, training and marketing.*

### ■ Software company launches real estate automation system

One of VAR’s affinity partners, ZipForm®, has created a strategic national software partnership with Auto-RE LLC, a Colorado-based company focused on real estate agent software solutions, through the market launch of the Auto-RETM Real Estate Transaction Automation System. A web-based system, Auto-RETM automates and streamlines the entire business service ordering process of the real estate agent, provides a central platform to automate the service ordering process for all businesses involved in the transaction. “Auto-RETM eliminates redundant data entry, data entry errors, and phone calls through seamless error-free electronic transmissions to the companies which the real estate agent currently utilizes,” according to **Kent Lewiss**, president of Auto-RE. More information is at [www.auto-re.com](http://www.auto-re.com), or contact your Zip-Form provider.

### ■ Data logger for mold investigations introduced

Onset Computer Corporation has introduced the HOBO U10, a new data logger that can help facility managers, HVAC/R contractors, building owners and others detect signs of environmental conditions suitable for mold growth. The HOBO U10 performs 24/7 monitoring of temperature and humidity, and uses Windows-based software to convert the recorded data into time- and date-stamped graphs. Details are on their website at [www.onsetcomp.com](http://www.onsetcomp.com).

### SEE WHAT SOME VIRGINIA REALTOR® BLOGS LOOK LIKE

#### **The Roanoke Real Estate Blog**

<http://roanokerealestate.blogspot.com>

#### **Northern Virginia Real Estate Guide**

<http://askmerv.choice3realty.com>

#### **Central Virginia Real Estate Blog**

<http://realcentralva.com>