

This article was published on: 03/01/2006

Online efficiency **Automate Showing Feedback**

ASK MR. INTERNET

With Web-based systems, you can capture meaningful input from showing agents without spending time on the phone.

BY MICHAEL RUSSER

If you're like many in the real estate business, you think that seeking feedback on your listings is just about as fun as getting a root canal. But who can blame you?



You have to spend hours on the phone gathering responses from practitioners who visited the home, produce a report for the sellers, and then get an earful from clients who aren't so pleased with the comments they read.

But that's only if you're gathering listing feedback the old way. I'm going to tell you about a far better way to get valuable comments from showing agents without wasting time on the phone or cranking out reports.

The Old Way: Slow and Expensive

If you're gathering showing feedback manually, as described above, you already know that it's a big drain on your budget and your time. You're most likely taking these three steps:

- **Call showing agents.** Your phone calls get an average 20 percent response rate — and that's after you spend a great deal of time playing phone tag. Unless you have a feedback form right in front of you when the showing agent returns your call, you'll have trouble standardizing their responses.
- **Produce report manually.** The responses came in by phone so your report will have to be manually created. This takes time and is error-prone, and if you don't put extra effort into the layout, it can look unprofessional.
- **Deliver report to seller.** If it's bad news, guess who's going to be blamed? But even if the report contains positive feedback, it still needs to be delivered somehow, and that takes time and money.

Imagine being able to accomplish all of those chores in no more than five minutes, regardless of how long the listing is active or how often your sellers want to see a report. That's the reality of using an automated Web-based system.

The New Way: Efficient and Affordable

There are several companies that offer automated showing feedback systems, which virtually eliminate all of the problems of the manual method and charge nominal monthly fees.

Two of the more well known companies are HomeFeedback.com and FeedbackCentral.com, which I compare below. Such systems turn the once-dreaded exercise of gathering input from home showings into a simple process that will impress sellers and help the home sell quicker.

Most Web-based feedback systems operate in a similar fashion, differing only in cost and specific features. Let's examine how the three-step feedback process changes when you stop doing things "the old way" and start using an automated system:

- **E-mail showing agents.** Automated feedback is usually done through a series of e-mail reminders to showing agents. A link in the e-mail takes the practitioner to an online feedback form with questions that can be answered with a few clicks of the mouse. Because it's so easy for the showing agents, you can expect response rates to increase dramatically. Casey Margenau, a top salesperson with RE/MAX Distinctive Real Estate Inc. in Reston, Va., says using an automated system boosted his response rates by 50 percent to 70 percent.
- **Standardized report created for you.** Showing agents provide their feedback on a Web-based form, so their comments are always standardized, aggregated, and ready for review. The reports are created automatically when a practitioner submits a feedback form, so you don't have to do any work.
- **Sellers view report on the Web.** With password access, sellers can view showing feedback at any time through any Web browser. This also means that you are no longer the bearer of bad news. The sellers see the comments first hand, so you won't get the blame. I've been told that it's not uncommon for sellers to want to reduce the listing price based on what they learned from the automated responses — that's something you won't see too often using the manual method.

The only time you spend with the automated process is during the initial setup when you need to enter the property information and after each showing when you enter the showing agent's contact information. But some practitioners I've talked to even have outsourced the latter step by "empowering" sellers to enter contact information from the business cards that showing agents leave at the house.

Which System Should You Use?

Only you can decide which automated feedback system is best for you. Thoroughly research the companies that offer this service and determine which one meets your individual needs. For any company that you are considering, it's a good exercise to compare their offerings side-by-side.

This chart will get you started by providing details from the two prominent showing feedback services mentioned earlier, HomeFeedback.com and FeedbackCentral.com.

	HomeFeedback.com	FeedbackCentral.com
Cost	\$9.95 one-time setup fee and \$9.95/month for unlimited listings.	No setup fee and \$7.95/month for unlimited listings.
E-mail Requests to Showing	Customizable message with up to three e-mail feedback requests sent out to showing agent. If no feedback is received	Customizable message, but currently only one e-mail feedback request is sent out.(1)

Agent	after third try, seller is notified of your efforts via e-mail.	
Phone Call Follow-Up	None available.	A FeedbackCentral.com staff member will follow up with up to three phone calls to the showing agent if there is no response from the e-mail you send.
Customized Questions	Each listing can have a customized set of questions in addition to the default questions you choose.	Each listing can have one or more custom sets of questions in addition to default questions you create.
Seller Access	Sellers can access their feedback reports from any Web browser (access is password protected).	Sellers can access their feedback reports from any Web browser (access is password protected).
Reports	You and sellers can access a detailed bar-chart summary of feedback reports. Sellers can be blocked from seeing written comments from showing agents. You and sellers receive e-mail notices when feedback is submitted.	You and sellers can access a detailed bar-chart summary of feedback reports. Sellers currently can't be blocked from seeing written comments from showing agents. At this time, there is no e-mail notification when feedback is submitted.(3)
Other Features	E-mail feedback requests can include a photo of the listing. Also, special announcements such as price reductions can easily be sent out to the entire group of showing agents or any subset.	E-mail feedback requests can include a photo of the listing. Also, special announcements such as price reductions can easily be sent out to the entire group of showing agents or any subset.
<p>1 Vendor says that by March 1, 2006, the listing agent will be able to configure any number of e-mail reminders to be sent at any intervals they choose.</p> <p>2 This premium feature currently costs \$29.95/month per listing, or \$45 for the life of the listing.</p> <p>3 Vendor says these features will be active as of March 1, 2006.</p>		

Of the two, HomeFeedback.com has been around the longest. However, as the new kid on the block, FeedbackCentral.com has done a good job of providing some interesting new features, a good-looking user interface, and a very attractive price point.

It Doesn't Have to Be Painful

If you're not already using automated showing feedback for your listings, you're spending way too much time and money with the manual process — exposing yourself to the potential wrath of unhappy sellers, and risking your competitiveness against other practitioners who tout automated showing feedback capability during their listing presentations.

Showing feedback doesn't have to be a painful experience. Using an automated system and proper positioning with the seller, the tool can serve as a formidable competitive weapon that will result in more listings and less work.



Mr. Internet, RUSSEr Communications, its staff, and officers receive no compensation from any third-party vendors and make no recommendations as to the suitability of the products or services mentioned in this article. Always thoroughly investigate any product or service before trying or purchasing.

Mr. Internet is the alter-ego of Michael J. Russer, an Internet speaker, trainer, author, and consultant. Send questions to help@askmrinternet.com