

Posted on: Tuesday, October 18, 2005

# MLS listings go public

By **Andrew Gomes**  
Advertiser Staff Writer

The competitive search for available property in O'ahu's tight housing market has become easier for consumers with a new Web site that unlocks the trove of information from the Multiple Listing Service.

At least three Web sites now offer near-complete Multiple Listing Service access to consumers at no cost, though some require personal registration information or otherwise limit access.

Local real estate agents said they believe one recently launched site — oahure.com — is the first to offer consumers unfettered access to Multiple Listing Service information at no cost. Previously, homebuyers were mostly limited to viewing abbreviated information through broker Web sites or could gain access to the full MLS only after agreeing to work with a broker.

"I'm just putting it all out there," said Bryn Kaufman, operator of oahure.com and a former Pennsylvania computer company owner. Kaufman began selling Hawai'i real estate last year as an independent Coldwell Banker Pacific Properties agent.

The Internet has vastly empowered consumers to shop for homes, with about 75 percent of buyers searching for property on the Net, according to the National Association of Realtors.

But most Realtor Web pages abbreviate home listing information, leaving consumers to seek more details from agents willing to help buyers find the right property for a commission.

The Multiple Listing Service is the most extensive source of information on real estate for sale. Access costs \$450 a year and is restricted to licensed brokers, most of whom list their properties with the MLS to reach a wider audience of potential buyers. But until now, a near-complete range of information on the O'ahu MLS was not freely available on the Web.

Kaufman's site is a searchable database of all O'ahu homes available for sale on the MLS, and contains details on property condition, maintenance and management fees, interior finishes, assessed value for property tax purposes, how long a home's been on the market and more.

Other features of the site, which is updated daily, allow price comparisons. A sister site, thekaufmanadvantage.com, provides property sale information for pending and contingent sales, as well as previous sales for historical price comparisons.

Popular real estate Web sites such as realtor.com and hi central.com feature limited information from the MLS. The Advertiser also is in the online real-estate marketing business via its site, homefinder.com /hawaiiishomes.

## PRUDENTIAL WAS FIRST

Prudential Locations, one of Hawai'i's largest residential real estate firms, launched a somewhat controversial service in mid-2002 that offered more in-depth access to the Multiple Listing Service similar to what Kaufman recently launched.

The Prudential site, brokers mls.com, allows free public access for a 30-day trial, but thereafter is limited to users agreeing to a client-broker relationship with Prudential. The 30-day trial is denied to anyone who acknowledges being a client of a competing agent.

### RELATED NEWS FROM THE WEB

#### Latest headlines by topic:

- Real Estate
- US News

Powered by Topix.net

ADVERTISEMENT

ADVERTISEMENT

## Dell Inspiron Laptop Sale

Shop Deals on Everyday Inspiron Laptops (Intel®) w/ Intel Core Now!



**SOME ARE WIDE OPEN**

Coldwell Banker Pacific in March launched a similar site at cbpacific.com called My Home Planner, which requires an e-mail-address login and acceptance of a user agreement.

The oahure.com site is available to anyone without registration or limitation.

"Realtors can get at this kind of information, but what about (consumers)?" Kaufman said.

Competing sites offer different ways to search for property, and consumers may find they prefer a site based on its search criteria. Sites also differ on how they provide notification of new listings or other information.

Kaufman established what the industry calls a virtual office Web site. Such VOWs have created dissension among Realtor association members across the country, and led the National Association of Realtors to propose new policies that the Department of Justice recently challenged as anticompetitive in a lawsuit.

Peter Colwell, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign professor emeritus of finance, said Realtor associations consider multiple listing service data a valuable and proprietary resource for brokers who pay for access.

"This data has value, and those who pay for the data would like to extract the value from it," he said.

Colwell said it makes sense for Realtor associations to release partial MLS data as a marketing device for members, but that releasing all the data "would undermine their ability to keep their members in line paying for the data, and would threaten their special status as exclusive intermediaries."

**BOARD STAYS NEUTRAL**

Donna Asino, O'ahu MLS operations director for the Honolulu Board of Realtors, said the organization takes a neutral position on what MLS information is publicly displayed through virtual office Web sites.

"If (members) want to do it, fine. More power to them," she said. "We can only provide the information. We don't encourage them one way or the other."

Asino said Prudential's brokersmls.com site caused a ruckus in the broker community three years ago as agents with other companies resented paying for access to data that the public could access for free.

Prudential said its site, beyond the 30-day trial, is exclusively for Prudential customers.

"We have a smart-client philosophy," said Bill Chee, Prudential president. "We should make them as smart as we can, and update them with as much information as we can."

Chee said the site receives tremendous use and has become one of the biggest sources of client referrals for Prudential agents. "It's been very good for us," he said.

**COST CAN BE DAUNTING**

Industry leaders agree that there haven't been more Web sites like Prudential's and Kaufman's because of the technical requirements and cost.

Prudential said it spent more than \$500,000 to develop its site, and estimated annual upkeep costs \$1 million.

Asino, of the Board of Realtors, said most real estate agents are independent contractors, which makes it prohibitively expensive to develop virtual office Web sites. "It's more than just a search engine on a Web site," she said. "It is a huge expense."

Most brokers subscribe to a more affordable IDX, or Internet Data Exchange, feed used to display limited property information from the multiple listing service.

Kaufman said he wasn't satisfied with the IDX link, and used his computer background to develop his own searchable database conduit to the multiple listing service.

"It didn't take a lot of time or money," he said, estimating it took a few days total programming time and \$8.95 a month to host the site. "That was my main expense, really."

Kaufman was an early adopter of the Internet, using it to sell computer equipment through a Pennsylvania-based company he established in 1985. In 2000, he sold his business, CMPEXpress, for \$12 million in stock to Outpost.com, which is now a unit of giant retailer Fry's Electronics.

#### SITES BENEFIT REALTORS

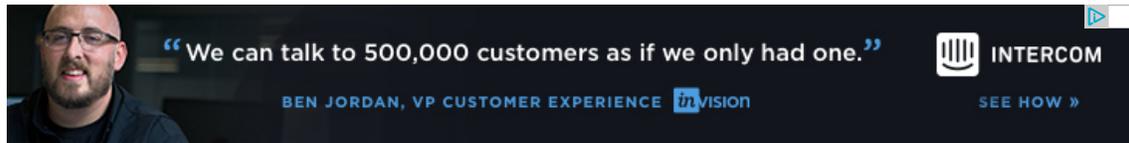
The computer business entrepreneur moved to Hawai'i three years ago and dabbled in Web site design, including some for Realtors. "I was learning a lot about real estate, and frankly, I think it sounded like it would be a fun thing to do," he said.

Kaufman said the site has gained him clients even though some of what he would provide them is now available without his help.

"I'm not worried about Realtors disappearing, because there's still is a role for Realtors to play," he said. "When the Internet first came up, people were wondering if there were going to be Realtors in five years. Realtor numbers are stronger now."

Reach Andrew Gomes at [agomes@honoluluadvertiser.com](mailto:agomes@honoluluadvertiser.com).

---



"We can talk to 500,000 customers as if we only had one."  
BEN JORDAN, VP CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE **in**VISION  
INTERCOM  
SEE HOW »

©COPYRIGHT 2010 The Honolulu Advertiser. All rights reserved.  
Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service and Privacy Policy/Your California Privacy Rights , updated March 2009.