



Retooling for Success – Essential Technology for Today’s Real Estate Professional

Recently, Research In Motion (RIM), the developer of the BlackBerry® solution, and RE/MAX International combined efforts to educate agents on the value of this powerful real estate tool. They identified and encouraged 160 agents and brokers in the US without BlackBerry smartphones to participate in a special trial program. These agents were invited to come to a training session where they would not only receive a free BlackBerry® Curve™ smartphone, but also get a free lesson on how to use it in the business of real estate – with no strings attached!

In the past twelve months the economy has undergone a profound metamorphosis. There are an unprecedented number of homes in foreclosure, credit has dried up, and available housing inventory is mushrooming while property values plummet. Things have gone from boom to bust in an unimaginably short period of time. For real estate professionals that are new to the business, this has been an incredible shock to the system. More seasoned real estate professionals have seen market downturns before and recognize the need to “batten down the hatches”, hunker down, settle in and switch to survival mode. This means re-evaluating the business processes, activities and tools used to run a real estate business. According to Real Source, the top 5 challenges faced by real estate professionals in the past year were:

1. **Unreasonable price expectations by sellers (84.4%)**
2. **Too few buyers (83.3%)**
3. **More informed consumers (81.4%)**
4. **Subprime loan fallout (72.6%)**
5. **Too many agents (64.6%).**

The level of competition between real estate agents has increased exponentially and clients’ expectations for agent responsiveness have been rewritten.

In years gone by we have seen voice mail, pagers, fax machines, the basic cell phone, the Internet and email become the competitive edge for real estate professionals. Today some of these technologies are obsolete and others are essentially the cost of admission to do business on a level playing field. The smartphone is the latest must-have technology tool-of-the-trade for real estate professionals. According to the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR), 28% of REALTORS® were using smartphones in 2007. In 2008 the number of REALTORS® using smartphones spiked to 42%. Real estate professionals who use a basic cell phone are now at a considerable disadvantage to their peers who have a smartphone.

For the real estate professional, email is no longer a tool of convenience – it’s a necessity. Over 90% of REALTORS® use email daily. Our pre-event survey of agents that did not own a BlackBerry smartphone showed that 63% of agents spent over 50% of their working day outside of their offices and 94% of agents responded to email leads by email. Given the importance of email –

how are these agents supposed to respond to clients in the timely manner expected? How much business opportunity are they missing by waiting until they return to their offices to check their email?

Over 30% of advertising spent in the real estate business is directed to online channels and this number continues to rise. Over 80% of property searches begin online and generate an electronic notification. Today’s buyers expect a response to their online queries in 30 minutes or less or move on to find another more responsive agent. It has been estimated that at least half of all sales leads generated online are never followed up on. To address this problem, some real estate franchises have developed lead distribution systems that deliver individual sales leads by email to multiple agents and reward lead ownership to the first agent to respond to the system. This is a very effective way for franchises who invest heavily in advertising to ensure that the leads generated get followed up on in a timely manner.

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The five BlackBerry for Real Estate Professionals training sessions were packed to capacity, not only with the 160 agents that were initially invited, but also with many of their colleagues who had already purchased BlackBerry smartphones and wanted to learn a few new tips and tricks.

Some of the BlackBerry benefits featured in the training session included:

- Accessing the Internet
- Accessing MLS
- Entering calendar entries
- Directing up to 10 different email addresses to a BlackBerry smartphone
- Setting up custom notification/ring-tones for incoming leads from MainStreet
- Synchronizing with email and calendar entries on desktop/laptop computers
- Navigating with GPS
- Transferring data from a Palm® Treo™ to a BlackBerry smartphone
- Snapping and sending photographs by email

To learn the basics and extra tips and tricks for using a BlackBerry smartphone, visit BlackBerry 101 at: www.blackberry.com/mainstreet.

Those participating in our program were either technophobes or technical whizzes and most left optimistic and eager to activate their new BlackBerry smartphones at local cell phone retailers so that they could experience the benefits that BlackBerry smartphones bring to both the business and personal lives of real estate professionals.

Most participants who received new BlackBerry Curve smartphones activated them within two days and made them part of both their business and personal lives. In a post-event survey agents/brokers with BlackBerry smartphones felt more empowered and were extremely satisfied with the BlackBerry smartphone experience:



“ The NAR 2008 Smartphone Whitepaper showed that BlackBerry is the number one smartphone brand purchased by REALTORS® .”

- 85% feel they are more responsive to clients now that they have a BlackBerry smartphone
- 86% feel they are more responsive to colleagues and business partners now that they have a BlackBerry smartphone
- 93% would recommend a BlackBerry smartphone to other real estate professionals

The NAR 2008 Technology Survey showed that smartphones would be the number one technology purchase for REALTORS® in the coming year. The 2008 NAR Smartphone Whitepaper showed that BlackBerry is the number one smartphone brand purchased by REALTORS®. Industry leaders including Dave Liniger co-founder of RE/MAX International believe that every real estate professional should have a smartphone in order to conduct business today.

If you haven't already added a BlackBerry smartphone to your toolset ask yourself:

- Am I doing everything I can to offer higher levels of responsiveness to my clients, colleagues and family?
- Am I doing everything I can to increase my level of client service?
- Am I doing everything I can to be more agile and able to seize new opportunities when they come my way?
- Am I missing opportunities when I'm away from my PC/laptop?

If you would like to learn more about BlackBerry smartphones, access our interactive BlackBerry 101 multimedia product demos, learn a few tips and tricks or learn more about the recently launched eKEY for BlackBerry lockbox access solution from GE Security, visit our website at www.blackberry.com/mainstreet.

We asked for feedback from the participants in our BlackBerry for RE/MAX Professionals program and here's what some of them had to say:

How has the BlackBerry solution impacted your personal life?

- "Has helped me especially with keeping up with email. I no longer have to get to my PCs to see messages. The browser has been a great feature because I have information at my fingertips. I also have used the navigation tool and it was a life saver. I'm now hooked on the device."
- "I absolutely LOVE my BlackBerry smartphone! I take it with me wherever I go. It is easy to discretely check my e-mail and messages so I can be more attentive to my family and responsive to my clients. I am not stuck in front of my laptop all the time. My family is happy about that. I love having technology with me all the time! I am a better wife, mother, and REALTOR!"
- "I don't have to be with my computer all day. I can manage multiple tasks and feel that I'm in touch with my business. I integrate my personal and business life so it makes it easier..."
- "I have more balance in work vs. off-work time. I can manage email better. I don't have to be online constantly. I can just monitor what is happening and respond immediately only when necessary."
- "It has made it possible for me to stay in touch with my family and friends immediately, when necessary, and not miss any urgent calls or e-mails, as well as respond to family emergencies quickly."

How has the BlackBerry solution impacted your business?

- "As a REALTOR®, I am on the road quite a bit. I have much more flexibility to send and receive information in the spur of the moment. In addition, I am pleased to advertise my technological connection and immediate response-ability for my clients."
- "By having emails and contacts, maps and top producer (database) data handy, I am able to respond more quickly, even when I'm between appointments or in an important meeting when time is of the essence."
- "I am able to respond almost immediately to my clients' and colleagues' needs. It has saved me time by allowing me to respond and sort mail as it arrives, instead of having to schedule time each day to sit down and do so."
- "I can check MLS on the go for clients. I can also take photos of a listing and email them to a client. Saves time and makes me look totally on top of things."
- "I can respond to clients in a more timely manner. When I do get those new leads/referrals I can respond instantly and get in touch with them before they move on to the next agent."
- "I cancelled my data card for my laptop! I don't have to open my laptop as much. When I get a PDF I can forward it on immediately. This has made me much more productive. It is so nice to have my phone, e-mail, calendar, and internet on one device. I can respond immediately to my clients' needs. I love to have access to everything 'on the fly.'"

What do you tell your colleagues about BlackBerry smartphones?

- "As the #2 agent in the office I have had to be smart with my time. Now I am smart with my phone! People often ask me how I have become so successful in such a short time. I tell them I always have my laptop so that I can respond quickly to my clients and referrals. Now I can respond immediately! Time is of the essence in this business. Whenever I have an opportunity, I encourage my colleagues to try a BlackBerry smartphone! I had a Palm device before but I could not synch my calendar after the first couple of weeks. The BlackBerry smartphone is a much superior device."
- "I can't believe I waited this long to get a smartphone. It has changed the way I do business. All real estate agents should have a BlackBerry smartphone."
- "I give it a glowing review. The way I explain it is that you don't realize the power and efficiency of the device until you use it on a day-to-day basis."
- "I tell them that it's fantastic, makes me more efficient, responsive and saves me time!"
- "I could not be happier with my new BlackBerry Curve 8330 smartphone. Here's what I love about my BlackBerry smartphone..."
 - Obvious quality of the unit
 - Excellent engineering
 - One hand usability with the trackball
 - Nearly unlimited features
 - Really good graphics
 - Sleek and small size
 - Seamless interface with Microsoft® Outlook®
 - Battery life (lasts all day with heavy use) ■



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