

New brokerage offers home sellers ad tracking, charges them greater commission for homes longer on the market

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A new residential online brokerage hopes to unlock a new palette of analytics from which sellers can track how their advertisements perform among buyers, adding a new transparency to the home selling experience.

RealDirect.com, which is being unveiled today, provides traditional brokerage services, plus it gives sellers a personal account through which they can check how often listing clicks result in appointments, a Google Analytics-type tool for real estate.

"If you're getting a lot of [clicks] from the New York Times... but you're getting twice as many appointments from StreetEasy, that's more valuable," said Doug Perlson, company co-founder and CEO. "What has been left out the entire time is appointments," a more important metric to track.

Sellers have a couple of options. For homes that are For Sale by Owner, or FSBO, sellers can pay \$295 to receive advice and access the listing tracking system.

The other option is working with a team of marketers and brokers who provide advertising, the tracking system, and sell homes. Sellers pay the brokerage on a commission scale -- 1 percent if the listing sells in fewer than 30 days, 2 percent if it takes longer.

Paul Purcell, co-founder of brokerage Charles Rutenberg Realty in New York, said that the analytics might be somewhat redundant, given the amount of information that a broker typically provides.

"A broker provides the seller with a great deal of this information anyway," Purcell said. "Every hit on [a broker's website] is already being measured by these firms... Traffic is an interesting analytic, but the broker is already supplying that."

Of greater concern to Purcell is the commission structure, which he feels incentivizes slower sales.

"As a seller... I [would] want to compensate someone at a higher level for doing it faster," Purcell said.

The number of days it takes to sell a home is generally longer than 30 days -- in fact it's generally at least three months. Manhattan condominium and co-op units were on the market for 124 days in the first quarter, according to data from appraisal and consulting firm Miller Samuel. In Brooklyn, the number of days a residential property sat on the market was 114; in Queens, it was 100. (Those are the markets Miller's data cover.)

Perlson of RealDirect puts the onus on sellers.

"The truth is, if a home sells in 30 days or less it is usually not because of the broker," Perlson said. "More likely it is that the home was priced aggressively or there was buyer who was waiting for that place to come up. Either way, in that situation we did less work than a typical sale. So since it costs us less to sell it quickly we pass the savings onto the client. It incentivizes the client to price the home correctly -- which is probably the most important part of the process."

While currently based in and focused on Manhattan, RealDirect plans to expand to the greater New York metro area by the end of the year.

RealDirect.com comes out of the box with one listing (a one-bedroom Chelsea apartment) and two agents, in addition to Perlson, as well as five digital marketing experts.

"Marketing analytics are always helpful because it allows the seller to target their strategy to the venue that is actually generating the most leads," noting that he's not yet totally convinced that the site will attract enough listings to make it a viable option for buyers," said Noah Rosenblatt, founder of brokerage and analytics website UrbanDigs. "Buyers will come only if they get enough sellers to list properties, so the key is how effective they are at procuring sell-side listings to manage."