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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Zillow complaint 'smoke and mirrors'

Re: '[National group charges 'Zestimates' are misleading](#)' (Oct. 27)

Real Estate Articles from Inman News

## Cost-effective Web techniques for real estate

### Brokers share powerful tips on what works

*Tuesday, October 31, 2006*

By [Glenn Roberts Jr.](#)  
[Inman News](#)

Innovative Internet-based technologies for the real estate industry can be cost-effective, too.

Blogs, wireless devices, off-the-shelf Web applications, video, virtual offices and paperless processes are among the examples of Internet-powered tools and techniques that don't require a huge investment of time and money before they pay off, said members of an *Inman News* Audio Conference, "Real Estate Technology: New Ways to Win."



Bruce Hiatt,  
Luxury Realty Group

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**Dear Editor:**

Real estate professionals have been saying for a long time that Zillow's estimates are too high -- sometimes by about 10 percent. This is hard especially when sellers think that they should sell their home for the "zestimate" and then they get zero showings, and their home sits on the market for months and months. This could have something to do with how homes are selling less, too, when sellers are unreasonable with their expectations.

Marjie Van Der Laan  
RE/MAX  
Vancouver, Wash.

**Dear Editor:**

This is online-discount-brokerage redux. Silliness. Get a job, you coalition whiners.

If the National Community Reinvestment Coalition would stop blathering and get into the market space with a better valuation tool that improved upon

Bruce Hiatt, principal for [Luxury Realty Group](#), a real estate company in Las Vegas, said his company has used separate blogs to target the downtown high-rise condo market and the market for homes in [Summerlin](#), a giant master-planned community in the region.

The company also produces video market reports for its clients to view online, and that has proved to be effective in reaching new clients, too, he said. "We found they were forwarding these video links to their friends ... this had a whole amoeba effect we never expected," he said. Promoting blog postings at blog directories, such as [Technorati.com](#), can also help draw visitors to a site, he said.

With the slowing of the U.S. real estate market, more agents and brokers are looking for ways to trim operating costs, said Brian Boero, CEO for real estate technology company [VREO Inc.](#) "We focus on removing paper from a real estate operation. I view paper as the cholesterol of the real estate business: It builds up and builds up and builds up and finally you wake up one day and it's going to give you a big problem, so you want to get rid of it."



Brian Boero,  
VREO

Traditional "cubicle farm" real estate offices are increasingly an anachronism, and agents are increasingly shifting into the field and away from the office, Boero said. Products such as electronic signature and other mobile applications are powering this office exodus, he said.

Jeffrey Bastress, president of [StartPoint Realty](#), a Massachusetts real estate company, said the company is using technology to push its agents out into the field. "They basically are working from virtual offices," he said, as the company has set up transaction management platforms and lead management systems that can be accessed away from the office. Lowering the overhead costs allows the company to offer service at a low cost to consumers, he said.

"We've been accused of being a discount broker. We think of ourselves as more of a [JetBlue](#) process -- being successful at a lower fee." Bastress, who has also owned and operated RE/MAX offices in the state, said that top producers have practically disappeared from real estate offices because of the evolution of technology.

**More stories by [Glenn Roberts Jr.](#)**

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[National group charges 'Zestimates' are misleading](#)

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Zillow, then they would do something constructive. Envy and running scared by slamming Zillow to the FTC doesn't impress anyone. More smoke and mirrors under the pretense of consumer protection. Yawn. Blabber. Move on. We poor, sad-sack consumers. We're all such idiots and victims to misleading data. Yawn. Blabber. Move on.

Every time someone's "interest" loses its grip on previously hoarded information due to some quasi-libertarian techno/business innovation, they come out insulting consumers. Who are these righteous "coalitions" who self-proclaim their role as consumer protectors? Give us a break. Zillow's inaccurate data doesn't hurt us. It's the "coalitions" that want to keep the data under lock and key that hurt us. Yawn. Blabber. Move on.

Ronald Gombach  
Morrisville, Pa.

StartPoint has also worked to streamline the entire real estate transaction process for clients, he said. Rather than serving as a "one-stop-shop" for real estate and related services, Bastress said that the company takes the approach of putting together a package of services that clients can choose from by establishing relationships with other companies.

Trolling for the new business on the Internet is perhaps easier now than it has been in the past, Boero said, as the technology can be very accessible and affordable. "Lead generation online is perhaps even less intimidating than it was a couple years ago," he said.

With increasing sources of property listings information on the Internet, Bastress said that real estate multiple listing services might have a tough battle in locking down that information. He added that too much emphasis is placed on who owns the listing and said he believes that listings information will inevitably become open source. Ultimately, he said, most sellers want as many prospective buyers as possible to know about their for-sale property.

"We don't control the information anymore," he said. Google, craigslist and other Internet sites are providing property information to consumers for free and outside of the MLS network, he noted. "People are getting this information anyway, in one shape or form."

Hiatt said he believes that real estate brokerage companies are stepping up to provide more detailed information about properties than is traditionally available through the MLS, and the amount of information on these sites will become increasingly rich.

Boero, meanwhile, said that property-search sites such as [Trulia](#), [Oodle](#), [craigslist](#) and [Google Base](#) are a byproduct of stagnant innovation by the MLS community at large. "Because there has been a lack of initiative within the MLS community you're seeing it pop up elsewhere," he said.

Hiatt and Bastress said that transaction management platforms are popular with clients and have improved communication and even generated new business.

\* \* \*

***Send tips or a Letter to the Editor to [glenn@inman.com](mailto:glenn@inman.com) or call (510) 658-9252, ext. 137.***

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