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Tablet PCs Power the New Real Estate Transaction

By JOEANN FOSSLAND

Talk about a wow factor. Total strangers will strike up conversations with you when they see you with a tablet PC and are fascinated as you show them how you can write on the screen.

For most, the first perception is that the tablet PC is a big PDA or fancy toy. In reality, it is as fully functional as a laptop with more advantages. Tablet PCs were launched in 2002, but many REALTORS® are just beginning to grasp the amazing potential and to jump on the bandwagon. The move toward a paperless business starts here.

The Wireless Advantage

Your digital proficiency will provide a distinct point of difference from your competitors who still conduct business using paper. Imagine arriving at a potential listing with tablet PC in hand. As you tour the home, you sketch the floor plan and make notes.

Your presentation begins with a few charts and graphs in PowerPoint to display the absorption rates and odds of selling in the current

market. Because you are wireless, when discussing comparables, you show your prospects the virtual tours of those sales online.

You provide a preview of how their property will look when posted to a special Web site you will use just for that property, with their address as the URL. Next, you demonstrate the neat mapping

features on your site.

Once ready to discuss the terms of the listing agreement and the supporting documents, the seller reviews them right from your tablet and signs. You have your portable printer with you to leave behind a copy and print the new flyer you have created during your visit.

Compare this scenario to the agent who walks in with a print-out of the current comps and a stack of papers. Who would you rather hire if you were the client?

Mario Fender of Team Link REALTORS-Keller Williams Realty in Westlake Village, CA, uses the Toshiba R15-S822, which has a DVD player, CD-RW, 14.1-inch screen and built-in wireless capability.



Mario Fender

"Every client who's signed contracts on my tablet has been very impressed with the technology," Fender said. "I don't have to use a desktop anymore. My documents are mobile on my tablet. My clients sign the contracts right on the screen. I can e-mail my client the contracts they just signed if they have a wireless network, or I can e-mail it to them from the office."

Because you are able to interact directly with the screen rather than with a mouse and keyboard, the tablet PC is more comfortable and easier to use. You don't need a flat space for your PC, nor does a vertical screen become a dividing wall between you and the other person.

My VREO RedTablet from Motion Computing is just about the size of a legal pad. I flip the image on the screen to portrait view while taking notes in a class or making sketches as I walk around.

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Fender prefers the Toshiba R15-S822 with DVD player, CD-RW, 14.1-inch screen and built-in wireless capability.



The pen writes directly on the screen and is used like a mouse to select, drag and open files or in place of a keyboard to handwrite notes. The screen is digitized and, unlike a touch screen, the tablet PC screen only receives information from the special pen as you rest your wrist on the screen and write naturally.

For Alisa Hagner, ABR, CRS, GRI, of the Berkshire Group in Denver, CO, her motto is, "Make it easy for people to do business with you, and they will." She uses a Toshiba Satellite R-15 and has found, "Handwriting and signing are the biggest reasons to have and use a tablet." She also finds the wireless access to be invaluable for her mobile business.



Alisa Hagner

The VREO RedTablet by Motion Computing is a slate model. The keyboard is part of the cover and can be connected via a USB connection. The slate is light and small.

The RedTablet is the only machine that has been developed specifically for the needs of the real estate industry, according to Dan Tealdi, vice president, tablet division. In the design, the company responded to requests for a tool that was small, completely portable with a long battery life and capable of searching the MLS and signing and e-mailing contracts.

On the Go: The Competitive Edge

With gasoline heading toward \$4 per gallon, there are few activities that are more wasteful than driving around to collect signatures. Tablet PCs eliminate the need for this.

The T1600 RedTablet's extended battery provides up to seven hours of power without recharging. The Toshiba gets three to four hours, and both Alisa Hagner and Debbie Redditt use AC/DC adapters to charge up while driving.



Debbie Redditt

Redditt, CRS, of Realty-Executives-Treasure Coast in Palm City, FL, uses the journal notewriter "to allow for my clients signatures. I can use the tablet as a notepad, and it will convert my notes into typed text, which helps, especially when previewing a home for a client or making notes for a new listing."

Tablet PC Hardware

The tablet PC is available in two forms, which are the convertible with an integrated keyboard and the slate tablet with a plug-in keyboard. When working in the office, most allow you to dock with full-sized monitor and keyboard.

Tablet PCs made by Acer, HP and Toshiba are convertible model tablet PCs. These have an attached keyboard and look and work much like a standard laptop until used as a writing pad. Then, you rotate the screen and close it inside-out for easy notetaking and pen input.

"I can use PowerPoint and allow my clients to interact with it while it is helping to sell me."

Tablet PCs

As with any computer, depending on the configuration, costs can vary greatly. Here are the main players and entry level costs.

Manufacturer	Model	Type	Price	Weight	Screen	CD/DVD
Acer (acer.com)	C110	convertible	\$1,100-2,000	3.1 lbs	10.4"	external
	C314XMI	convertible	\$1,700-2,000	6.4 lbs	14.1"	internal
HP Compaq (hp.com)	TC1100	convertible	\$1,200-1,500	4 lbs	10.4"	internal
	TC4200	convertible	\$1,600-2,200	4.6 lbs	12.1"	internal
IBM (ibm.com)	ThinkPadX41	convertible	\$1,900-2,200	3.5 lbs	12.1"	external
RedTablet (redtablet.com)	1600 Centrino	slate	\$2,199-3,500	3.1 lbs	12.1"	external
Toshiba (toshiba.com)	R-15	convertible	\$1,200-1,500	6.2 lbs	14.1"	internal

Redditt also appreciates the interactive features that the tablet offers. "I can use PowerPoint and allow my clients to interact with it while it is helping to sell me." Her Toshiba Satellite R15 is a convertible model.

The handwriting recognition software used by these computers is surprisingly accurate. My RedTablet has good speech recognition as well and makes it possible to dictate e-mails.

Redditt believes the tablet gives her a competitive edge by increasing her productivity. "I can pull up additional listings in the car with my clients and access e-mails while on the road," she said. "The keyboard, touchpad and four-way scroll keys are designed for people who like the familiarity of a notebook computer."

Fender enjoys the ability to write on the screen during a PowerPoint presentation, as well as having his own signature at the bottom of his e-mails. These little things can make a big impression.

The Extras

In case there are no hot spots to be found, Hagner has a wireless modem (Motorola im240) to look up properties on the MLS, send and receive e-mails and conduct research. While tablet PCs have built-in wireless capability for office, home and hot spot use, to be entirely wireless requires an additional aircard, which costs about \$80 per month for unlimited wireless.

Most convertible tablet PCs have a CD/DVD reader/writer built in. The slate does not, but it has a small peripheral drive that attaches by a firewire port. The trade-off is weight and size.

Redditt likes being able use the two USB ports, as well as a digital card reader "so I don't have to carry all the cords for my digital camera. I just insert the card and voila. I have my digital pictures immediately."

The RedTablet features a View Anywhere® Screen that is easy to see inside or out.

Tablet PC Software

Microsoft's Windows Journal is designed specifically for the XP Tablet Operating System. According to Hagner, she can plan a whole year ahead with OneNote, which allows you to organize multiple file formats, including ideas, agendas and contacts, in one location.

Hagner utilizes several software programs for her business, including Pat Zaby's Marketing

Library and database software; Respond, which makes operating a real estate business from Outlook easier; Adobe Acrobat to create PDF files; Microsoft Office to work with documents and spreadsheets; Publisher for brochures and photo property cards; and Microsoft Streets and Trips with GPS to locate properties on the map and organize showings.

Now that's a huge "wow" for a client to see the car icon moving along the route from house to house. Clients see the schools, parks and places to dine right on the computer in their lap.

The VREO RedTablet's Dashboard software works with the tablet PC to download forms, as well as most of the required documents to conduct a sale. Then the user locks down the document, and it cannot be changed.

One of the interesting features about this approach is that documents are stored in an online "vault" rather than in a traditional computer file. Say goodbye to stacks of paper on your desk and to searching for that one document you forgot to have signed before a closing.

Redditt researched extensively before her purchase. "I found some local stores that carried various tablet models," she said. "I was able to play with a few different tablets and decided that the Toshiba was best for me."

"Handwriting and signing are the biggest reasons to have and use a tablet."



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