

HEADLINE: Keeping real estate practice relevant

TEXT:

Awareness of ecological issues has never been higher, and its growth approaches critical mass. In nearly every industry, stand-out examples of initiatives by established market leaders or of attention-grabbing upstarts are steering attention and media coverage toward green, carbon-neutral and eco-conscious initiatives. Whether it be in greener power, as evidenced by the popularity of Bullfrog Power, or in hybrid vehicles, in which the Prius is the [ITALICS ne plus ultra] of consumer brand identification with green automotive transport, the importance of staying relevant and anticipating consumer needs is imperative. The National Association of Green Agents and Brokers is the leading group in Canada that assists real estate professionals in greening their practice.

In today's fast-changing landscape, early and effective adoption of necessary business practices can make the difference in determining whether a business stays competitive. Indeed, business history is rife with examples of organizations which first anticipate a given need, and by executing on that need ahead of competitors they become the defining brand that consumers identify in their given sector. Names like Google and Microsoft connote hegemonic dominance of their respective business fields, and yet both companies are still relatively young. The ability to read a radically dynamic marketplace and anticipate structural and social changes in how business operates can be key to establishing a strong market position.

Environmental concerns are prominent in people's minds, and they aren't going to become any less prevalent anytime soon. In this busy election year, partisans of all stripes mentioned the environment in their campaign platforms, whatever the specifics of their strategies. In some jurisdictions, regulatory change at the government level is already underway. "Our provincial government has recently announced a new \$60 million rebate program for existing homes to help with energy retrofits. As a real estate board, we need to be updating our members on these new incentives so they can offer this information to both sellers and new buyers," says Dennis Fimrite, Education and Green Task Force Chair at the Victoria Real Estate Board. The VREB's involvement with NAGAB helps it do just that: "Realtors help people make the biggest financial decision of their lives and more and more of those decision makers want to know about the energy conservation measures that exist in the home they might be buying. Given that buyers want this information, sellers need advice from their Realtors about what they could do to make their properties more 'energy ready' for sale."

With prospective buyers and sellers interested in their options in terms of home retrofitting and renovation, NAGAB sponsor Home Depot has an Eco Options program to assist its customers. "It's easy to make simple changes around the home to save energy, conserve water, reduce waste and have a positive affect on the environment. Homeowners just need to know how, and that's where The Home Depot can help," says Joanna Caners, Eco Options Manager at Home Depot Canada. The ability of a Realtor to point to a well-known name with a parallel program like that at Home Depot is a message of competent reassurance, as well as showing clients that going green needn't necessarily mean going far out of their ways.

Especially in a time of potential uncertainty, the prospect of ensuring one's home is both ecologically and economically sustainable is possibly the best message one can pass on to a client. "I think being green is important to a Realtor only if it resonates to them on some level. On a personal level, I have always been aware and a champion of the environment. I reduce, reuse and recycle. I love being out in nature," says Angela Bailey, Toronto-based eco-Realtor and former Olympian. "I want to be a part of the environmental solution, and want a career that reflects my commitment and that is why I am steering myself toward a green designation."

It is the abilities that NAGAB membership offers, and the distinction that its certification gives, that make it so useful in optimally positioning your real estate practice for the years ahead.