

ASSESSING SEO PRACTICES OF THE TOP 50 REAL ESTATE COMPANIES



... and planting the seeds for a successful 2009.

A Real Estate Website SEO Optimization Study by Randi Thornton SEO Consultant for PCMS Consulting

For America's Top Real Estate Companies . . . SEO Delivers Exponential Growth Opportunities.

ARE THE TOP CONTENDERS CAPITALIZING?

Author Profile

Randi Thornton is the SEO (Search Engine Optimization) Consultant for PCMS Consulting. She has worked in the Real Estate industry for 20 years. A thorough understanding of the regular obstacles that Real Estate Companies and Agents face, has helped her apply specific and targeted Search Engine Internet Marketing Real Estate Optimization strategies for many Real Estate related websites.

Clients come to Randi for her specialized knowledge and insights on SEO Optimization practices for the Real Estate industry. Randi is heavily involved in search engine optimization research and has had the opportunity to transform a wide variety of Real Estate websites into revenue-producing services.

Websites she has developed from start up include: MortgageCreditProblems.com, REOSphere.com, Calculators4Mortgages.com, LendingAffiliates.com, CreditRepairSite.com and SilverDoorRealEstate.com.



Executive Summary

In October and November of 2008, Randi Thornton compiled a detailed analysis of the Top 50 Real Estate Companies' Websites, recognized by Real Trends Report "The 500 Largest Brokers in the U.S. (Ranked by Closed Transactions sides for 2007)." Real Trends is a leading source of analysis and information on the residential brokerage industry.

The main objective of the analysis was to highlight the SEO practices of major Real Estate Companies as well as emphasize with real examples, the importance for all Real Estate Companies to place SEO at the top of their 2009 marketing agenda.

I review countless websites every month, ranging from small sites to large multi-page web-sites. While doing a variety of SEO research to try to identify what's working and what's not cutting it for Real Estate websites, I've noticed that there are a few issues that come up frequently. These Real Estate Optimization factors were divided into **Seven (7) SEO Categories**.

Note: The categories that are discussed in this report only touch the surface of what is required to gain top Search Engine placement. Like Real Estate, the SEO world is constantly changing and it takes a true professional to keep up with new SEO trends, tools and practices. I follow Google SEO best practices.

What is Search Engine Optimization?

SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is the process of making a website and its content highly relevant for both search engines and searchers. SEO includes technical tasks that make it easier for search engines to find and index a website for the appropriate keywords. Web SEO helps a Real Estate website gain top positioning for relevant words and phrases. If a website is not found on the first or second page of a search engine, then that website will not enjoy website traffic, online exposure, and online profitability.



Did you know that there are about 200 factors that go into determining a Real Estate website's ranking in Google's search results? Last year, Google made 450 tweaks to its algorithm. Can you afford to remain unaware of these changes?



Measurements

This study evaluates the websites of the Top 50 Real Estate Companies as recognized by a report published by *Real Trends* entitled "The Largest 500 Brokers in the U.S. — Ranked by Closed Transactions Sides for 2007".

The following factors were considered:

- Traffic Ranking
- Number of Search Terms a website ranked for
- Google Page Rank
- Number of Pages indexed by Google
- META Descriptions
- Page Titles
- Website Validation Errors

Real Estate Landscape

Real estate is about **building relationships.** Today, these relationships start online. The need to embrace the Internet is evident in most industries, but for Real Estate Brokers and Real Estate agents, Real Estate website SEO Optimization and the Internet is paramount, and a core factor for success. Having an online, visible and

prominent website voice and an online platform to showcase your listings and make your services known to sellers is crucial.

In today's challenging real estate market and economic downturn, every dollar spent needs to have relevance. Advertising and marketing costs are on the rise and what used to work no longer does. Media today has become fragmented and gone are the days when companies launched a campaign on According to the 2007 National Association of REALTORS[®] Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers, 84% of all home buyers used the Internet as an information source.

TV and reached masses of consumers. Traditional media vehicles such as newspapers, magazines and TV, simply do not make the phone ring like they used to. This is because consumers today are bombarded with thousands of marketing messages every day and they have almost become immune to traditional media.

Studies indicate that the Internet has become the go-to source for home buyers and sellers. The Internet provides a 24/7 source of information and buyers and sellers can browse and look for **WHAT** they need, **WHEN** they need it, without having to be distracted by hordes of other irrelevant marketing messages.

An astounding 84% of ALL buyers identified the Internet as a source in their home search. This percentage amount included 87% of first-time buyers, 82% of repeat buyers, 79% of new home buyers and 85% of buyers of previously owned homes.

With a plethora of Real Estate Websites to choose from, can home buyers easily find your site? Or is your competitor enjoying the increased profits?

This means that you need to position your Real Estate Companies and Agents' website for top rankings in the search engines. Top Real Estate companies have relied on name recognition, but with a host of major companies to choose from, clearly only a few would get "top-of-mind" awareness. Subsequently, even the most established companies need to optimize their websites to constantly maintain their market position.



In a world dominated by the Internet, what matters most is not having concrete processes for your marketing and sales funnels **BUT a search engine optimized Real Estate website that potential clients will FIND in the first place!**

Guess what happens if customers don't find your website?

Real Estate Companies are overwhelmingly neglecting SEO, missing out on a massive opportunity to boost their profits and thrive in today's market and economic situation!



Traffic Rankings

The table below highlights the top 10 Real Estate Companies with the highest traffic rankings (out of the top 50 analyzed).

For this inquiry I used Alexa.com. Over the years, Alexa has built an unparalleled database of information about sites that includes traffic ranking, statistics, related links, etc.

The lower the number the higher the ranking. This means that in this case, Zip Realty receives the highest amount of traffic.

Out of the 50 Real Estate websites analyzed, the following are the top 10 websites that receive the most traffic. Is the LACK of Real Estate Website Search Engine Optimization Affecting Your Traffic Ranking?

Traffic Ranking is a measurement that determines the amount of traffic that your website receives. Your Traffic Ranking is what counts. Without traffic to your website, you will not be discovered online. This means **lost business**!

TRAFFIC RANKING	REAL TRENDS RANK- COMPANY NAME ING		
2,185	15	Zip Realty	
9,788	1	NRT LLC	
18,888	3	The Long & Foster Companies, Inc.	
19,986	13	Keller Williams Realty	
29,343	12	John L. Scott Real Estate	
39,362	2	Home Services of America, Inc.	
41,322	18	Prudential Douglas Elliman Real Estate	
53,037	11	Ebby Halliday, Realtors	
61,515	7	Hanna Holdings, Inc.	
65,389	9	William Raveis Real Estate, Inc.	



Number of Keyword Found that Point to a Website

With this exercise, I found the number of different keyword terms that point to a website when a searcher performs a search in Google. These keywords are ranked in the top 20 searches on Google. For example, the same website may rank #1 for the keyword term "Chicago Real Estate", # 5 for Real Estate in Chicago" and # 19 for "Homes for Sale in Chicago".

Did you ever check how many relevant keywords your site has in order to rank high enough and be in the Google Top 20? Using the information obtained from your SEO analysis and building a semantic core, you can find out how well a site is optimized for specific search requests.

Out of the 50 websites analyzed, these are the top 10 websites that have the most keyword terms that rank 1-20 on Google.

Have you checked your keywords lately? Through who's eyes are you seeing them — Yours or a typical searcher's eyes? Keywords must be your website's foundation.

NUMBER OF KEYWORD TERMS RANKED	REAL TRENDS RANKING	COMPANY NAME	
23,891	10	GMAC Real Estate - Company Owned Operations	
7,811	1	NRT LLC	
4,714	18	Prudential Douglas Elliman Real Estate	
4,330	4	Crye-Leike Realtors	
2,075	12	John L. Scott Real Estate	
1,725	7	Hanna Holdings, Inc.	
1,390	3	The Long & Foster Companies, Inc.	
1,013	45	Northwood Realty Services	
842	40	Prudential Georgia Realty	
818	11	Ebby Halliday, Realtors	



Google Page Rank

The top Google SEO ranking for all 50 Real Estate Companies was six. This means that only 6 out of the 50 websites analyzed achieved a Google SEO ranking of six! Most Real Estate Companies have missed massive opportunities by not having their website optimized. Are you guilty of making their same mistake?

What's the use of spending top dollar in creating compelling marketing messages, when your customers are not finding your Real Estate website?

You have to reach your customers FIRST in order to attempt to persuade them to use your services. Surprisingly, most Real Estate Companies are missing this huge opportunity.

This exercise identified the percentage of website pages that utilized a unique META description for each web page. I was extremely surprised that this well known Real Estate SEO technique did not have higher percentages. The results indicate that there is a huge scope for With Page Rank, Google introduced a way of evaluating the relative authority of a web-site or page.

improvement for these company websites and other similar ones. Just by implementing this simple SEO technique, these Real Estate websites can achieve much better rankings. Out of the 50 websites analyzed, the table overleaf highlights the top 10 web sites that have the highest percentage of unique META descriptions on their web pages.

GOOGLE PAGE RANK	REAL TRENDS RANKING	COMPANY	
6	1	NRT LLC	
6	18	Prudential Douglas Elliman Real Estate	
6	3	The Long & Foster Companies, Inc.	
6	13	Keller Williams Realty	
6	15	ZipRealty	
6	6	Prudential Fox & Roach Realtors	



Good practices for META description tags according to Google Webmaster Central

- Accurately summarize the page's content.
 Write a description that would both inform and interest users when they see your description
 META tag as a snippet in a search result. Put just enough detail to arouse their curiosity and interest to click for more.
- DO USE unique descriptions for each page. Having a different description META tag for each page helps both users and Google, especially in searches where users may bring up multiple pages on your domain. If your site has thousands or even millions of pages, then manually creating description META tags is probably not feasible. In this case, you could generate description META tags automatically, based on the content of each page.

What are META Tags?

Information placed in the HTML header of a Web page, providing information that is not visible to browsers, but can be used in varying degrees by search engines to index a page. Common META tags used in search engine marketing are title, description, and keyword tags.

Think of your META tags and page titles as valuable real estate!

You Should Avoid

- Writing a description META tag that has no relation to the content on the page.
- Using generic descriptions
- Filling the description with only keywords.
- Copying and pasting the entire content of the document into the description META tag.

% OF UNIQUE META DESCRIP- TIONS	REAL TRENDS RANKING	COMPANY NAME	
72%	44	Prudential Carolina Real Estate	
63%	14	Realty Executives, Phoenix	
53%	15	ZipRealty	
50%	17	RE/MAX Greater Atlanta	
49%	10	GMAC Real Estate - Company Owned Operations	
44%	1	NRT LLC	
40%	3	The Long & Foster Companies, Inc.	
37%	7	Hanna Holdings, Inc.	
33%	4	Crye-Leike Realtors	
30%	12	John L. Scott Real Estate	



Good Practice for Page Title Tags According to Google Webmaster Central

Out of the 50 websites analyzed, the table below shows the top 10 websites that have the highest percentage of unique page titles on their website pages.

- Accurately describe the page's content. Choose a title that effectively communicates the topic of the content of the page.
- DO USE brief, but descriptive titles. Titles can be both short and informative. If the title is too long, Google will only show a portion of it in the search result.
- Create unique title tags for each page. Each of your pages should ideally have a unique title tag, which helps Google know how the page differs from the others on your site.

An HTML META tag with text describing a specific Web page. The title tag should contain strategic keywords for the page, since many search engines pay special attention to the title text when indexing pages. The title tag should also make sense to humans, since it is usually the text link to the page displayed in search engine results.

Things you should avoid

- Choosing a title that has no relation to the content on the page.
- Using default or vague titles like "Untitled" or "New Page 1".
- Using a single title tag across all of your site's pages or a large group of pages.

% OF UNIQUE META DESCRIP- TIONS	REAL TRENDS RANKING	COMPANY NAME	
72%	44	Prudential Carolina Real Estate	
63%	14	Realty Executives, Phoenix	
53%	15	ZipRealty	
50%	17	RE/MAX Greater Atlanta	
49%	10	GMAC Real Estate - Company Owned Operations	
44%	1	NRT LLC	
40%	3	The Long & Foster Companies, Inc.	
37%	7	Hanna Holdings, Inc.	
33%	4	Crye-Leike Realtors	
30%	12	John L. Scott Real Estate	

Duplicate Content, META Descriptions and Page Titles

There are a few types of duplicate content. In this study I looked at both the META descriptions and page titles. Many times this issue is unknowingly created by repeating the brand name on each page as the page title or just reusing one META description for all pages on a site. Search engines will see the duplicate META descriptions and sometimes conclude that a page is a duplicate before they get to the actual page content. This happens more often when there isn't a lot of supporting text on the page.

Besides giving search engines the wrong impression about your site, you're missing a key opportunity to optimize this page for a search phrase that can bring good qualified traffic to your site.

Site Validation

Out of the 50 websites analyzed, these are the top 10 web sites that have the least amount of website errors, according to the World Wide Web Consortium (w3.org). This is your website's foundation. As with Real Estate, if the foundation is cracked, the rest of the house may be considered irrelevant.

A w3 HTML validation shows the number of errors with HTML. If your web site is not conforming to CCS Standards, the search engines will have problems reading and indexing your website.

NUMBER OF ER- RORS	REAL TRENDS RANKING	COMPANY NAME	
0	43	Coldwell Banker Schmidt Realtors	
0	49	First Weber Group- Madison	
9	4	Crye-Leike Realtors	
11	29	William Raveis Real Estate, Inc.	
23	36	Prudential Gardner, Realtors	
26	10	GMAC Real Estate - Company Owned Operations	
26	33	Metro Brokers/GMAC Real Estate	
41	38	RE/MAX Results	
41	39	Prudential California/Nevada/Texas Realty	
46	13	Keller Williams Realty	



Summary

While it is clear that the top broker real estate websites are using SEO to some degree, there is definitely room for improvement. The traffic rating chart demonstrates that the top 18 brokers identified in the Real Trends study are enjoying massive website traffic. This confirms that in order to become a top real estate company or agent you need SEO to achieve search engine traffic. As was highlighted earlier, website traffic means profits.

Is it therefore any surprise that the top producing Real Estate Companies are also the ones that utilize the Internet and experience high traffic, top Google Rankings, a massive number of keywords terms directed to their website, and make correct use of META descriptions and page titles?

Which Real Estate companies are going to outperform the others in 2009?

Keywords also play a major role in the online success of a Real Estate website. The Real Estate Company websites that had the most keyword terms associated with their website also had high rankings in the Real Trends study. GMAC Real Estate was the clear winner here with 23,891 different keyword terms that were found on page 1 or page 2 of Google. These gigantic numbers can be achieved by any Real Estate Company or agent, no matter the size of the company.

However time is a factor, along with keyword relevance page titles, META descriptions, content, links and other factors Google uses to determine which websites are worthy of what keyword terms.

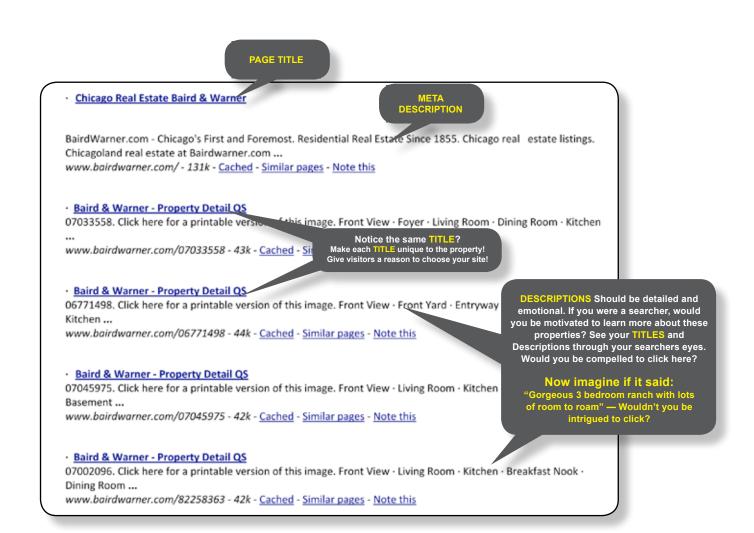
An authority website is one that Google rates top in its industry. I looked at the Google page rank to determine how important Google thought these websites ranked. A Google SEO ranking of six is the minimum every Real Estate website should aim to obtain.



Stories Sell: Think of your Website's Title and Descriptions as Valuable Real Estate!

The one thing that you need to ask yourself when writing content for your real estate website TITLES and META DESCRIPTIONS is whether you are answering the one question your potential customers would have on their minds and that is: "What is in it for me?"

Randomly, I choose to do a Google search for "baird warner realty." Following are the Google page 1 results. Baird & Warner, Inc., located in Chicago, IL, ranked number 20 in the Real Trends Report.





Buying SEO Will be Your Greatest Benefit

Now, using the top Real Estate keyword term (real estate), let's do a search for "Chicago Real Estate". Real Estate is the number 1 keyword phrase used by searchers' seeking Real Estate information. Therefore, it makes sense for a Real Estate Company or agent servicing the Chicago market place to be found for the phrase "Chicago Real Estate". Will Baird & Warner show up in the top Google results? Below are the top results for Real Estate Company listings.



Searchers will usually pick a result from the first page!

Unfortunately, Real Estate companies are not capitalizing on the basics of SEO! A fully optimized Real Estate website means top search positions for Real Estate companies of all sizes. Local search is a SEO tool used for greater search rankings.

Beat the recession by using SEO Services to obtain high search engine rankings. What happens when you do not optimize your website? The result is ALWAYS loss of sales, because searchers WILL find someone. Will it be you or your competitor?



Let's Take a Closer Look at Keywords and Real Estate Websites

A keyword is a word or phrase entered into a search engine in an effort to get the search engine to return matching and relevant results. Just how important are the keywords you use at your site? How big an impact can they have on the success or failure of your site? Actually keywords can make or break your site. easily make the difference between a site or blog that has no traffic and one that enjoys heavy traffic. **That is how important keywords are!**

Implications of the "Set it and Forget it" Mentality

It's short-sighted to think that you can optimize your website and then forget about it. There is no "one size fits all" SEO tool that allows for a consistent number one ranking. Some sites need higher keyword density; pages optimized for very competitive keywords may need more quality links to achieve the traffic you need in order to achieve top search engine rankings. Moreover, there are numerous factors that need to be considered to safeguard your website from violating Google's code of conduct. Failure to ignore this code of conduct may even result in your Real Estate website being dropped!

SEO Optimization issues are all fixable. It's crucial to know the strengths and weaknesses of what you're doing and get the issues that are holding your Real Estate site back, out of the way. SEO is not something to be taken lightly.

KEYWORD TERM	SEARCH VOLUME: October 2008 on Google	
real estate	101,000,000	
real estate agent	9,140,000	
real estate search	7,480,000	
real estate homes	2,740,000	
real estate agents	1,500,000	

The Top Five Real Estate Related Keyword Terms in October 2008 for Google

You don't gamble on your business with shoddy busines planning and strategies, so why should you risk losing valuable sales by ignoring Real Estate SEO Optimization?

SEO is an ongoing process that requires art and science. Invest the time and work with a white hat SEO Consultant to get it right, first time. Be extremely cautious if a SEO company offers you a quick scheme and promises you the world. Buy SEO from a skilled SEO Real Estate Consultant.

Surpass your competition with Real Estate SEO Services

This is not the time to indulge in business activities that cannot be measured. Real Estate Companies cannot continue wasting valuable opportunities to attract qualified leads to their websites, by not optimizing their sites effectively. The leads you are losing can mean important sales that you're simply throwing away every day.

According to the Marketing Sherpa, a small increase in traffic and conversions, usually mean an impressive impact on lead generation and sales!

In their Search Marketing Benchmark Survey — July 2007, Marketing Sherpa published a Lead Search Opportunity Calculator that clearly shows the effect that more traffic and leads have on any website in any industry. I've reproduced the chart overleaf. The first conversion rate is the average conversion rate for 2007 and measures the connection between website traffic and lead generation. The second and third conversion rates highlight trends that are slightly higher than the average, and thus demonstrate the huge benefits of a small increase in conversion rate and traffic.

Natural Search Lead	Average Conversion Rate of Site		
Site Traffic Unique Visitors (per month)	1	2	3
	4%*	5%	6%
	Leads	Leads	Leads
0	0	0	0
6,000	240	300	360
12,000	480	600	720
18,000	720	900	1,080
24,000	960	1,200	1,440
30,000	1,200	1,500	1,800
36,000	1,440	1,800	2,160
42,000	1,680	2,100	2,520
48,000	1,920	2,400	2,880
54,000	2,160	2,700	3,240
60,000	2,400	3,000	3,600

Marketing Sherpa, Search Benchmarking Survey, July 2007



How much Real Estate Business will you produce in 2009?

Seize the SEO Real Estate Opportunity! Real Estate Website Optimization is critical to boost profits and thrive in today's market and economic situation.

Useful SEO Tool Box

SEO Website Marketing ROI Calculator

Our free and easy to use SEO Website ROI Calculator is designed to estimate your return on investment. Plug in the numbers and see how it changes present and future profits for your business. Give it a go and get an immediate snapshot of how your website fairs as regards to SEO and more importantly, know what to expect when you engage in effective SEO optimization! Get the SEO Web Marketing ROI Calculator: http://www.seogoogleguru.com/seo-tools/web-marketing-calculator/.

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Website SEO Score Report

Rocket Your SEO ROI with a 14-Point Smart Web Site SEO Review Optimization Report! Your SEO score is a measure of your domain's importance and popularity. It predicts the domain's ability to rank well in search engines, the reach of your brand awareness and how well you currently draw in traffic. Get your SEO Score Report here: <u>http://www.seogoogleguru.com/seo-tools/seo-report</u>.

Real Estate Domain Names

Domain Name and Keywords: When your targeted keywords are in your Domain Name, search engines will know what your web site is about. Therefore, helping you gain better rankings! Get your domain name here:



http://www.seogoogleguru.com/seo-services/domain-name.

Real Estate Optimization SEO Study

Get Your Copy Here: <u>http://realestateseostudy.com</u> A December 2008 Real Estate Website SEO Optimization Study **Authored by Randi Thornton** 612-414-2541

