



*This article was published on: 08/01/2006*

**BUYER'S GUIDE: Mobility**

**BY MICHAEL ANTONIAK**

**'I am my office'**

Where's your office? Today, many real estate professionals can confidently answer, "Wherever I am!" They've left their desks behind to work virtually, in the field. Yet, there's no single definition of what constitutes a virtual workspace.

Debra Agliano, GRI, of ERA Andrew Realty in Medford, Mass., takes a minimalist approach. The sales associate carries all she needs in her multifunction Palm Treo smart phone: voice communications, mobile e-mail and faxing (which arrive as PDFs), Web access, and essential software. "The Treo is my office," Agliano says. "It's given me the freedom and flexibility to work when and where I want, without any sacrifice in service to clients."

Salesperson Monica Foster's virtual office is stocked with a MacBook Pro notebook, a Palm PDA, a cell phone, a Hewlett Packard Wi-Fi-compatible mobile printer, and Web-based software.

Foster, ABR®, with RE/MAX Preferred Associates in Cedar Hill, Texas, considers her essentials the notebook, the printer, and a virtual fax service. "These three things let me conduct and grow my business without being tied to one location," she says. "I spend only four hours a week in the office—if that much."

Lee Henderson, vice president and branch manager for Pacific Union GMAC Real Estate's Danville, Calif., office, has been developing a pilot program "to give salespeople everything they need to work in the field as if they were in our offices." There are currently about 20 participants in the program, and he hopes to have 75 on board within a year. He plans to use the program as a recruiting tool.

Specifically, the company provides the infrastructure for mobile e-mail, faxing, electronic forms and contracts, MLS access, and Web-based



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transaction management. And it offers recommendations on hardware, such as Treo's smart phone and VREO's REDTablet Tablet PC, and software.

Says Henderson: "A brick-and-mortar office isn't really necessary for salespeople to be productive anymore."

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## Taking it to the Web

Equipment may be the first thing that comes to mind when you think "virtual," but Web-based tools and Internet connectivity are what empower the devices you choose.

E-mail is the starting point, quickly followed by Web-based faxing services that let you send, receive, and review documents as PDFs without ever handling a printout.

Then there's the growing selection of Web-based software. If you're not already using some now, expect to within the next year or so. The concept has developed momentum with Microsoft's announcement last year of Web-based versions of Windows and its popular productivity suite Office ([officelive.microsoft.com](http://officelive.microsoft.com)). As a rule, Web-based programs deliver the same features and functionality as their computer-based brethren.

For users of specialized real estate software, several options are already online. Examples include contact management and marketing systems such as Top Producer 7i ([www.topproducer.com](http://www.topproducer.com)) and Sharper Agent ([www.sharperagent.com](http://www.sharperagent.com)); virtual tour-building software such as Home Debut's TourFactory ([www.tourfactory.com](http://www.tourfactory.com)); the RELAY online transaction management solution from Real Estate Business Technologies ([www.rebt.com](http://www.rebt.com)); and Web-based real estate contracts and forms from Winforms ([www.winforms.com](http://www.winforms.com)) and ZipForm ([www.zipform.com](http://www.zipform.com)).

## Computers

**REALTOR BENEFITS(SM) PARTNER Latitude D520** \$769 Dell Inc., [REALTOR.org/realtorbenefits](http://REALTOR.org/realtorbenefits), then click Dell Inc., 877/648-3355. Basic configuration includes Celeron M 1.46GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 40GB hard drive, 24X CD-ROM, four USB ports, and one FireWire port. 14.1-inch LCD display. Wi-Fi 802.11g mini card. Magnesium alloy frame protects system components. Dual batteries extend operation.

**REALTOR BENEFITS(SM) Lenovo Z61t** \$1,186.99 Available at [CDW.com](http://CDW.com). Expected to be available through Lenovo by mid-July. (At

[REALTOR.org/realtorbenefits](http://REALTOR.org/realtorbenefits), click Lenovo. 800/426-7235, ext. 5766.) Widescreen notebook includes Intel Celeron M 1.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and 60GB hard drive. 14.1-inch widescreen LCD. PC card slot. Ethernet, Bluetooth built-in. Compatible with Wi-Fi 802.11 a/b/g. Built-in camera and microphone for videoconferencing. ThinkVantage Technologies for managing security and data rescue and recovery.

**VAIO UX Micro PC** \$1,800 Sony Electronics, [www.sonymstyle.com](http://www.sonymstyle.com), 877/867-7669. Pocket-sized mobile PC runs Windows XP Professional. Includes Intel Core Solo 1.2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and 30GB hard drive. Two USB ports, one IEEE 1394 (FireWire) port. Ethernet, Wi-Fi, and Bluetooth support. LCD screen slides away to reveal mini keyboard. Fingerprint reader. G-Sensor technology protects hard drive. Measures 5.9 x 3.7 x 1.5 inches.

**Toughbook CF-74** \$2,999 Panasonic Computer Solutions, [www.panasonic.com/toughbook](http://www.panasonic.com/toughbook), 800/662-3537. Includes Intel Core Duo T2400 1.83GHz processor, 512MB RAM, shock-mounted 80GB hard drive, and magnesium alloy case. Full sunlight-readable 13.3-inch LCD monitor. Integrated Wi-Fi support. Compatible with Sprint and Verizon EV-DO networks.

### Mobile Printers

**REALTOR BENEFITS(SM) DeskJet 460wf** \$349 Hewlett-Packard, [REALTOR.org/realtorbenefits](http://REALTOR.org/realtorbenefits), then click Hewlett-Packard, 800/888-8177. Wi-Fi-compatible thermal inkjet printer. Maximum speed 17 pages per minute (ppm) black, six ppm color. Maximum resolution 1,200 dpi. Prints envelopes and standard and legal-sized documents. Multicard reader for printing directly from flash memory cards. 802.11b Wi-Fi card for wireless printing. Optional extended-life battery available. Weight: 5 pounds.

**Pixma iP90** \$249.99 Canon U.S.A., [www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com), 800/385-2155. Portable inkjet photo/document printer. Maximum speed 16 ppm black, 12 ppm color. 1,200 dpi print resolution. Prints photos or 8.5-by-11-inch pages. IrDA support for wireless printing. Direct printing from any PictBridge-compatible digital camera or video camera. Optional Bluetooth adapter. Weight: 4 pounds.

### Smartphones

**SCH-i730** Approx. \$699 for hardware only, without service contract Samsung Telecommunications America, [www.samsungwireless.com](http://www.samsungwireless.com), 800/726-7864. Multifunction handset for voice and data communications. Runs Windows Mobile operating system and all compatible software applications. Includes Intel 520MHz PXA 272 processor, 64MB RAM, and 128MB flash memory. Secure Digital expansion slot for adding memory, functions. 2.8-inch screen. Mini-QWERTY keypad. Bluetooth and 802.11b Wi-Fi wireless support.

Speakerphone function for hands-free calling.

**Treo 700p** \$399 Palm Inc., [www.palm.com](http://www.palm.com), 888/223-4817. Latest version of popular smartphone running Palm OS. Intel Xscale 312MHz processor. 128MB RAM, including 60MB of user storage. Compatible with EV-DO networks. Built-in 1.3 megapixel digital camera. Bundled software includes Blazer Web browser, Documents to Go, and support for PDFs, Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Also offered in Treo 700w version, which runs Windows Mobile OS.

**Nokia 9300** \$299 (plus Cingular Wireless) Nokia, [www.nokia.com](http://www.nokia.com). Symbian OS. Built-in mini keyboard. Internal and external LCD displays. 80MB memory. MMC memory card expansion slot. Nokia PC software suite for contacts, schedule, documents, spreadsheet, and presentations. Bluetooth support.

### **wireless services**

**Cingular Wireless** [www.cingular.com](http://www.cingular.com), 888/333-6651. Offers a range of voice and data plans for nationwide coverage, starting at \$39.99 for 450 minutes of voice calling. Unlimited Data Connect offers data services over high-speed EDGE/GPRS network for \$59.99. Wi-Fi Connect option adds unlimited Web access at more than 3,000 Wi-Fi hot spots nationwide.

### **REALTOR BENEFITS(SM) Sprint Nextel Corp.**

[REALTOR.org/realtorbenefits](http://REALTOR.org/realtorbenefits), then click Nextel, 888/503-3069. Calling plans include National Free Incoming Call Plan, starting at \$39.99 for 300 minutes of outgoing calls, and BlackBerry Unlimited Web/e-mail plan for \$49.99 per month. TeleNav option for GPS-based point-to-point directions over cell phone.

**Verizon Wireless** [www.verizonwireless.com](http://www.verizonwireless.com), 800/899-4249. Offers special voice and data plans for residential and commercial practitioners. Combination Voice and Data plans start with 450 anytime voice minutes, unlimited incoming calls, unlimited nights and weekends, and unlimited data for \$79.99 per month. Also offers unlimited data plans for notebook users using PC card (\$79.99 per month). Wireless Web access over standard cellular service through company's EV-DO network.

Prices are the vendors' suggested retail prices and are subject to change. This list isn't comprehensive; NAR doesn't evaluate or endorse these products and isn't responsible for changes in company info.

### **Cool tools**

#### **They'll envy your pouch**

Don't call it a purse—it's a Personal Utility Pouch, or PUP for short. Created by two real estate brokers who struggled to keep their business essentials organized while they were on the go, the unisex bag includes

four open pouches and two zippered pockets to hold cameras, keys, and PDAs. The 6-by-9-inch organizer comes in six colors and is made of a durable synthetic material. Wear the PUP over your shoulder, across your chest, or around your waist. \$19.95. Newco Enterprises LLC, Palm Bay, Fla.; 800/257-8244 (access code 44); [www.lovemypup.com](http://www.lovemypup.com).

### **Easy e-mail campaigns**

Turn your everyday e-mail system into a marketing powerhouse. PoliteMail software works as an extension of Microsoft Corp.'s Outlook, letting you create and send marketing messages. It includes e-newsletter and e-mail templates, CAN-SPAM compliance tools, and automatic e-mail tracking so that you can see who opens your message. A \$99 package allows up to 10,000 tracked messages, or users can opt for a \$495 annual license. Bootstrap Software Partners LLC, Portsmouth, N.H.; 866/496-6368; [www.politemail.com](http://www.politemail.com).

### **Collapsible real estate sign**

Traditional For Sale signs made of metal can be a hassle to lug around and store. Now there's an alternative—the collapsible Tuff Sign, made of strong but lightweight plastic. Your company information and logo is digitally printed onto a piece of vinyl that clamps to the sign frame. With no bolts or screws, the frame offers simple assembly. \$479.75 for a package of five frames, five printed signs, five printed riders, and five “take one” tubes. Tuff Sign Inc., Orange Park, Fla.; 904/449-0559; [www.tuffsign.com](http://www.tuffsign.com).

—Kelly Quigley

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