Point2 powers real estate marketing with search and advertising tools from Google.

Point2 gained traffic, conversion, and customer insights with Google.

"We integrate and leverage Google's innovative technologies to empower our customers to lead their field."

Brendan King, COO
Point2 Realty Solutions

Point2

ABOUT GOOGLE TOOLS

For more information, visit
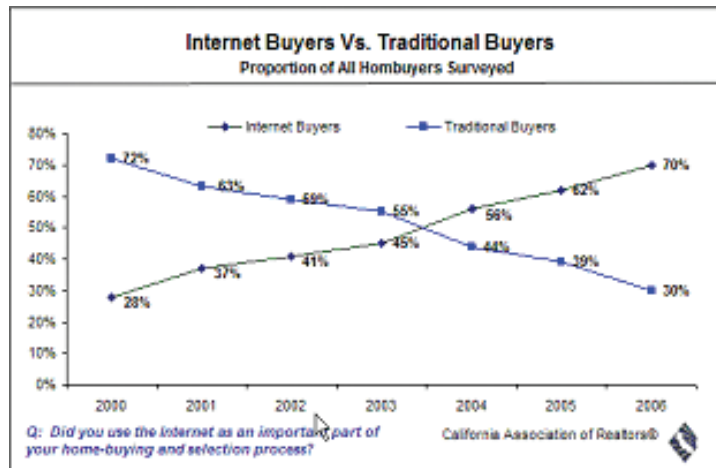www.google.com/realestatetools.

Business

Point2 Technologies Inc. ('Point2') is a global leader in Internet commerce and online marketing software for the real estate and heavy equipment industries. From lessons learned over a decade of software development, the company focuses on building easy to use software that helps clients connect with consumers. In marketing such assets as heavy equipment and real estate, Point2 builds simple solutions to publish better listing content and therefore gain wider exposure and response.

With more than 100,000 brokers and agents in 82 countries subscribing to its solutions, Point2 commands the top spot in real estate lead management and online marketing software, Its flagship solutions, Point2 Broker and Point2 Agent provide REALTORS® with a professional self-maintained website, lead capture, management and incubation system with analytics, plus a platform to market and advertise listings online.

Challenge

According to the National Association of Realtors, 95 percent of visitors to real estate websites are looking for listings. These listings are the most important content to consumers, and the most valuable marketing asset to real estate brokers and their representatives. In the same study, consumers overwhelmingly stated that detailed property descriptions and photos are the most valuable content to them.*

Traditionally, real estate professionals have displayed listing data online from databases primarily meant to be shared only between brokers – it is not intended for marketing and advertising. Knowing that consumers value richer content (more photos, virtual tours and lots of detailed information about listed properties),and to help its customers to generate better online exposure and generate more online leads, Point2 has asked its real estate platform users – brokers – to re-enter their listings into their Point2 platform. To convince them that this extra work is worthwhile, Point2 needed to ensure the better content will help generate higher exposure and better response.

Internet Buyers Vs. Traditional Buyers
Proportion of All Homebuyers Surveyed

Q: Did you use the Internet as an important part of your home-buying and selection process?

California Association of Realtors®

The California Association of REALTORS® 2006 Internet vs. Traditional Buyers survey shows a significant climb in Internet buyers.

As most consumers now rely on the Internet for research, REALTORS® must increase their online exposure and effectiveness by providing what consumers want.

*National Association of REALTORS® 2005 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers.

"With Google Webmaster Tools, our members can now ensure their content is crawled and have more control on the timely inclusion and deletion of their content in Google's index. Point2 uses the Webmaster Tools to easily spot application errors that could be affecting a regular crawl."

Jeff Tomlin
Manager of Market Research

Approach

One of Point2's strategic advantages is its ability to leverage the publishing efforts of its members. The company can provide better listing exposure online, increase consumer inquiries and leads, and understand how the results were generated.

For increased exposure, Point2 focuses on improving natural search results by refining the information search engines crawl, feeding structured content to many sources, integrating paid search options and offering better local search capabilities. The company also uses analytics tools so that Point2 users can better understand what is working and what needs improvement.

Exposure

According to CAR, nine out of ten Internet buyers found their agent through a real estate search site. Sixty three percent began their search through an Internet search engine.[1] These facts indicate that to maximize exposure, REALTORS® must focus on search combining multiple strategies including natural placement, structured content submission and paid search.

The starting point is to optimize real estate listing content for natural or organic search, which has been traditionally difficult to find. To overcome this obstacle, online documents or web pages need to be structured in a way that allows search engines to crawl them easily. Second, the content needs to be accurately described, and relate to search terms consumers actually use while searching.

Rather than requiring brokers to manage these technicalities of search engine optimization (SEO), Point2 has built Google Webmaster Tools™ into its platforms so that members can submit site maps, access statistics and gain better insight into Google's index.

"Over the past couple of years, Google's index has been constantly improving at returning more relevant content," says Jeff Tomlin, Manager of Point2 Market Research. "Increasingly, people are finding property listings in the long tail of search. Although vertical search engines are becoming increasingly popular, the better organic search becomes at returning relevant content, the more consumers will conduct detailed, narrow searches to try and find exactly what they are looking for, faster."

But until recently, organic search alone has not provided a meaningful way to search for structured content like real estate listings. Now, Google is integrating content from Google Base into its search index. Real estate-related searches now appear with two boxes to refine a search. Using those parameters returns listings from Google Base.

When Point2 members add a property listing, they can automatically syndicate that listing to Google Base. "Since Google has added real estate listings from Google Base into the main search process, we've seen over a 200 percent increase in traffic directly to our member listings," says Tomlin. That's free traffic for our members, and obviously a better search experience for consumers.

Another strategy to increase exposure is through paid search. Point2 has added the option for members to purchase a Google AdWords ad for any listing they are sending to Google Base. This serves to boost traffic to listings that need to be sold quickly, or to bring attention to events such as open houses. The process is simplified so that Agents do not need to go to a separate application of interface to purchase the advertising; they use the same process to add a listing, send it to Google Base and purchase enhanced AdWords placement on the same screen.

1 California Association of REALTORS®, "Internet Vs. Traditional Buyer Real Estate Research Report", 2006, page 8.

> "The Google Toolbar provides a reliable transport mechanism for notification, immediate updates and complete information on customer inquiries without having to login to email or an online office."
>
> **John Fothergill**
> Director of Product Development
> Point2 Realty Solutions

VALUE OF WEB SITE FEATURES
(Percentage Distribution)

	Very Useful	Somewhat Useful
Photos	84%	14%
Detailed property information	83%	15%
Interactive maps	59%	26%
Neighborhood and community information	35%	43%
Real estate agent contact	29%	35%

Home Buyers and Sellers report consumers find mapping useful 80% of the time and local information useful 79% of the time.[2] Point2 members can add a Google Maps module to their real estate websites, which provides site visitors a compelling interactive solution that keeps them on the site longer and enhances the overall search experience.

Conversion

After creating exposure, the next step is to convert traffic into business. Since online listings generate higher response rates, Point2 has turned to Google Maps and Google Earth to provide consumers with a better search experience. According to the NAR 2005 Profile of In addition, all listing results from Point2 Agent and Point2 Broker websites, and on the www.Point2Homes.com storefront (a rapidly growing consumer real estate search site), can be imported and viewed in Google Earth. Not only does Google Earth enhance the mapping experience; consumers can overlay local neighborhood information such as schools, shopping, and recreation by the listings which interest them.

"User experience – publishing great listing content, providing interactive mapping and local information – is only the first step in lead conversion," explains Tomlin. "The second most important step is timely response, and although it seems like a simple matter, it's a challenge for the industry, because REALTORS® are mobile."

A Realtor.com study[3] revealed that 45 percent of consumers want a response to their inquiry online within 30 minutes. But only 12 percent actually received a response within three hours, and 45 percent never received a response.

The challenge is not just that brokers are mobile; many do not read their email frequently enough to respond to inquiries promptly. In addition to email and SMS (short message service) text messaging notifications, Point2 is using the Google Toolbar to provide a dynamic feed for all new inquiries and leads directly to the browser.

"The Google Toolbar provides a reliable transport mechanism for notification, immediate updates and complete information on the inquiry without having to login to email or an online office," says John Fothergill, Director of Product Development at Point2. "With market studies indicating that number one reason consumers choose their real estate agent is their responsiveness, it was critical for us to give this advantage to every single one of our users, not just those who carry a BlackBerry."

Besides converting online traffic gaining faster response times, another goal is to improve longer- term follow-up on leads from home buyers and sellers who were not yet ready to act, but were still in the research phase. At this point, the Agent wants to be the source for their research information, and Point2 again turned to Google's Toolbar All listing results set on member websites and Point2 Homes leverage the Google Toolbar as a 'presence' tool. By clicking on the Google Toolbar icon above the listing results, consumers can get updates via a feed that can be accessed right from the Google Toolbar. The Toolbar provides instant updates on listings and is non-invasive because registration is not required.

2 National Association of REALTORS®, "The 2005 National Association of REALTORS® Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers", 2005, page 36.

3 REALTOR.com, "Mystery Shopper Survey of Practitioners", August 2004.

Analytics

Point2 turned to the Google Analytics package to power the reporting for its agent and broker websites. "When seeking an appropriate analytics platform, we needed a comprehensive set of reports that was scalable," notes COO Brendan King. "Google Analytics has given our members the insight into their traffic they need to generate higher conversion rates."

Point2 also uses Google Analytics for its storefront at www.Point2Homes.com. "It's been a tremendous tool for understanding our traffic patterns," adds King. "Our goal is to convert traffic into consumer inquiries. Google Analytics helps us identify hot spots, and dominant click paths." Furthermore, he continues, "Over and above understanding traffic behaviour on our corporate sites, Google Analytics has been an instrumental tool for all of our marketing. We use the goal conversion tools to track response to email correspondence we send to our members. It helps us know which reports are read by our members and what help material is effective."

"Real estate is a local business and Google has developed a lot of tools to help market local products, services and assets better," says Tomlin. What's more, "The competition for consumer eyeballs is fierce.". There are over 1.2 million licensed REALTORS® in North America, most with personal websites. And there are many other third party companies that operate real estate websites. People conduct more than 2 billion real estate searches each year on Google.

"As a major source of traffic to all the real estate websites out there, Google is also leading as a provider of tools to maximize traffic volume, make local real estate content more meaningful, which helps conversion, and finally, to understand online activity with comprehensive analytics. The more Google tools we've integrated into our solutions, the better results we've been able to achieve for our customers."