PLACESTER



Beginner's Guide to Being a Real Estate Agent

Everything You Need to Know to Become a Smarter Real Estate Agent

Chapter 1

Introduction

So, you just earned your real estate license. Congratulations! You've joined the ranks of one of the world's oldest and most vital professions. You're now one of more than one million real estate agents in the United States. Now that you're licensed, it's time to get out there and start selling...right?

Not exactly. Getting started in real estate can be a confusing, difficult, and drawn-out process. As you adjust to the life of an independent contractor, you'll face a lot of tough decisions that only you can make.

Worst of all, your first paycheck may be a long time coming. One thing is certain: if you entered real estate as a hobby, or to make a quick buck, you're in for a rude awakening.

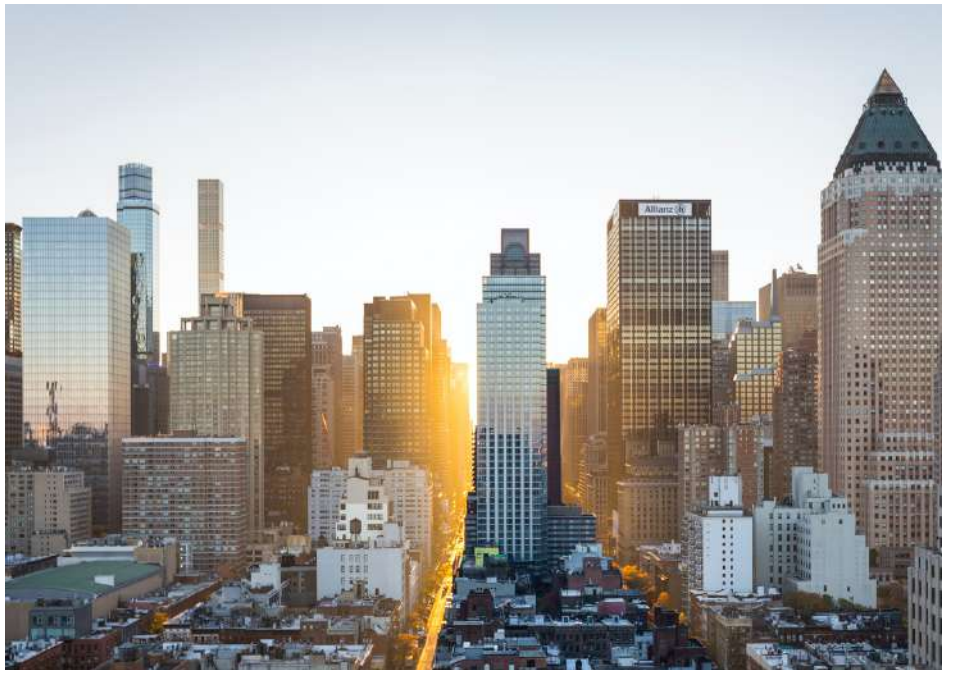
Make no mistake: new real estate agents face a steep path to success,

fraught with uneven terrain, rocky slopes, and a harsh, unforgiving climate. In light of the unique challenges agents face, it's not surprising that real estate has always had one of the highest turnover rates of any profession. One saying in the industry goes: "A third in, a third out, a third up."

In other words, for every experienced and successful agent, there's one agent just starting out, and another giving up. Obviously, this isn't an exact figure, and turnover fluctuates depending on the state of the market. According to a top real estate coach, 87% of all real estate agents fail at this career. That's not exactly reassuring!

Still, with a clear set of goals, a strong work ethic, and a little guidance, you can push through those arduous first months and give yourself a strong foundation for a long and prosperous real estate career.

Welcome to The Beginner's Guide to Being a Real Estate Agent.



In this new ebook, we will show you:

- How to decide where to work as an agent
- How to start developing a list of clients
- How to market yourself and your properties
- What to expect from your first year, based on survey responses and interviews with veteran agents
- How to distinguish yourself from other agents
- Which tools and technologies to use in your business
- Strategies for evaluating your performance
- Resources for continuing your real estate education
- And much more!

Chapter 2

First steps

Before you can start working as a real estate agent, there are a few questions that still need answering. Chief among them: Where?

The real estate profession is unique in that there are many ways to work as an agent.

Some agents are completely independent, selling out of home offices and coffee shops. A different set has a virtual office with their corporate franchisor, and still others fall somewhere in between. Your first task is to decide where you fit on this continuum.

Deciding where to work

When you're considering a broker or a firm, here are a few things to keep in mind.

Commission and fee structure

Real estate offices vary widely when it comes to commission splits and fee structures. Some cover more expenses upfront in exchange for a larger share of your commissions, while others let you keep more of your earnings in exchange for a flat "desk fee" issued per month, per transaction, or at some other cadence. Some brokers provide software licenses and computers, while others charge you for printing and office supplies. It's important to factor in all of these costs before you commit to a broker. You should also consider whether a broker's fee structure lines up with your work habits. If, for instance, you prefer to handle everything on your own, then you'll probably want to compare desk fees at brokers who don't offer administrative, marketing, or transaction support. But if you want as much assistance as you can get, then you'll be better off thinking about high-touch outfits that charge relatively high commission splits—and offer a lot of support in exchange.

Location

Real estate agents can (and do) work from anywhere thanks to the internet. That said, you'll likely want to choose a company that's as close to your home as possible—first because it allows you to sell the area you know best: your neighborhood. Working close to home will also minimize gas mileage and other transportation expenses.
(Don't forget to keep track of those expenses for tax deduction purposes next April—more on that later.).
Finally, having your office close to home gives you more flexibility, allowing you to stop by the house to pick up something you forgot.

Inventory

The perfect company culture and oodles of marketing support won't do you much good if you have nothing to market. That's why you'll want to make sure the broker you work with has a large inventory of property listings. Think of listings like physical goods in a shop: you wouldn't want to work in a place with nothing on the shelves, and customers won't want to shop there, either. A large and diverse inventory also gives you the freedom to focus on specific kinds of listings.

Inventory has been historically low for years, so you should make sure you're comparing apples to apples when evaluating brokerages. How big is the brokerage? How many listings are currently posted on the MLS? And how does that shake out to listings per agent, more or less?

Not all listings are created equal! Different brokerages might specialize in different types of property or unique home features. Waterfront homes, high-end estates, city condos—if you know you want to sell a specific type of house, and a brokerage specializes in it, that's something else to take into consideration when making your decision.

Technology

When it comes to working in real estate, technology doesn't end with a computer and an internet connection. There are many factors for determining whether an office will suit your tech needs. Are there desktop computers available? How new are they? What operating system do they use? Which software products and tools do they use or require? This last question is especially crucial: many real estate offices are woefully outdated from a software standpoint. If your broker is living in the past now, chances are they won't be any more interested in updating later.

This can range from mildly irritating if you have your own devices and can manage digital transactions on them—to a full-blown dealbreaker if the lack of technology or devices costs you a deal. Buyers and sellers increasingly expect digitized transactions and web-based marketing, which means your broker should ideally be set up to provide at least those services for you. And if they aren't because you prefer a strict DIY route, then you'll want to make sure you've got the technology in place to meet (and exceed) your clients' expectations.

Training

Any real estate agent will tell you that the learning begins when you earn your license. No matter how confident or intelligent you are, as you get your feet wet, you'll still need guidance to navigate your new profession. Some brokers offer formal mentoring and training programs on everything from sales to technology to ethics.

Others drop a company manual on your desk and wish you luck. Make sure the firm you choose will provide the support you need to be successful.

> *"Having people who inspire you, teach you, support you, and lift you up is critical to your success."*
>
> **- Laurie Weston Davis**

> *"Choosing a real estate company should be based on support and guidance, not higher commission splits. Those will come later."*
>
> **- Patrick Norman**

Marketing And Advertising

Marketing and advertising are a huge part of a real estate agent's life and budget, so you'll want to pay attention to how a prospective office handles them. Some companies subsidize a portion of your marketing budget and provide ready-made materials

like print mailers, while others will ask you to handle it all on your own. Cost isn't the only concern, either: some offices, particularly those affiliated with large franchise companies, will restrict how you can use their brand and where even require you to use approved language and materials. Go with an office that provides the right balance of support and flexibility.

97% of buyers looking for homes online at some point during their search,

It's more critical than ever that you be able to market and advertise homes online if you're a listing agent, and that you are able to help buyers navigate those listings if you're working with buyers. What kind of support does your broker offer in this area?

Franchise or independent?

One of the most common questions new real estate agents ask is: should I work for a major corporate chain or a smaller independent shop? Every company is different, so it's important to use caution around terms like "franchise" and "independent." That said, each model offers pros and cons.



Franchise & Chain Brokerages

Pros

- Robust referal network
- Larger listing inventory
- More formal training
- Name-brand recognition
- Strong technology and resources

Cons

- Less freedom to experiment
- Less input
- Higher cost and initation fees
- Limitations on branding and marketing

Franchise

In a word, franchises provide more **support**. Because of their size and relationships with other offices across the country and even internationally, franchises usually have robust referral networks and large listing inventories, making it easier for new agents to find leads and offer clients more attractive options. Due to their corporate nature, franchises also tend to provide more formalized, in-depth training programs, as well as brand recognition to help beginning agents make their start. Corporate rigor also leads to more up-to-date technology and marketing resources.

On the flip side, franchises tend to offer **less freedom**. Agents must answer to the corporate culture when it comes to how they conduct their

business, from the tools they use internally to how they market themselves and their properties. This all tends to come at a higher cost: in exchange for a brand name, agents must often pay initiation fees, or a higher commission cut, or both. Finally, franchises can be bureaucratic places, where loyalty and camaraderie are low, and the corporate dictum trumps new ideas or criticisms.



Independent Brokerages

Pros

- More flexibility
- Lower costs for agents
- More input on policies/programs
- Local authority and crediblity

Cons

- Can be resistant to change
- Smaller network, fewer resources
- Less support and guidance
- Fewer formal training opportunities

Independent

Here, the word is flexibility. Independent real estate companies come in all shapes and sizes. Some are single offices with a couple of agents, while others encompass several offices and dozens (even hundreds) of agents. Nevertheless, because they don't have to answer to corporate policy, independent companies are often more adaptable and give agents more direct input on policies and programs. Since they're founded locally, independent companies also have a local authority, with a reputation for offering a more personal touch and deep knowledge of the area.

That local flavor sometimes comes with a traditional mentality. Ironically, this actually makes some independent companies less forward-thinking and less willing to modernize. On the other side, smaller companies tend to have fewer resources than

franchise firms, meaning that even if they want to update their technology, they don't always have the cash to do it. This may also lead to less advertising support, fewer training opportunities, and less guidance.

Again, none of this is absolute. Indeed, plenty of independent firms actually have more power and better brand recognition than the franchise offices they compete with. If everyone in the area knows Beverly Johnson, you might get more visibility by working for her than you would by donning that gold blazer. Plus, independent doesn't have to mean alone: some independent offices have networks of their own. The most prominent example of this is **Leading Real Estate Companies of the World**, a collection of more than 500 premier firms, both franchise and independent. LeadingRE affiliates must maintain high performance standards in order to maintain membership.



For more resources on **choosing a real estate office**, check out the National Association of Realtors' Field Guide to Franchises vs. Independent Firms.

Settling In

I've chosen my company. Now, how should I get started?

Once you've set up in your new digs, here are a few more steps you should take to get acclimated and start working.

Read The Manual

If your broker provides an employee manual or guide, read it. Some of the contents may seem obvious, but every real estate company is different, and you'll have to know yours inside and out if you want to be successful. Knowing your company policies will ensure that you start your relationship with your colleagues on the right foot.

By learning your obligations and responsibilities, you'll also minimize potential errors and know how to respond to a bad situation, whether it's with a client or your broker.

Train

Whether you have sales experience or not, you'll want to take advantage of any sales training opportunities to give yourself the strongest start possible. Selling takes personality, but it's also a skill like any other, meant to be studied. If you assume you'll make it on charm alone, your first few months will be rocky.

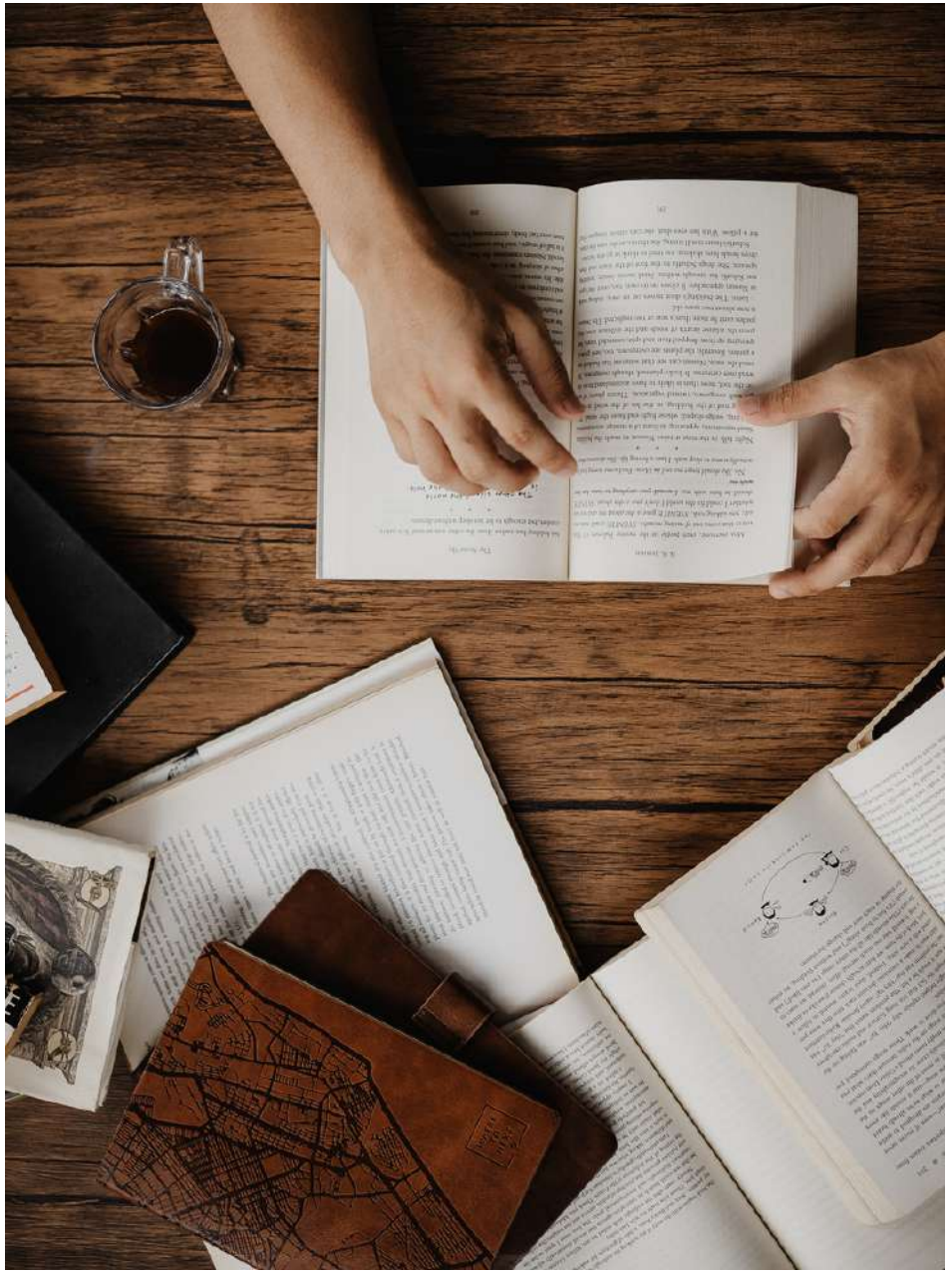
The same goes for technology. Even if you are technologically inclined, it's worth noting that enterprise software doesn't have a reputation for being intuitive. A three-hour class may sound tedious, but it beats dozens of hours puzzling over your company's user-unfriendly contact management system.

Introduce Yourself

As a real estate agent, you're technically an independent contractor. That doesn't mean, however, that you don't benefit from your relationships with fellow agents. Introduce yourself to everyone in your office, from fellow agents to administrative and support staff. The friendlier you are, the more willing they'll be to help. Your colleagues will give you insight on the company culture and what's expected of you as the new kid on the block.

You'll also learn whom to avoid, and whom to shadow and study. Ask who the resident expert is on a subject you want to learn more about: marketing, contracts, foreclosures, and so on.

Ask each of your colleagues for their one best piece of advice for someone starting out in real estate. Their answers might surprise you!



Set Up Your Systems

You want to hit the ground running, understandably. But you'll go farther and make more money if you set yourself up for success from the very beginning.

You're going to need systems for at least a few basics:

- Lead generation, to create a steady flow of potential buyer and seller clients, which will (ideally) eventually ripen into real estate transactions.
- Transaction management, to ensure that all the steps are completed in a timely manner, closing is as smooth as possible, and you can spend as little time as possible on administrative work dealing with minutiae.
- Documentation, so that when the time comes for you to submit the miles you drove for taxes (for example), you aren't scrambling to figure it out last-minute.







Building Your Client List

It's time to start selling. There's just one problem: As a new agent, you have no one to sell to...yet.

Once you've set up in your new digs, here are a few more steps you should take to get acclimated and start working.

STEP 1: Make A Plan.

Some agents make the mistake of assuming they'll prospect however they can, whenever they have time. Instead, be methodical.

- Set aside three hours in your daily schedule for prospecting. You can do them all at once, or split them up. You can prospect in the morning, or the afternoon. Whatever you choose, eliminate all other distractions during those times.
- Limit yourself to two or three outreach methods to start. Will you email prospects? Make cold calls? Send flyers? Get recommendations from more experienced agents, then take the time to perfect your choices.
- Set monthly, weekly, even daily quotas for your prospecting efforts. This will give you a goal to strive for and help you decide whether your strategy and approach are working.

> *"The biggest mistake new agents make is is not having a business plan. You have to know where you want to go and how you are going to get there. Then, implement the plan."*
>
> **- Laurie Weston Davis**

STEP 2: Leverage Your Relationships.

While getting your name out there to new people is important, it's much more likely that you already know your first client. Indeed, a friend or relative will probably be more willing to give you a shot as a new agent than a stranger who isn't familiar with your character or habits.

- **Make a list** of everyone you know on a first-name basis in your area, from your sister to the guy you wave to every week at the dry cleaners. It may sound like a silly exercise, but it will put into perspective just how wide your sphere of influence already is.

- Once you have your list, **tell everyone** on it that you're a new real estate agent and you're accepting new clients.

- Check names off as you go. Expand your contacts by **getting involved** in local groups and organizations, from the PTA to the chamber of commerce to your neighborhood association. Be a positive contributor to your community, and make sure everyone knows what you do.

STEP 3: Volunteer For Floor Duty Or Open Houses.

Many agents shudder at the mention of floor duty, in which an agent is assigned to the public area of the office to answer phones and meet visitors. That's because it's tedious and often thankless work. Nevertheless, floor duty has its benefits for a new agent hoping to find new clients (assuming that this is possible from a public health standpoint where you're located).

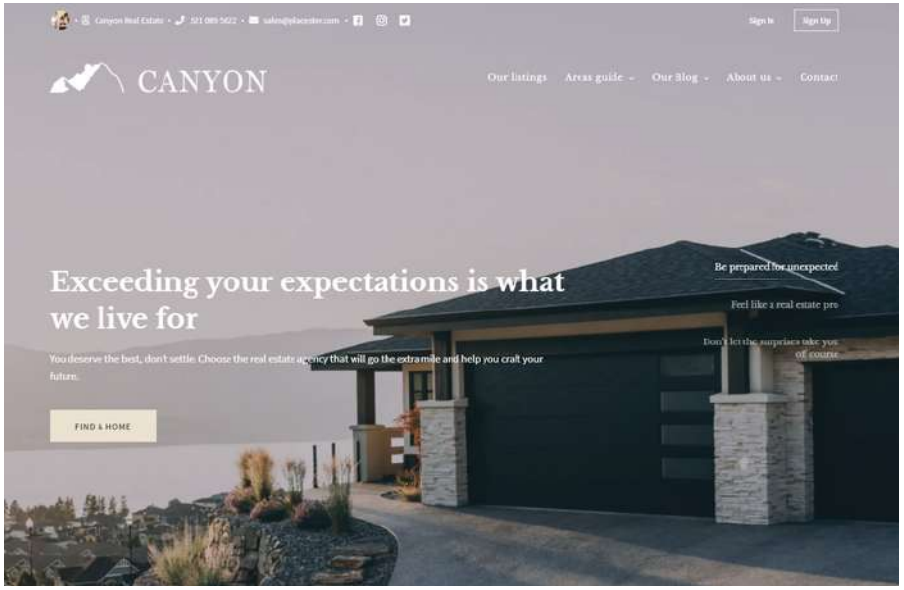
Likewise, hosting an open house for an established agent can be a way for you to meet buyer clients. When a listing agent is double-booked or too busy to

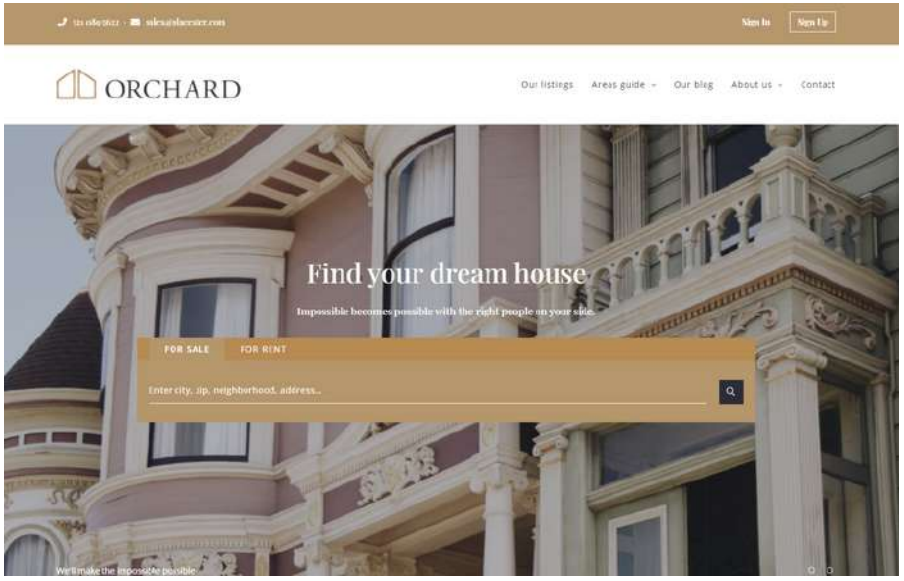
handle hosting an open house for their sellers, stepping up to the plate can be rewarding for the same reasons that floor duty is a worthy strategy.

- Engage walk-ins and call-ins before anyone else, and practice working with prospects. Even if they aren't interested, they'll walk away with your name and contact information.
- Score points with other agents and brokers. When your colleagues and superiors see that you're dedicated, they may be willing to throw you a lead as a reward (or when they're too busy to handle it themselves).









STEP 4: Create A Real Estate Website.

Many of the top producers and talking heads in the real estate industry suggest that being successful is about “building a brand.” But that’s a little vague. In other words, you need to provide prospective clients with a clear promise of what you have to offer them, and a place they can go to witness that promise. The best way to do this is to build a real estate website that displays your professionalism, your understanding of your craft, and, of course, your inventory.

According to the most updated statistics from the National Association of REALTORS, 97% of buyers go online for at least part of their home search. It’s absolutely critical that you have an online presence and are able to communicate digitally with your clients through that website.

It’s not enough to have just any website, however. Here are a few musts:

- Your site should be your own, not just a page on your broker or company’s website. This gives you full control over everything from the header and footer on the page, down to the website analytics when you want to take a look.

- Your site should be **technologically up to date**, with an SEO-friendly structure, advanced search features, and an IDX solution that automatically imports and updates your property listings with the most current MLS data.

- Your site should feature a **responsive design** that displays well on any device and lets your listings take center stage.



For more on how to create the best launchpad for your listings, check out our ebook: The Ultimate Guide to Building a Real Estate Website.

STEP 5: Build A Mailing List

Once you've gotten the ball rolling on your contact list, you'll need to consider how you can demonstrate your value to the potential buyers and sellers who don't know (yet) how much easier you can make their real estate transaction from start to finish. The best way to do this is by engaging your network via email.

- **Take advantage of every opportunity to get an email address.** Make sure each page of your website offers multiple methods and reminders for visitors to opt into your email list.

- **Segment your email lists for maximum effectiveness.** It doesn't make sense to send buyers and sellers the same emails; they're at very different points in the transaction! Split your list into buyers, sellers, and homeowners, then think about what valuable information you can offer different groups at different stages of their home purchase (or sales) journey.

- **Make it worth their while.** Whether it's a downloadable neighborhood guide or a series on preparing your home for sale, be sure your emails are adding value instead of just noise.

- **First impressions are everything.** Whatever incentive you create for people to sign up for your email list, be sure you follow through. If you promise your subscribers great content and deliver something mediocre, chances are they won't stick around very long.

- **Don't use email to sell.** Most people will delete overly sales-y messages without opening them; others will quickly unsubscribe from your list. Instead, use email to drive people to your blog and your website, where your informative

content and beautiful listings will make a much more persuasive argument than a cold sales pitch ever could.

- **Customize your calls to action.** Make sure people know exactly what they're getting when they fill out your opt-in form or click on that link in your newsletter. Instead of vague requests like "click here," "submit," or "sign up," make sure every call to action offers a clear reward: "download your free ebook," or "request a free comparative market analysis from a real estate expert."



Chapter 3

Life As An Agent

Now that you've found your broker and are set up in your new office, it's time to consider your life as a new agent.

When and how long will you work? How much money can you expect to make? What should your budget be?

We surveyed a number of working real estate agents about these and other questions. Here's what we found.

A Day In The Life

What does a real estate agent do on a daily basis?

One of the biggest challenges when it comes to starting out as a real estate agent is finding a routine and a schedule that works best. We asked a few seasoned veterans to offer their perspectives on what it's really like to live the life of an agent. Here's what they had to say.

Patrick Norman, Rodeo Realty, Beverly Hills, CA

> *"I spend most of my time out of the office, making and returning calls and showing properties. The rest of the day, I comb the MLS for new listings for clients. I'm primarily a listing agent, but I also work with buyers that have been referred to me."*

Stephanie Crawford, Nesting In Nashville (Keller Williams), Nashville, TN

> *"My typical day consists of lots of web updates, social media, email, contract negotiations, and phone conversations. I mainly work from behind my desk, while my business associate shows homes."*

Laurie Weston Davis, Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate Lifestyle Property Partners, Pinehurst, NC

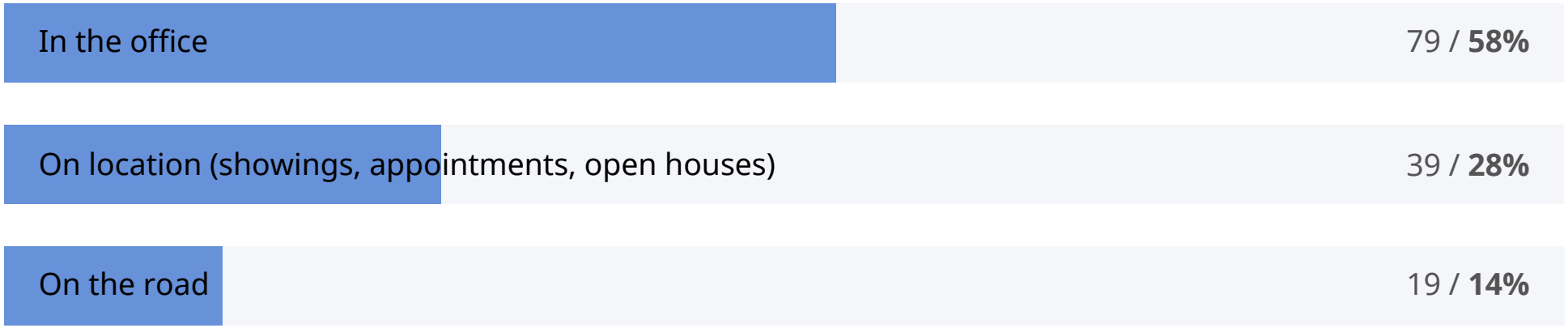
> *"As an agent, I have one job: lead generation. There is nothing more important in my work day. I time-block a minimum of three hours every day doing lead generation tasks, which include phone calls, social media/internet interaction, and face-to-face meetings to build and maintain relationships with clients, potential clients, and referral sources."*

Survey: Life As An Agent

As you can see from these responses (and as many experienced agents will agree), there is no such thing as a typical day for a real estate agent. Nevertheless, we weren't satisfied with that answer, which is why we decided to dive deeper into the daily experiences of real estate professionals. We surveyed 137 agents from around the country about their routines and habits. Of these respondents, most of them (53 percent) have been agents for at least seven years, while a full third (33 percent) have worked in real estate for more than a decade. Here's what they had to say about their daily lives.

Where do you spend most time during your workday?

137 out of 137 people answered this question

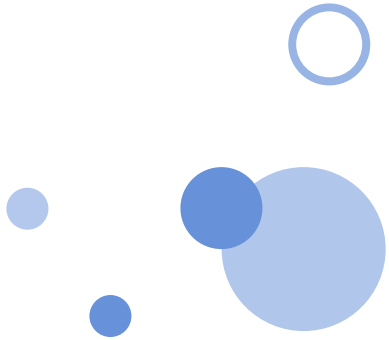


- A majority of the agents we surveyed (58 percent) said they spend most of their time **in the office**, while 28 percent said they spend more hours **in the field** at showings, appointments, open houses, off-site meetings, etc.

- The most time-intensive tasks had to do with attracting new clients and helping current ones navigate the search process: agents said they spent "several hours a day" on **marketing and advertising** (36 percent); **showings**, **appointments, and travel** (28 percent); and **prospecting and lead generation** (26 percent).

- The next level down adds paperwork into the mix: in addition to prospecting (34 percent) and marketing (26 percent), agents said they spent "an hour or two a day" on **contracts** (29 percent).

- Less time-consuming but still important were professional development and content marketing activities: agents spent "a few hours a month" on **company functions** (36 percent) like floor duty and sales meetings; **blogging and content creation** (36 percent); contracts (34 percent); and **training** (32 percent).



Work Hours

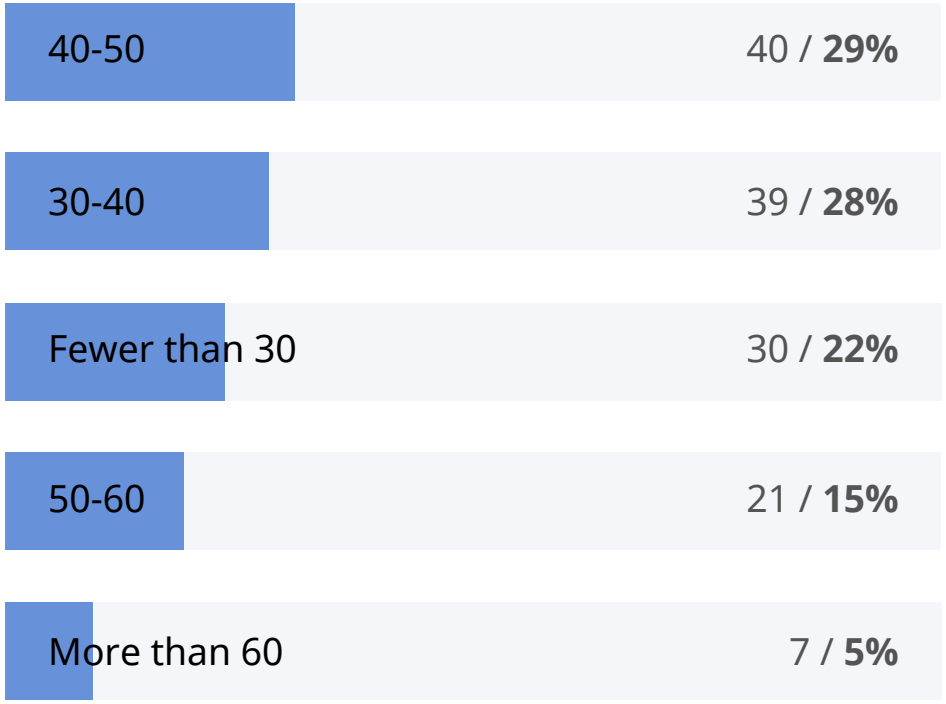
How long should I expect to work, and when?

30-Hour Work Week? Not Likely

Unlike a traditional 9-to-5, a real estate job offers no punch card or time sheet, which begs the question: how many hours should I be working? The most common answer you'll get is, "It depends." Unfortunately, that's not very helpful.

On average, how many hours do you work each week (as an agent)?

137 out of 137 people answered this question



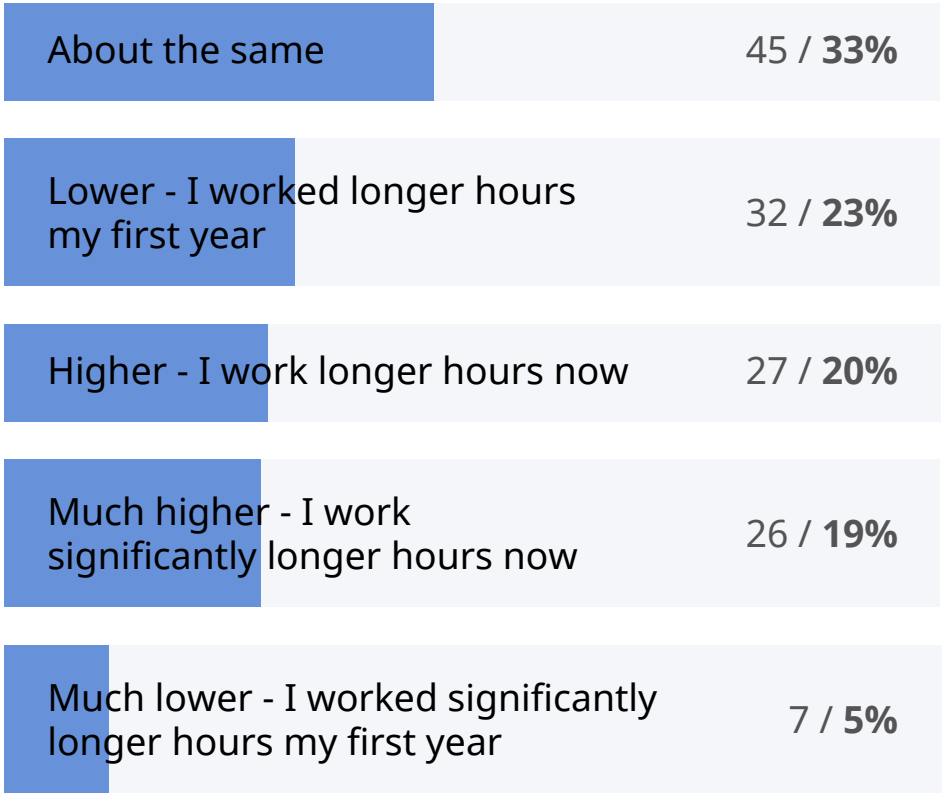
Some agents start out part-time, easing into the business while they support themselves with a part-time job. “I started slow at a local boutique brokerage and waited tables” Stephanie Crawford says.

Others dive right in and commit full time. “My first year in real estate, I was an on-site agent for a developer that my team represented,” says Laurie Weston Davis. “I worked about 30 to 40 hours a week.” One thing is certain: if you got into real estate expecting lots of time off, you’re in for a rude awakening. According to our survey, nearly half of real estate agents (49 percent) **work 40 or more hours a week**, with the largest share (29 percent) logging between 40 and 50 hours. Meanwhile, only 22 percent work fewer than 30 hours.

Don’t assume you’ll be able to work significantly less as time goes on, either: while 23 percent of the agents we surveyed work less now than they did during their first year, a third (33 percent) of respondents said they put in just as many hours today as they did when they were rookies.

On average, how many hours do you work each week (as an agent)?

137 out of 137 people answered this question



In fact, a full 39 percent of agents say they actually work **more or significantly more** hours now than they did when they first started.

Nevertheless, it's important to remember that real estate is an entrepreneurial career. To a large extent, it's up to you how many hours you'll work, and how much you want to get out of those hours. Many of the agents we surveyed work more than 60 hours a week not because they're required to, but rather because they want to. Plus, once you iron out the kinks, you'll be able to use your time more efficiently, so that an hour will bear more fruit as time goes on.

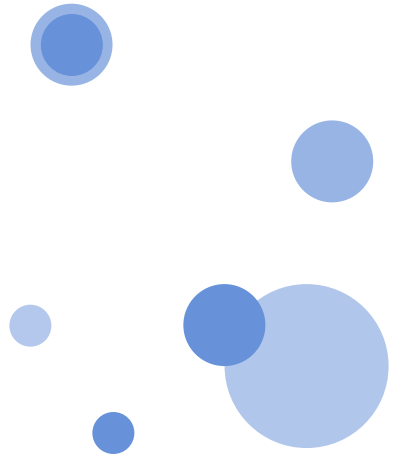
30-Hour Work Week? Not Likely

As for when your work hours will fall in the day, the answer is less clear. Since most of your customers will likely work more traditional schedules, you'll have to be more flexible. That means working evenings and weekends to accommodate clients. To top it all off, as a new agent, you'll have to put in significantly more time than a seasoned agent, getting acclimated to the job and building your contact list. As for the latter, plenty of networking will also happen outside of your scheduled work hours: at barbecues, PTA meetings, your neighborhood bar, etc.

There is, however, a silver lining: while you have to be flexible, you can also be flexible. That is, as long as you're doing what's necessary to serve your clients, your schedule (and location) is your own to fix. Want to volunteer during the day? Exercise? Pick your kids up from school? It's a lot easier to fit these things in as an agent than it is for someone in a traditional 9-to-5 job. That said, it may take some time before you have enough breathing room and confidence in your routine to take advantage of this perk.

Remember, however: flexible doesn't mean irregular. Indeed, most seasoned real estate agents agree that

the key to success is establishing a routine, and sticking to it as much as possible. “I wish I had treated it more like a business right off the bat, with regular office hours and regimentation,” says Stephanie Crawford.



Money Matters

How much should I spend? How much will I make?

Budgeting

Another common question for new real estate agents: what should I expect in terms of overhead? Naturally, it depends on which expenses you're responsible for, and which are covered by your broker. If you're self-employed, you'll be trading that freedom for a lot more spending on everything, from advertising, to MLS fees, to gas.

We surveyed agents about how much they budgeted for a variety of operating expenses. Here's what they had to say.

- You might want to consider investing in a hybrid vehicle: **transportation** accounted for the largest portion of many agents' budgets, with 36 percent spending between $1,000 and $5,000 a year on gas and maintenance. Indeed, another 19 percent actually shelled out **more than $5,000** on transportation.

- Just because you're an independent contractor doesn't mean you don't have anyone to pay tribute to: more than half of the agents we surveyed (49 percent) said they spend more than $1,000 a year on **professional dues and fees** (licensing and credentialing expenses, NAR and local real estate association dues, MLS fees, etc.).

- Other top budget concerns for agents are digital: 27 percent spend more than $1,000 dollars annually on **technology and software**, and 31 percent devote just as much to **online marketing and advertising**.

- Nearly a third (31 percent) of respondents said they spent between $501 and $1,000 a year on **office supplies and expenses**. Other leaders in the same range: technology (26 percent), online marketing (24 percent), and **website services** like hosting, design, and maintenance (also 24 percent).

- Interestingly, online marketing was also one of the **smallest** line items, with 29 percent devoting less than $100 a year to the practice. Also in the lowest spending category were **print marketing** (34 percent) and **website services** (31 percent). Don't erase these activities from your budget sheet just yet, though: agents who don't spend much on marketing are likely seasoned veterans, established enough to get most of their business through referrals.

- Don't forget about Uncle Sam! As independent contractors, real estate agents are responsible for paying taxes on their earnings. It's probably worth your time to talk to a financial planner and ask them about setting aside money from every commission check for taxes, as well as what you need to be tracking for deductions. You don't want to miss out on getting some of that money back that you spent on gas, marketing, and other business needs!

Keeping operating costs as low as possible is paramount to success as a new agent. It's crucial to think long and hard about every expense, both before and after you pay. Do you really need an employee to handle your social media? Is that top-of-the-line laptop necessary right now, or can you make do with a used (but new to you) upgrade instead? Was that expensive marketing campaign effective, or a waste of time and money? Set aside time to evaluate and re-evaluate your spending—otherwise,

you may find yourself in serious debt before you've even closed a deal.

When will I start making money?

Finally, one of the most important questions a new real estate agent faces is how long it will take to get into the black. The simple answer is: a while.

Because you work on commission, it may be quite a long time before you make your first dollar that stays in your pocket. Even experienced agents go months without closing a deal. Since you're just getting started, you shouldn't expect to get rich quick. Indeed, this expectation is the reason many new agents wash out after a year or two.

To explore this question of earnings further, let's return to our survey once more:

How long did you work in real estate before you could support yourself (and, if applicable, your family) financially?

137 out of 137 people answered this question



While responses were pretty evenly distributed on the subject, it's telling that **only 22 percent** said they were able to support themselves after less than six months on the job. For many agents, it wasn't much longer—a third said it took between six months and a year—but nearly a quarter of respondents (24 percent) said it took **more than two years** to truly make a living as an agent.

Our interviewees had a variety of experiences when it came to their first paycheck as well. "I worked two to three years before I could fully support myself with commissions," Stephanie Crawford says. Others were luckier. "It took about three months before I closed my first deal," Laurie Weston Davis says.

Some of the obstacles new agents face are beyond their control. Patrick Norman, for instance, left his first company a few months in when it was acquired by Coldwell Banker. Still, he managed to get a couple of deals done: "I sold my first listing and also represented a buyer in a successful short sale."

The difference between a good and a threadbare first year often comes down to one or two deals. Even if you start out strong, however, there's no guarantee that your streak will continue. As the 2008 housing bubble shows, the market can change without warning. Because of this, Patrick says, agents must be adaptable and open to opportunities wherever they appear. "I was selling multi-million dollar properties before the downturn. After that, my bread and butter were properties in the $500,000 to $700,000 price range." Listing price isn't the only area agents should be flexible on, either. "New agents should also do leases, because those clients turn into buyers eventually," Patrick adds.

Agents who can be flexible will give themselves more opportunity to represent buyers, sellers, renters, or

homeowners as the market shifts. When there isn't much inventory and lots of buyers are interested in moving up, then focusing on sellers can be incredibly lucrative. But if the market shifts in favor of buyers, then you'll also want to know how to work with that group. And homeowners who aren't quite ready to make a move yet, but don't want to keep paying a full mortgage, could benefit from knowing a property manager to help them rent their house before they sell.





Chapter 4

Distinguishing yourself

Now that you have realistic expectations for what lies ahead, it's time to put yourself out there and get to work.

But if you're going to be successful, you'll have to find ways to separate yourself from the pack. Remember, there are more than 1.5 million licensed agents in the U.S., and new agents are trying to break into real estate every day.

Here are a few strategies for setting yourself above the compeittion and winning your clients' attention.

Know Your Niche

Earn respect and attention by becoming a local expert and getting specific with your industry focus.

Obviously, the best way to stand out from other agents is to be the best. Of course, that's a tall order, and a little vague. To make this a little more actionable: the best way to stand out is to be the best in your niche.

You can think about this in two ways. The first is geographical. In our survey, **28 percent** of agents said the best way to distinguish yourself is to be an expert when it comes to the neighborhoods, towns, and regions that you serve. That means experiencing all these places have to offer from the perspective of someone who lives there. Try to spend as much time as possible in these places. Become a resource on everything a client would want to know about the area surrounding one of your listings.

- **Visit local businesses** and attractions: restaurants, bars, shops, parks, etc.
- **Walk, drive, and take public transportation.** Know how long it takes to get anywhere, how far each neighborhood is from nearby attractions, major employers and urban centers, etc.
- Stay up to date on the **happenings in government**: property taxes, building and infrastructure projects, etc.
- **Absorb statistics** on everything from schools to demographics to crime.

> *"Find a niche and stick with it. It might be a certain kind of prospecting, or a certain kind of home, or a certain area, or a specialty. We try to be all to everyone, but we just can't wear that many hats and look good doing it.."*
>
> **- Stephanie Crawford**

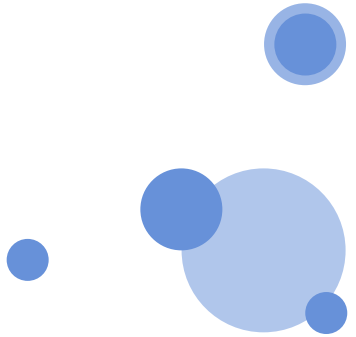
A second way to think about niche is in terms of the kinds of listings you handle. Indeed, **18 percent** of the agents we surveyed suggest that the best way to distinguish yourself is by focusing on a specific industry segment.

- Concentrate on a certain **property type**: multi-family, condominiums, townhouses, large apartment complexes, etc.

- Specialize in listings with **particular features or requirements**: co-ops, farm properties, beach-front properties, distressed properties, historical homes, etc.

- Focus on listings with special **financial or negotiation circumstances**: foreclosures, short sales, FSBO, bank-owned listings, etc.

Buying and selling these kinds of properties requires an agent with knowledge of the red tape involved, as well as an eye for features and problems that are unique to that niche. Naturally, you'll want to cultivate a specialty that's needed in the areas you serve.



Use Technology

Simplify your job and enrich your customers' experience.

As a new real estate agent, it's crucial that you become proficient with the latest technology. This is especially true if you're an older agent changing careers. After all, many of the other new agents you are competing with are just out of school, and already know their way around technology. If you want to compete, you'll need to beat them at their own game. Here's a survey of the tools you should master.



Get Mobile-First

There are tons of statistics out there to show just how central mobile devices are becoming to our daily lives. Mobile phones—not including tablet devices, such as the iPad—account for just over half of global website traffic (54.80 percent as of the first quarter of 2021). Tablets have become increasingly popular, too: In 2020, it was estimated that 160 million tablets were shipped. That's not quite at the level of the 218 million laptop units shipped as a previous record, but it's still quite respectable.

Our survey respondents echoed these statistics: of all the technologies they use in their business, the largest share of agents (22 percent) said their **smartphones were the most important.** Some of the benefits of a smartphone for real estate agents are obvious: constant access to email, the ability to search the web from anywhere, mapping and navigation abilities, etc. There are also a growing variety of apps designed specifically for real estate-related tasks: property inspection, e-signatures (see below), on-the-fly video editing, etc.



For more on how to create the best launchpad for your listings, check out our ebook: Art of Building a Lead Gen Real Estate Website

Local Search

Due to the widespread use of mobile devices, people are constantly searching for local information. In fact, the majority of consumers say they use their smartphones to research local businesses, and 88 percent of people who look up a business on their mobile device end up visiting or calling that business within one day. As a result, search engines are doubling down on local search, integrating local listings and maps into their results.



To capitalize on local search, make sure you claim your business on all the major local portals—Google+ Local, Google Maps, Bing Local, Yelp, etc. (Depending on the areas you service, you might also consider building satellite websites that target specific neighborhoods or towns.) This hyperlocal focus will help you establish yourself online more quickly.

Try our ultimate SEO guide for real estate agents in the Real Estate Marketing Academy: How to Dominate SEO for Real Estate

Client Relationship Management (CRM) Systems

CRMs took third place in the technology section of our survey, with **13 percent** of agents citing their CRM as one of the most important technologies in their business. It's not hard to see why: real estate agents have to account for dozens of clients and leads, all in different stages of the buying or selling process, all at the same time. CRM applications keep track of all of these people, helping you stay in touch with past customers, monitor current customers and deals, and nurture leads who may become future customers. CRM systems can be used for a variety of tasks, including marketing automation, customer service, and, of course, storing all relevant contact information.

There are plenty of CRM systems out there. Some, like Salesforce and Highrise, are aimed at sales professionals in any industry. Others, like Property Base and AgentOffice, are designed specifically to real estate professionals. Do some research to find the CRM system that's right for you.

Because your CRM is such a critical part of your business, it's a technology that you should get to know intimately. Check out these materials at **Placester's Real Estate Marketing Academy**:

- Convert Leads Into New Clients With Your CRM
- Simplify Lead Management with a Dynamic CRM

The Cloud

Doing business on paper can be especially annoying for real estate agents, who need to be mobile and able to retrieve relevant paperwork at a moment's notice. The costs of printing add up quickly, and organizing records can be time-consuming. Plus, these documents take up a lot of space, and chances are good that you won't have more than a couple OF file cabinets to work with.

Luckily, there are several services out there that allow you to store your files on their servers and access them from any machine. With "cloud" solutions like Google Drive, Dropbox, and Apple's iCloud, you'll get more storage space and fewer hardware and software costs. Plus, you'll also have continuity across devices, meaning you can start a task or document on one device, and then finish it on another.

> *"New agents have technology on their side. When I started, the Internet had just begun, and the MLS had just come online. Before that, agents had to look through a huge book of listings that often times were no longer active."*
>
> **- Patrick Norman**

Transaction Management And Paperless

Official contracts and transaction records are also starting to make the online transition. In fact, the agents we surveyed put paperless and transaction management tools in second place, with **16 percent** citing them as the most important technologies in their business. With apps like DocuSign, you can securely transmit binding documents for clients to sign with their smartphone or tablet. Additionally, services like Dotloop and Cartavi promise secure systems for processing and storing real estate transactions, while companies like NuOffer aim to

bring the entire negotiation process online.

If the idea of storing signatures and sensitive financial records in the digital ether makes you a little leery, consider this: due to advances in encryption and cloud security, your data is more secure on the cloud than it is on your hard drive, and even more secure than data stored on a server in your home or office.

While these technologies are invaluable for real estate agents, you shouldn't let them distract you from your goals. Remember that these are just tools for running your business, not the business itself. "Real estate will always be a relationship business, but technology has changed how we create and maintain those relationships," Laurie Weston Davis says. "Our goal is to make the transaction more about the people and less about the paperwork. We have put systems in place that allow us to focus on our clients."

For more on **using technology** to take your real estate business to the next level, check out these great resources at the **Real Estate Marketing Academy:**

- Tools and Tips for a Paperless Real Estate Office
- How to Test Your Real Estate Website for Mobile Responsiveness
- Real Estate Website Integrations to Streamline Your Business

Promote Yourself

All the technology and expertise in the world won't matter unless you're putting yourself on display.

Your broker, your company, your listings-these can only take you so far. You also need to offer proof that you, above all others, are the real estate agent your leads should work with.

Social Media

For starters, you should be using social media to engage your network and find new customers. In a tie with CRMs, **13 percent** of the agents we surveyed said social media was one of the most important tech tools in their business. Nevertheless, having a profile on one or two social media outlets isn't enough: you need to actively use those networks to spread the word about your expertise and your business. Of course, there are a few caveats when it comes to social media etiquette.

- **Don't brag about your successes**. Instead, try to add value with every post. Share informative articles and research findings. Educate, enlighten, and enrich.

- **Don't complain about how busy you are**. This suggests you can't handle the workload and might also signal that you wouldn't be pleasant to work with.

- **Don't be selfish**. Balance plugs for your own company, listings, and content with posts that raise awareness for others, whether they're colleagues or local business owners.

- **Don’t overshare**. At best, people will ignore that post about what you had for lunch. At worst, they’ll delete or block you. Before you share something, think seriously about whether your connections will be interested in it.

- **Don’t spam your networks** with information about all of your listings. Instead, share them sparingly, concentrating on only the best and most unique properties.

- **Don’t be vague**. Whether it’s a link to a blog post or a question you’d like answered, make sure every post has a clear call to action.

Don’t limit yourself to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram either: while less traveled than those networks, LinkedIn is also less noisy, and since its users are actively looking for business and investment opportunities, the professional network boasts a higher lead conversion rate.

Content Marketing

Your social media outlets also serve another purpose: they’re venues for promoting your expertise through high-quality, informative content. By creating your own content, you’ll drive traffic to your website and create value for your visitors. Plus, you’ll offer cold leads serious proof of your professional worth-proof that a headshot and a short bio simply can’t match.

Also, remember those email lists for buyers and sellers that you set up earlier? Send that informative, quality content to your email list. And make sure that visitors to your website who landed there as a result of social media know that you’ve got a ton of good information to share—don’t forget to invite them to

sign up for your email list at every opportunity.

As for the content itself, here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- **Create a neighborhood guide** for each area you serve. Offer a free download in exchange for filling out a contact form.

- **Profile local businesses**, highlighting restaurants, bars, and shops that prospective residents of your community should know about and visit.

- **Comment on current events** in your community and the real estate market at large. Show people you know what's affecting their real estate prospects.

- **Offer advice and suggestions** about everything from home maintenance to preparing a property for sale.

- **Create professional videos** that show off the best listings in your inventory.

To learn more about **building your brand**, check out these great articles at the **Real Estate Marketing Academy**:

- Building your Unique Value Proposition
- Tips for Crafting a Real Estate Email Signature That Shines
- Building Your Reputation As a Real Estate Community Expert
- Concierge-Level Real Estate Services to Delight, Your New Clients

Personality

While it isn't everything, personality can make a huge difference in separating you from the pack. Consumers want to work with an agent who's attentive, trustworthy, and reliable. If you're serious about winning their business, you'll have to show them you're there to provide the best experience possible- not just to collect a commission.



A winning personality is about more than just integrity. It's also important to be true to yourself. If you're naturally introverted, don't force yourself to be the bubbly, outgoing agent you think everyone wants: chances are you'll alienate more people than you attract. Instead, focus on learning, sharing, and being as helpful and knowledgeable as possible. Content marketing can be a major asset here as well: if initiating social interactions isn't your thing, your content will speak for you. (A great video or blog post could also inspire others to reach out to you.)

Similarly, when it comes to getting involved in your community, don't just take up causes and join organizations because so-and-so told you that you'd find customers there: do it because you are genuinely interested in what they stand for. Your passion will say far more than just your membership

Follow Up

Be persistent. Be smart. Be remembered.

Finally, the last way to distinguish yourself from other agents: don't give up. Success in real estate is all about building your network of customers and cultivating new leads. That takes patience and persistence. Here are a few strategies for making sure you follow through.

Have An Objective

Don't just "reach out" or "touch base." When contact-ing a lead, always have a concrete goal in mind. Are you hoping to get their email address? Offer them a piece of content? Book an appoint-ment? Whatever your objective is, set your sights on achieving it. To ensure you stay focused, you should create a script or workflow for these interactions. Whether it's an email template or a few phrases for telephone calls, honing your language will help you make an impression and achieve your goals.

Try Another Channel

In the old days, leads were only reachable via landline telephone and snail-mail. Today, you can contact a lead by home phone, cell phone, email, social media, etc. What's more, habits vary widely in terms of which method people use most often: according to a government study in 2021 only 40% of households in the U.S. have a landline. If you can't reach someone via telephone, be sure to try email or social media before you throw the lead away.

Take 'No' For An Answer

Remember, following up is as much about disqualifying leads as it is about turning them into customers. A "no" is almost as good as a "yes" because it lets you know where you stand and prevents you from investing any more time in a lead that won't bear fruit. As time goes on, you'll learn to distinguish which "maybes" are worth pursuing, and which are not. For now, let leads know up front that it's okay for them to say no and welcome that answer when it comes.

Don't Stop At A Signature

Your relationship with a client shouldn't end once you've closed the deal. It's crucial to stay in contact with former customers, even if they don't plan on buying or selling for the next several years. First, there's a good chance a satisfied customer will know someone who is on the hunt for a new home, and if you're top of mind, you may get a referral. Second, staying in touch with existing customers lowers your prospecting costs. After all, it's cheaper to stay in touch with someone you've already done business with than it is to convert a new lead.

Finally, when a former customer does decide to move, you stand to profit even more-after all, there's a good chance their second home will be worth more, and you may have the opportunity to sell their first.

Chapter 5

Securing Your Future

Now that you have tools and perspectives you need to get started, it's time to talk about the future.

As a new agent, you'll realize quickly that you have a lot of growing to do before you're a true proffesional.

As you hone your skills and strategies for serving your clients and expanding your bussiness, you should also have a plan for gauging and optimaizing the learning process.

Self-Evaluation

Measure, analyze, iterate, improve.

Honing your craft and increasing your income as a real estate agent begins with taking stock of your behavior and performance. Here are a few methods for doing just that.

Performance Reviews

Depending on the company or broker you align yourself with, you may be subject to a performance review on an annual or biannual basis. If there is no formal assessment, you should take the initiative in arranging one. As a new real estate agent, it's important that you see these evaluations not as a painful formality, but rather as an opportunity for serious reflection and growth.

Take advantage of performance reviews to ask questions. In your broker's opinion, where should your sales figures be at this point? Do your numbers reflect that benchmark? If not, what should you be doing to improve? What strategies haven't you tried? What have others noticed about your practice that you might have missed? Your broker's answers will help you identify weaknesses and find ways to strengthen them.

Even if you're struggling, it's important to come to your performance review with a positive attitude. Don't get defensive: instead, be receptive and absorb as much as possible. Then, implement your broker's feedback, creating a checklist of concrete steps you can take to improve your practice.

Journaling And Benchmarks

You shouldn't simply wait for others to point out your weak spots. Top-performing agents are reflecting constantly on their performance and developing



systems of benchmarks to stay accountable and motivated.

- **Daily**: Keep a journal to jot down your impressions. Record your schedule, including start and end times. Keep count of how many prospects you talked to and how those conversations went. No need to be incredibly detailed: just get in the habit of consciously and frequently evaluating your habits.
- **Weekly**: Consider your daily notes. Was it a successful week? If so, did you do anything differently? If not, why not? What can you do to make the following week more successful or more productive?
- **Monthly/yearly**: Set specific sales goals. How many transactions do you need to close to make a comfortable living? Check the numbers you actually achieved against those targets. Getting a lot of leads, but not making a lot of sales? You may be better off devoting more time to fewer clients.

You should also be tracking clients and leads from start to finish. Are some steps in your sales funnel working better than others? Do you tend to lose leads at a particular stage? If so, you might need to change your approach.

Analytics

Executed properly, your real estate website can be one of your most valuable assets for attracting leads and converting them to customers. The best way to ensure that you stay on track is to connect Google Analytics to your website. Indeed, of all the self-evaluation methods we listed in our survey, Google Analytics was the most popular, with **19 percent** of agents using the service. With Google Analytics, you can measure how much traffic you're getting and how those visitors are behaving, helping you adjust your content to maximize your site's impact. Here are a few of the most important metrics to measure.



Visits: How much total traffic are you getting? If this number is exceptionally low, you may need to adjust your SEO practices to boost your search visibility.



Unique Visitors: Not counting repeat visits, how many individuals came to your site? The more unique visitors, the better.



Duration: How long are visitors staying on your site? If your average duration is short, chances are visitors aren't finding your content worthwhile.



Bounce Rate: How many visitors leave your site without visiting any other pages? Again, if your bounce rate is high, you may need to work on making your site content more valuable and informative.

You can also explore your lead conversion rate by setting up Goals in Google Analytics. With **Goals**, you can track specific actions or behaviors that demonstrate visitor interest: filling out a contact form, signing up for a newsletter, staying on a site for an extended period of time, etc. Visitors who complete these actions are more likely to become valuable leads, so the more Goals your site meets or exceeds, the better you'll fare.



For more on how to use Google Analytics to get the most out of your website, check out our ebook: The Real Estate Agent's Guide to Google Analytics

Continuing Your Education

Never stop learning, never stop growing.

Mentoring

Over **half** (56 percent) of the agents we surveyed devote at least a few hours a week, if not more, to training and mentoring and while company training programs are more formalized, our respondents cited **mentoring** as the more valuable educational tool, 19 percent to 14 percent.

You should be taking every opportunity to learn from more experienced agents. Find someone you respect and admire and ask to shadow them on an appointment or with a prospect. Offer to split your commission if they'll take on an advisory role on one or two of your clients. If an experienced agent doesn't have time to help you during the workday, offer to buy him or her lunch, a coffee, or a drink after hours.

You should also be building and maintaining your relationships with the rest of your colleagues. You'll not only strengthen the network you need to be an effective salesperson—you'll also have access to their hard-earned wisdom. Listen to horror stories as well as their success stories. Find time to ask questions. Next, step outside your office and find out which agents are the most successful and most visible in your area. Do your research. What are they doing that others aren't? They might not tell you everything, but they'll appreciate the recognition and since they're already successful, they can afford to help the little guy.

> *"The best thing an agent can do is to pick a successful agent to model themselves after and work with. Success breeds success."*
>
> **- Patrick Norman**

REALTOR Designations

Ever seen the acronyms that appear after a Realtor's name? These are designations awarded by the National Association of Realtors, indicating additional expertise. Some are useful for agents in specific markets and areas. Others prepare agents to work in a specialized niche. Most of these designations don't come cheap, so to start, you should concentrate on just four:



Graduate, Realtor Institute (GRI) –
This designation covers topics ranging from the sales process, to legal and regulatory issues, to professional standards.



Certified Residential Specialist (CRS) – An exclusive club of 33,000 as of 2019 agents, the CRS designation is a mark of both experience and integrity. Applicants must meet transaction and education credit requirements for eligibility, and once designated, must abide by a strict code of ethics.

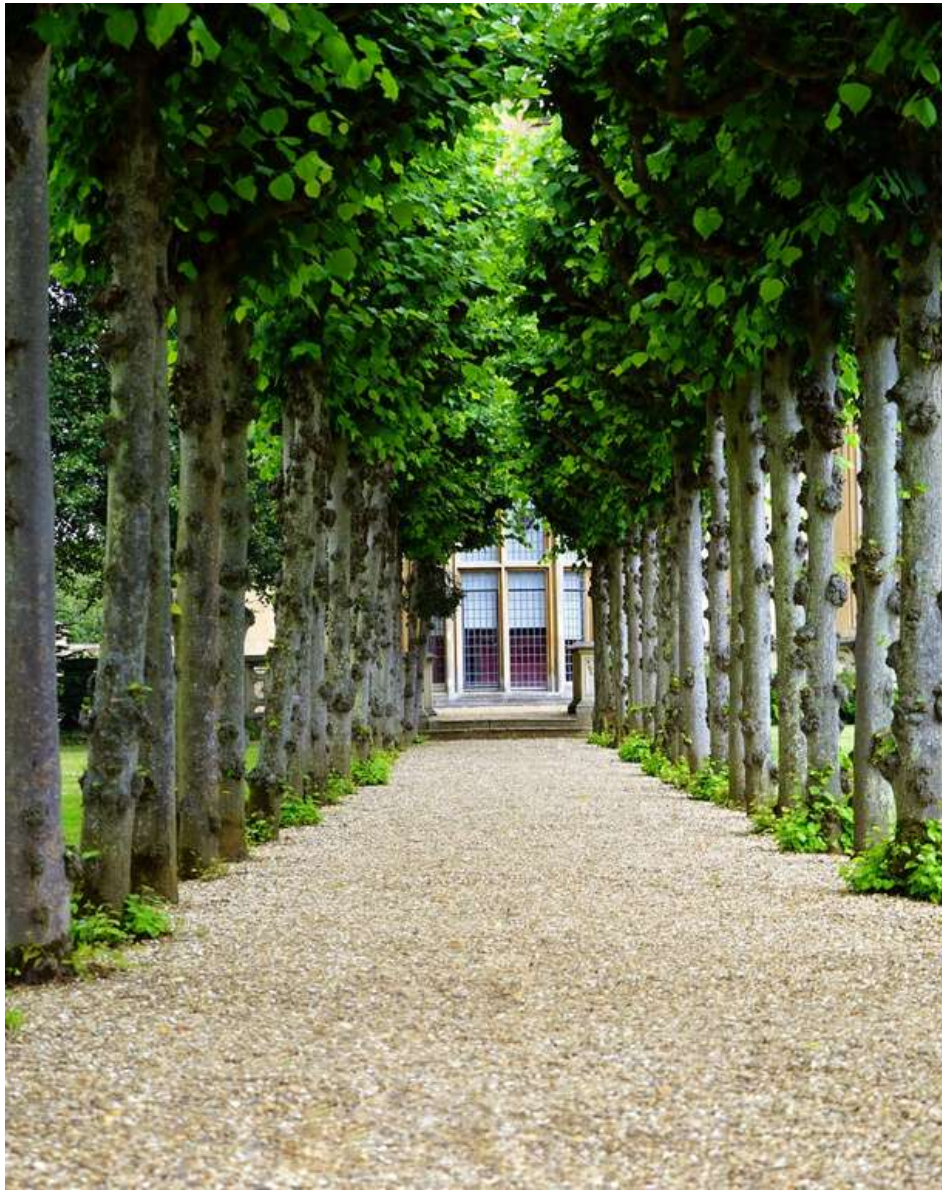


Accredited Buyers Representative (ABR) –
This certifies and prepares agents to work on the buyer side of real estate transactions. Designees also get access to exclusive REBAC marketing tools and resources.

e-PRO®

e-PRO – This teaches members how to use techology to grow their business. Getting certified also offers lead generation benefits, earning you a searchable profile on the e-Pro website and making your name stand out on REALTOR.org.





PLACESTER

Other Courses And Materials

While NAR-sponsored designations add heft to your resume, the agents we surveyed chose external training programs as their third-most valuable education tool. There are plenty of terrific courses and materials out there to learn about everything from SEO to real estate websites.

HubSpot – In addition to offering inbound marketing tools and services, HubSpot offers plenty of educational resources to help new agents get acquainted with the new online marketing landscape, including webinars and e-books.

Copyblogger– A great resource on content marketing and content creation, Copyblogger also offers a range of free webinars, downloadable guides, and email courses for aspiring marketers.

In addition to these larger sources, there are local consultants and smaller shops out there (like our friends the Geeky Girls) that offer workshops on everything from lead generation to social media. You can also find educational opportunities around the corner at your local real estate association.

Conferences

Finally, beginner real estate agents looking to continue their education should strongly consider attending real estate conferences, where they can hear talks from industry movers and shakers and check out what's on the cutting edge when it comes to real estate marketing tools and technology. Here are our favorites:

Inman Connect – The self-described "grandaddy of all real estate conferences," Real Estate Connect is run by Inman News and held twice a year in New York and San Francisco. The conference brings the industry's executives, leading brokers, top producers, and technology providers together to discuss and debate the future of real estate.

REALTORS Conference & Expo – Held in November, this four-day event is run by the National Association of Realtors and offers a combination of professional speaking engagements and vendor demos.

Many large real estate franchises also host their own conventions and conferences. Coldwell Banker, for instance, has the Generation Blue Experience, while Keller Williams offers their Family Reunion and Mega Camp events for KW agents. If you sign with a franchise, be sure to take advantage of these kinds of events.

Get To Work

Make no mistake: real estate is a tough business. Being a successful agent will require perseverance, thick skin, and above all, a lot of hard work. But with these tips and tools, and the right attitude, you'll start seeing the fruits of all that labor in no time. Now: **get cracking!**

Contributors



Seth Price, Director of Sales & Marketing**,** Placester

A 14-year veteran Internet marketer, Seth has consulted for leading B2B and B2C companies including: Metlife, BMW, Sony, Nationwide Financial, and Toys R Us. He is a master relationship builder, innovator and thought leader. In particular, his experience in real estate allows him to uniquely navigate the ambiguous facets of our space, creating value for customers and clients.

Contact Seth



Laurie Weston Davis,
Agent and Broker,
Keller Williams / Live Love Charlotte

Laurie serves as VP of Business Development for Live Love Charlotte and owner of Live Love Pinehurst with Keller Williams Realty, selling real estate in Charlotte and Pinehurst, NC. In addition to her work as a Realtor, Laurie is also a real estate technology coach and co-founder of The Geeky Girls. Laurie speaks and teaches at regional and national events, with a focus on social media and Internet lead generation.



Patrick Norman,
Agent and Director,
Entertainment
Division, Rodeo Realty

With a previous career as a nationally released recording artist and producer, Patrick has extensive business experience and a wealth of personal and professional contacts in the entertainment field.
A licensed Realtor since 1995, Patrick specializes in residential property in the Hollywood Hills, and has sold all property types in Southern California.



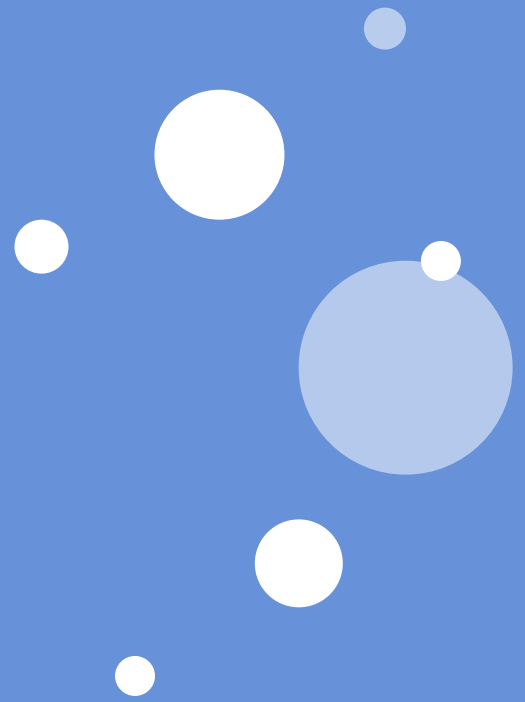
Stephanie Crawford,
Agent Keller Williams /
Nesting In Nashville

Stephanie focuses on residential sales Davison County, specializing in her native Nashville's urban properties. A full-time Realtor since 2003, Stephanie has personally invested in rental, rehabbed, and "flipped" properties, and loves working with first-time buyers. Whether this is your first or fifteenth home in Nashville, Stephanie will deliver prompt, hospitable, knowledgeable real estate services that utilize all of the latest technologies.

Thank you!

Thanks for checking out The Beginner's Guide to Being a Real Estate Agent eBook.

For more insight into the world of real estate marketing, be sure to visit our Real Estate Marketing Academy.



PLACESTER

PLACESTER

Looking to set up a new real estate website with built-in IDX/MLS search, premium themes, and indexable property pages? Head to Placester.com and get started with a 30-day free trial.