

HP mobile tools transform The Hunter Agency in real estate downturn

Profits up after agency shuts physical office in favor of HP Tablet PC, mobile printer, calculator



“With HP mobile technologies, we’ve eliminated all the time-consuming things about running the business. We’re free now to work with more clients, faster, to serve them better and earn more profit.”

— Darold Hunter, REALTOR® and Broker/Owner, The Hunter Agency



Objective:

Increase efficiency, gain flexibility, improve customer service — by transforming nine-person real estate agency from physical office to virtual mobile operation

Approach:

Deploy HP mobile PC, print and calculator technologies coupled with non-HP communications services

IT improvements:

- Operate efficiently on the road
- Speed communication with part-time agents
- Simplify and speed transaction processes
- Gain immediate access to data and documents
- Gain operational flexibility to meet customers on their own terms

Business benefits:

- Cut costs substantial overhead costs
- Respond immediately to customer needs
- Increased business volume
- Increase profitability potential
- Increase broker commissions/reward loyalty

Prior to one of the nation’s worst real estate downturns in years, Darold Hunter saw the competitive advantages to be gained through advancing technologies, a vision that helped him win First Place in the Fourth Annual HP Real Estate Technology Contest. When Hunter launched his real estate agency in 1994, many realtors still looked up Multiple Listing Service properties in big, heavy books and spent much of their time driving documents around town. One of his first business purchases was an HP LaserJet printer and he still uses that workhorse machine.

Hunter recently transformed his technology base to make a bold business leap: Using HP mobile tools — an HP Tablet PC, HP Deskjet 460 Mobile Printer and HP 12c Financial Programmable Calculator — he closed his agency’s physical office to run the eight-agent business as a virtual company. As a result, The Hunter Agency has cut costs, improved customer service, freed its agents to work more efficiently, and increased its business volume and profitability.

“We’ve done what every business dreams about,” says Hunter, owner of The Hunter Agency in East Hartford, Conn. “We’ve cut our costs, increased efficiency and are more profitable now than when we had a physical office — even in this bad market. The key is to pick and choose the technologies that are going to advance your business. In my company, I rely on HP.”

“We made the decision to cut costs and let HP mobile technology work for us before the recent real estate headlines, but now it’s proving to be an even greater benefit for us in this tumultuous market,” he says.

“In 13 short years, I’ve watched the real estate industry go from very little technology to technology as a central tool. Veteran agents sometimes resist this, but if you don’t adapt to these changes your business could die.”

Darold Hunter, REALTOR® and Broker/Owner, The Hunter Agency, East Hartford, Conn.



Technology transforms real estate industry

Hunter became involved in real estate initially as an investor in rental properties. But frustrated by what he saw as broker inefficiency, he acquired a real estate license in order to transact his own deals. When he found himself having more fun — and earning more money — in real estate than in his job as an insurance sales consultant, he left to open his own agency.

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Darold Hunter, REALTOR® and Broker/Owner, The Hunter Agency, East Hartford, Conn.

Always interested in efficiency, Hunter watched technology transform the real estate industry. MLS listings, for example, moved from heavy bound volumes to dial-up desktop PC connections to web-based connectivity.

“With the HP Tablet PC, I can stay connected wirelessly anytime, which is important in this business,” he says.

Every step of the way, he stayed ahead of the curve. The Hunter Agency grew to eight part-time agents, plus Hunter and an administrative assistant. Home base was a 1,000-square-foot office serving Hartford County.

Then roughly a year ago, Hunter took a giant step; after assembling a collection of HP mobile tools, he closed the physical agency office — hardly used anymore anyway — and transformed his company into

a virtual business. Here’s how it works: On the road, Hunter uses an HP Tablet PC, an HP Deskjet 460 Mobile Printer and an HP 12c Financial Programmable Calculator.

The HP Tablet PC gives him web access to MLS listings and other online resources, as well as to his own client and forms databases. What’s more, the Tablet PC captures electronic signatures, enabling rapid contract finalization and electronic transmission. With the HP Mobile Printer, he prints these contracts on the spot for clients.

The HP 12C calculator lets him compute interest rates, loan payments, percents, cash flows and more. “The HP 12C calculator doesn’t seem like your typical ‘high-tech’ tool, but it’s the all-in-one wizard for REALTORS®. It is THE gadget you don’t want to live without,” Hunter says.

“When I started my business and needed to buy a printer, I checked around and people told me to get the best LaserJet I could find — and that was HP. I’ve depended on HP reliability ever since.”

Darold Hunter, REALTOR® and Broker/Owner, The Hunter Agency, East Hartford, Conn.

In his home office, Hunter uses two HP desktop PCs — one as a desktop computer, another as a server — and of course there’s the veteran HP LaserJet printer. He also uses a virtual phone service, smart phone and VOIP to keep everyone in his company linked to the latest data and communications networks.

“I can be sitting at a café and receive incoming calls, look up listings, meet with a client, have a contract signed, e-mail it to another agent, receive signed copy

via e-fax and print it out on my HP Mobile Deskjet Printer,” Hunter says. “It amazes even me sometimes. Before, all this might have taken days, with hours wasted driving around in a car.”

Not only is life more fun with all these rapid-fire capabilities, Hunter says, but his business reaps enormous benefits:

Lower costs: Closing the agency’s physical office saves substantial monthly overhead in rent, utilities, office supplies, insurance and the need for an administrative assistant.

Greater efficiency: Listings data, transaction documents and e-communications are continuously at Hunter’s fingertips with the HP Tablet PC. Its wireless capabilities keep him connected, allowing immediate response to customer needs. In addition, Hunter can quickly coordinate the many parties involved in a real estate deal, including buyers, sellers, agents, brokers, mortgage companies and banks.

Greater flexibility: All of Hunter’s eight agents work other full-time jobs. Before, phone messages would

go into agents’ voice mail and not be retrieved until perhaps late in the day, slowing response time to customers. Now all communications are routed instantly to mobile communications devices, streamlining workflows and allowing the fast response needed to win business and serve customers efficiently.

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Better customer service: Mobile technology gives The Hunter Agency the flexibility to meet clients on their own terms — for example at their job sites during lunch breaks. “Our business is just fast paced,” Hunter says. “Clients like that, and the agents like it.”

Higher business volume/greater profitability: The Hunter Agency increased its business volume since

Customer solution at a glance

Primary applications

Access listing data and contract documents;
communicate with customers and other relevant parties;
finalize and transmit contracts

Primary hardware

HP Tablet PC
HP Deskjet 460 Mobile Printer
HP 12c Financial Programmable Calculator
HP Desktop PC
HP LaserJet Printer

transforming to an HP-based virtual office and profits were up over the previous year. To appreciate his agents, Hunter has increased their share of the commission split. How the current market will affect profits is the question everyone is wondering.

On the horizon:

HP Color LaserJet for professional-quality brochures

Much of The Hunter Agency's business is working with first-time homebuyers — the very people most squeezed in the recent sub-prime mortgage crisis and resulting credit crunch. Hunter aims to keep his customers out of trouble by educating them to make wise financial decisions, a role he sees his agency expanding in the future. On the technology horizon, he has his eye on an HP Color LaserJet Printer for brochures, flyers and other professional-quality marketing materials. Meanwhile, his HP-enabled operational flexibility gives him the time to enjoy his passions for jazz music and travel while taking his business to the next level of success.

"I love what I do," Hunter says. "When you sit across the closing table and you know you've helped someone buy their own home, that's a good feeling. HP is a key part of making it all happen."



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