

NEW JERSEY REALTOR®

MAY 2016: VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

TECH TIPS

Keep your Business
Moving Forward

NJREALTOR.COM



New Jersey REALTOR®

A publication of the New Jersey REALTORS®



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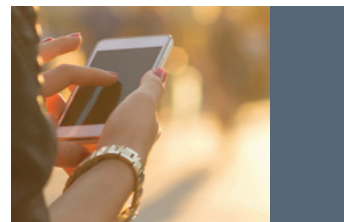
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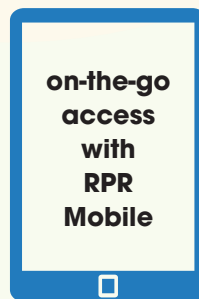


Facts & Figures



Data Tools

- Market Data
- User Stats
- Data Feeds
- News & Training



maps
include school
attendance zones,
FEMA flood maps,
demographic
information, etc.



Realtors® Property Resource was created by NAR for the sole purpose of providing Realtors® with the data to meet the needs and demands of clients. RPR is a benefit of membership and you can sign up at narrpr.com



57 Channels

The great sage, Ferris Bueller, once said, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." This couldn't be truer when it comes to technological advancement. From the dawn of time, man looked to the skies and dreamed of flying like the birds, and it took until 1903 for us to finally get off the ground. However, it only took another 66 years for us to set foot on the moon. That's how fast technology moves forward.

Real estate is not immune to this frenzied progress. MLS books transitioned to computerized multiple listing services; newspaper advertising overflowed to social media; descriptive listings will become immersive virtual reality walkthroughs. We are only limited by where our imaginations take us.

New Jersey Realtors® has always been forward-thinking and has stayed in front of new technologies to provide you with the tools, education, and resources that keep you on the cutting edge. We have partnered with all the MLSs in the state to aggregate big data into monthly market reports and videos, available for you to use in your listing appointments, marketing, blogs, etc. Check out njrealtor.com/10k.

An added benefit of membership, only Realtors® have access to easy-to-understand reports for every municipality around the state, giving you an advantage over your competitors.

Once upon a time, Realtors® had to make appointments to drive and gather signatures on contracts, then deliver them to other agents and attorneys. Things became a little easier with the invention of the fax machine. Now, with our forms product and partnership with ZipLogix, you can do everything online, and it's all included in your membership—even electronic signatures. What once might have taken days can now be done in minutes. Our online forms also get nearly-instant updates with law and regulation changes, reducing your risk.

Rest assured New Jersey Realtors® will continue to keep our sights on emerging tech. This way, you'll never feel like there's "57 channels and nothin' on," and you'll always have the latest tools and resources to succeed! ■

Tg Glazer
PRESIDENT





Why Investing in RPAC is Crucial

We've all heard the poignant reasons why investing in RPAC is crucial — we write about it often in this magazine, too — but they're worth repeating.

Since 1969, the Realtors® Political Action Committee has served as your best investment in real estate by supporting Realtor®-friendly candidates in elections, championing for important issues on all levels of government, and protecting the rights of private property owners. Even though the foundation has been laid for why all members should consider investing, we recognize that everyone has different reasons for why they do or do not currently contribute.

On April 11, NJ Realtors® brought together more than 100 Realtors® from around the state for a Fundraising & Political Advocacy Forum that delved deeper into fundraising best practices and examined the current and potential legislative issues that could effect the real estate industry. The half-day session kicked off with a discussion led by Kathy Fowler, NAR's 2016 fundraising liaison, whose own board — the Oklahoma Association of Realtors® — recently underwent a RPAC revamp. By taking a closer look at the reasons why members give as well as common objections, and finding new and creative ways to involve Realtors® in the political process, the association saw a substantial increase in the number of members who invested in RPAC. They also more than tripled their number of major investors. This undoubtedly had a positive impact on the work they were able to do for local and state issues.

Following Kathy, the group had the pleasure of hearing from John Currie, NJ Democratic State Chairman, and Bill Palatucci, a national Committeeman for the Republican National Committee. Though from opposite sides of the aisle, both legislators spoke of the value they place on their relationships with Realtors® and the association, as well as the issues their parties hope to work on in the coming months and years.

With additional presentations from Victoria Givens, NAR's Realtor® Mobilization Manager and Karl Eckhart, NAR's Region 2 Political Executive, it was abundantly clear that RPAC is vital not only for Realtors®, but for the real estate industry and its many partners as a whole.

RPAC investments help forge lasting and valuable relationships with government leaders, stop hundreds of pieces of legislation that would have negatively impacted the industry, and give Realtors® a strong, united voice.

Regardless of your political affiliation, at the end of the day we all share a common interest in the state of the real estate industry and the clients we serve. RPAC is the only PAC in the country that protects private property rights. And that's a powerful organization I'm especially proud to be a part of. ■

Jarrod C. Grasso
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER





EVENTS & DEADLINES

MAY 1, 2016 TO JULY 31, 2016

MAY 9 – 14

REALTORS® LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS & TRADE EXPO

Washington, D.C.
realtor.org/midyear

MAY 16 10:00 a.m.

INTRO TO RPR COMMERCIAL WEBINAR

njrealtor.com/2016/04/RPRcommercial

MAY 30

NJ REALTORS® OFFICE CLOSED – MEMORIAL DAY

JUNE 7 1:00 p.m.

NJ REALTORS® BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Edison, N.J.

JUNE 7 11:00 a.m.

NJ REALTORS® EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

NJ REALTORS® EXECUTIVE OFFICERS MEETING

NJ REALTORS® PRESIDENT-ELECT MEETING

Edison, N.J.

JUNE 9 5:00-9:00 p.m.

A NIGHT AT THE RACES

Meadowlands Racetrack

njrealtor.com/YPN

JULY 4

NJ REALTORS® OFFICE CLOSED – INDEPENDENCE DAY

NEW JERSEY MULTIPLE LISTING SERVICE | GET MORE

Comprehensive real estate information and technology for REALTOR® members.

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- ShowingTime Appointment Scheduling
- Tax Records for all of NJ and 9 NY Counties
- Mobile App for Agents and Consumers



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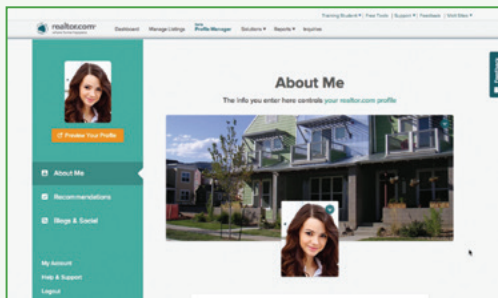


HOW TO GET NOTICED



As part of your membership, you are provided with the ability to create a Realtor® profile that serves as a marketing tool to connect you with buyers and sellers looking for an expert in your area. We encourage you to take a few minutes and visit realtor.com/profile to take advantage of this feature. This single profile is used on realtor.com's search tools as well as the 'Find a Realtor®' consumer tool on njrealtor.com.

Having a complete profile is the best way to get noticed. Thankfully, you don't have to be a marketing or technology whiz to make the most of this tool.



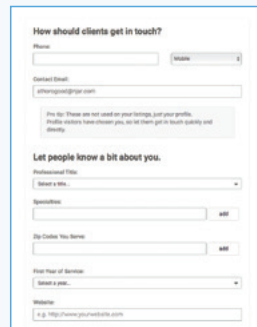
2. Make It Personal

Since your Realtor® profile might be the first impression people have of you, don't be afraid to inject a few personal touches. You can add a profile photo as well as a background photo (just like Facebook). There is also a designated area for you to include a short bio.

Use this space as an opportunity to let your voice shine through while also detailing some of your credentials and areas of expertise.

1. The Basics

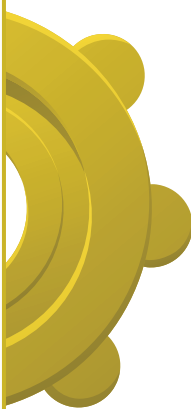
Visit realtor.com/profile to build your Realtor® profile with basic, but important, information about you and how potential clients can best contact you. This includes your phone number, email address, the areas you serve, how long you've been a Realtor®, and your website's URL.



3. The Extras

Let past clients become some of your best advocates with ratings and reviews that will appear on your profile. Through the Realtor® profile manager you can request reviews through the Realtor® profile manager. Once completed, they will be added to your profile for others to view.

You can also link your Realtor® profile to your blogs and social media accounts. Whenever you post, it will show on your realtor.com profile so your visitors can get to know you better.





What are you doing May 9?

By Douglas M. Tomson

Each year, approximately 10,000 Realtors® from across the country take time out of their busy lives to attend the Realtor® Legislative Meetings & Trade Expo in Washington, D.C. The annual May meeting is a great opportunity for members to take an active role in the real estate industry, learn about public policy, and get to know the association better.

Realtors® come to Washington, D.C. for special issues forums, committee meetings, legislative events, and the industry trade show. It's a great event and I hope you consider attending. Learn more at realtor.org/midyear — the meeting runs May 9 – 14.

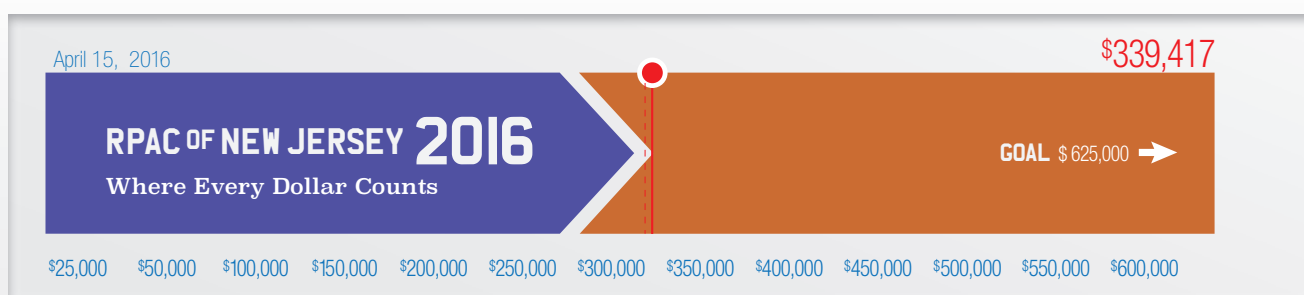
Your volunteer leadership team here at NJ Realtors® has already begun laying the groundwork with our Congressional

members and Senators to make sure the topics and issues we are advocating at these meetings become a reality.

NJ Realtors® President Tg Glazer, President-Elect Robert Oppenheimer, First Vice President Christian Schlueter, Treasurer Jeffrey Jones, Immediate Past President Eugenia Bonilla, and CEO Jarrod Grasso spent a few days in March on Capitol Hill discussing various real estate issues with members of Congress.

Some of the issues discussed were:

- FHA and HR 3700
- Tax reform and preserving 1031 Like-kind exchanges
- Not using G-fees to fund non-housing parts of budget
- Flood insurance reform
- Patent reform



All of these issues have been discussed in the past with our national leaders, but this year, with the heat of the presidential race closing in on D.C., they carry extra value.

As the presidential race heats up, so does Washington. Every member of the House of Representatives and one third of the Senate is up for election in 2016. In election years, Congress usually holds fewer sessions in an effort to avoid discussing controversial topics that may be perceived as unpopular by the voting electorate. With this in mind, our association's goal was to help educate our elected officials on what issues we think may be tackled during the fast-paced lame duck session.

While the NJ Realtors® leadership team has laid the groundwork, we need members like you to attend the meetings in May so our members of Congress know our 45,000-strong voice is no exaggeration and it's important to keep Realtor® priorities at the front of the line.

On May 12 from 4 to 6 p.m. at Bullfeathers in Washington D.C., NJ Realtors® will be hosting a widely attended meet-and-greet with members of Congress, their staff, and Realtor® members from New Jersey. Please contact Christina Gordillo Farrell at 732-494-4708 to reserve your seat to attend this great networking event. ■

Douglas M. Tomson is the Director of Government Affairs. He can be reached at 732-494-4720 or dtomson@njrealtor.com.



NEW JERSEY LEGISLATIVE BILLS

A2830 – McKeon (D-27)

Requires Department of Community Affairs to adopt an energy inspection code and requires licensed home inspectors to report energy analysis for each home inspected in contemplation of purchase.

New Jersey Realtors® Position: Oppose

We oppose this bill that will stigmatize older homes for sale New Jersey being sold that may be less energy efficient. It would increase the cost and time required for such a property to be sold.

Bill History:

2/16/2016 – Introduced in Assembly and referred to Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee

A3263 – Singleton (D-7)

Establishes pilot program allowing municipality and engineering firm of contract to serve as construction code enforcing agency.

New Jersey Realtors® Position: Support

We support this bill that will speed up the inspection and CO process required when a homes is sold in many municipalities.

Bill History:

2/22/2016 – Introduced in Assembly and referred to Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee

S1413 – Weinberg (D-37), Oroho (R-24)

Addresses procedures for public comment about matters before municipal planning and zoning boards.

New Jersey Realtors® Position: Strong Support

We strongly support this bill that allows for comments to be made before certain municipal boards, even if an interested party is unable to attend a local meeting, through the acceptance of written comments on applications.

Bill History:

2/11/2016 – Introduced in Senate and referred to Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee



SUPPORT



MONITOR



OPPOSE

2016 HOUSING MARKET OFF TO A STRONG START IN NEW JERSEY

By Allison Rosen

During the first two months of the year, New Jersey is already showing signs of bucking the national housing market trends, including when compared to the rest of the Northeastern United States.

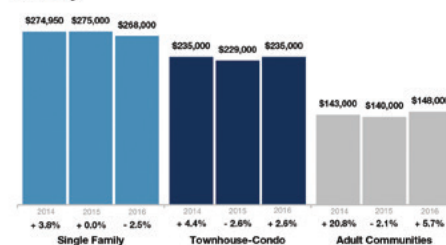
In February, nationally, home prices were at a median of \$210,800 and \$239,700 in the Northeast. In New Jersey,

Median Sales Price

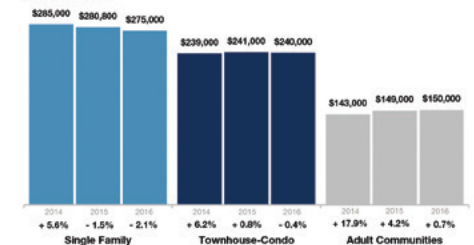
Point at which half of the sales sold for more and half sold for less, not accounting for seller concessions, in a given month.



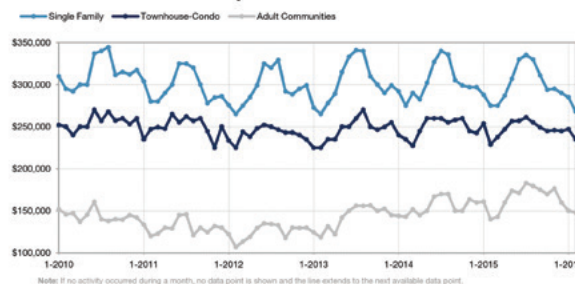
February



Year to Date



Historical Median Sales Price by Month



	Single Family	Townhouse-Condo	Adult Communities
March 2015	\$275,000	\$237,745	\$142,750
April 2015	\$267,000	\$247,000	\$160,000
May 2015	\$307,000	\$256,500	\$174,000
June 2015	\$330,000	\$257,000	\$171,000
July 2015	\$335,000	\$261,000	\$183,000
August 2015	\$330,000	\$255,000	\$179,450
September 2015	\$311,000	\$249,000	\$175,000
October 2015	\$294,000	\$245,000	\$169,700
November 2015	\$295,000	\$245,890	\$176,500
December 2015	\$290,000	\$245,000	\$160,000
January 2016	\$285,000	\$247,000	\$150,000
February 2016	\$268,000	\$235,000	\$148,000
12-Month Med.*	\$305,000	\$250,000	\$169,900

* Median Sales Price for all properties from March 2015 through February 2016. This is not the average of the individual figures above.

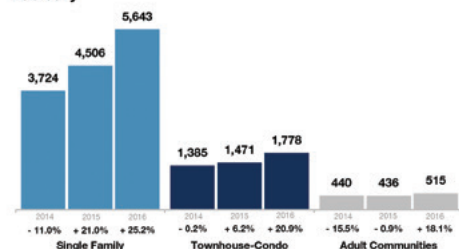
Data as of March 8, 2016. All data from the multiple listing services in the state of New Jersey. Provided by New Jersey REALTORS®. Powered by ShowingTime IDX. | 6

Pending Sales

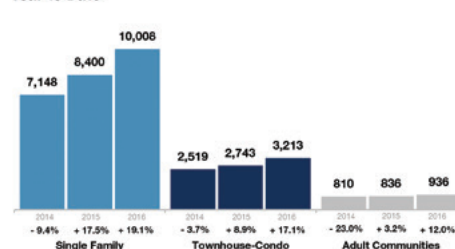
A count of the properties on which offers have been accepted in a given month.



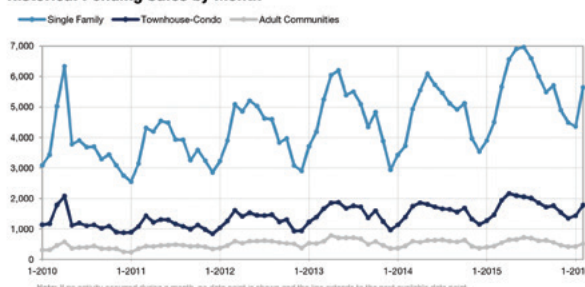
February



Year to Date



Historical Pending Sales by Month



	Single Family	Townhouse-Condo	Adult Communities
March 2015	5,660	1,939	550
April 2015	6,559	2,165	646
May 2015	6,903	2,092	654
June 2015	6,959	2,055	719
July 2015	6,598	2,013	696
August 2015	6,005	1,858	610
September 2015	5,491	1,715	629
October 2015	5,705	1,763	559
November 2015	4,900	1,539	464
December 2015	4,487	1,351	417
January 2016	4,365	1,435	421
February 2016	5,643	1,778	515
12-Month Avg.	5,773	1,809	573

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the median home price was \$250,000, significantly higher than the rest of the country, despite a 2 percent drop when compared to last year.

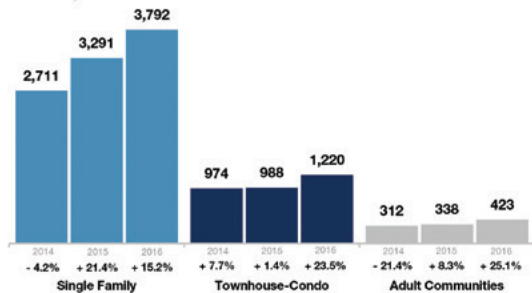
This is good news for buyers and sellers in New Jersey. With interest rates lower – according to Freddie Mac, the average commitment rate for a 30-year, conventional, fixed-rate loan was 3.66 percent in February – and affordability at an index of

Closed Sales

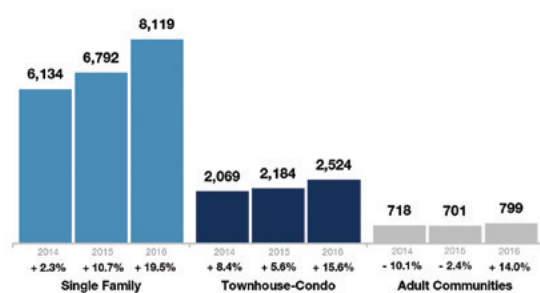
A count of the actual sales that closed in a given month.



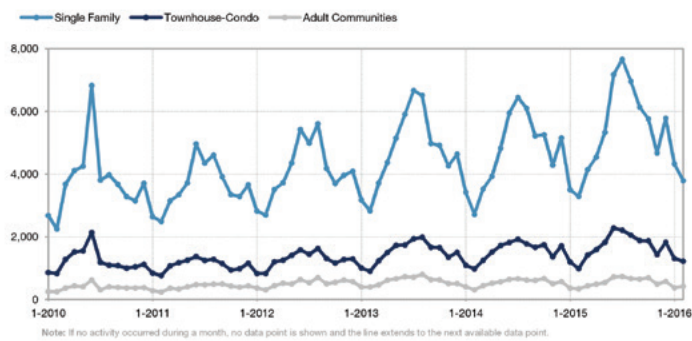
February



Year to Date



Historical Closed Sales by Month



	Single Family	Townhouse-Condo	Adult Communities
March 2015	4,145	1,414	435
April 2015	4,539	1,591	487
May 2015	5,326	1,821	544
June 2015	7,172	2,280	724
July 2015	7,659	2,215	737
August 2015	6,959	2,050	672
September 2015	6,137	1,881	652
October 2015	5,763	1,870	691
November 2015	4,673	1,435	488
December 2015	5,781	1,826	577
January 2016	4,327	1,304	376
February 2016	3,792	1,220	423
12-Month Avg.	5,523	1,742	567

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174, the housing market seems favorable for many. The states unemployment rate in February was 4.3 percent, which was a small 0.2 percent decrease from January. More significantly, it was 2 percent lower than the same time last year and the lowest it has been since August of 2007.

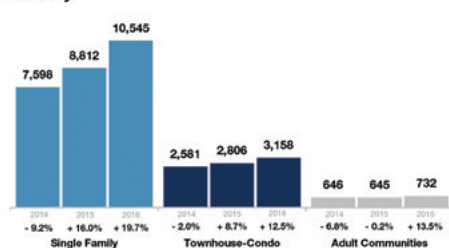
When looking at further statistics for February, there was a sharp 17.5 percent increase in new listings over

New Listings

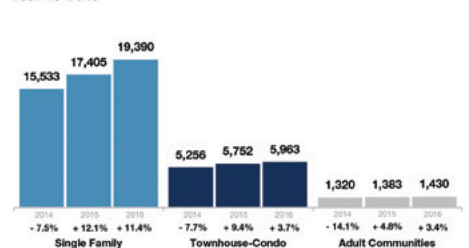
A count of the properties that have been newly listed on the market in a given month.



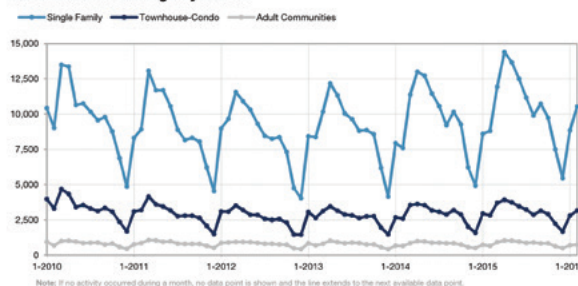
February



Year to Date



Historical New Listings by Month



	Single Family	Townhouse-Condo	Adult Communities
March 2015	11,933	3,704	923
April 2015	14,400	3,918	1,028
May 2015	13,671	3,740	1,014
June 2015	12,507	3,454	950
July 2015	11,160	3,227	864
August 2015	9,905	2,854	900
September 2015	10,740	3,154	826
October 2015	9,736	2,900	841
November 2015	7,499	2,226	628
December 2015	5,451	1,660	484
January 2016	8,845	2,805	698
February 2016	10,545	3,158	732
12-Month Avg.	10,533	3,067	824

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last year for a total of 14,727 new properties coming on the market, but also a significant 22 percent drop in the total months' supply.

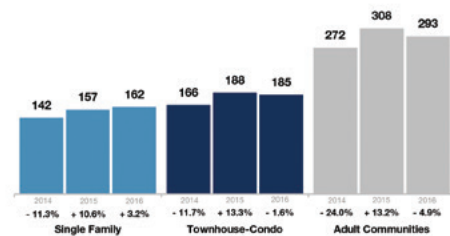
However, with the supply at a balanced 6.4 months, it's actually an ideal position for supply and demand. Other noteworthy numbers include the February pending sales for the state, which increased 24.2 percent to 8,132, indicating a strong number of sales to close in early spring.

Housing Affordability Index

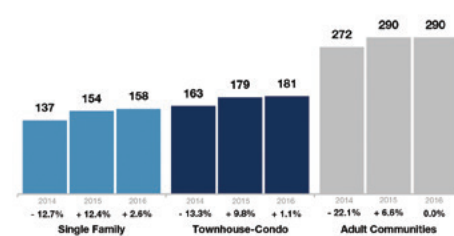
This index measures housing affordability for the region. An index of 120 means the median household income is 120% of what is necessary to qualify for the median-priced home under prevailing interest rates. A higher number means greater affordability.



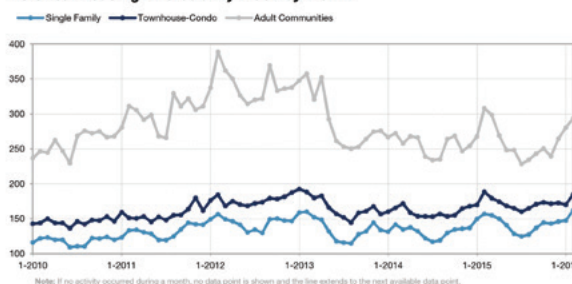
February



Year to Date



Historical Housing Affordability Index by Month



	Single Family	Townhouse-Condo	Adult Communities
March 2015	155	179	299
April 2015	150	174	269
May 2015	141	168	248
June 2015	129	165	248
July 2015	125	160	228
August 2015	127	165	234
September 2015	137	171	243
October 2015	145	173	250
November 2015	143	172	239
December 2015	146	173	264
January 2016	147	170	280
February 2016	162	185	293
12-Month Avg.*	142	171	258

Note: If no activity occurred during a month, no data point is shown and the line extends to the next available data point.

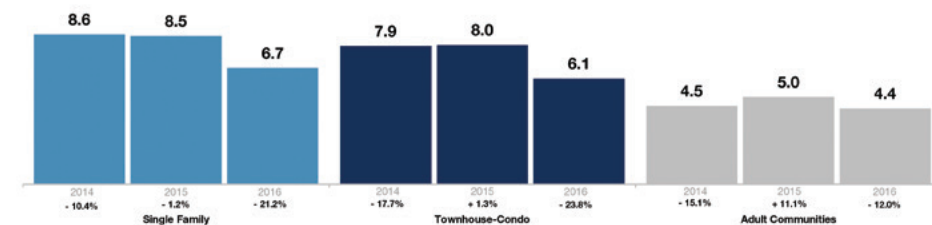
Data as of March 8, 2016. All data from the multiple listing services in the state of New Jersey. Provided by New Jersey REALTORS®. Powered by ShowingTime 10K. | 12

Months Supply of Inventory

The inventory of homes for sale at the end of a given month, divided by the average monthly pending sales from the last 12 months.



February



Historical Months Supply of Inventory by Month



	Single Family	Townhouse-Condo	Adult Communities
March 2015	8.8	8.3	5.2
April 2015	9.4	8.6	5.5
May 2015	9.9	8.8	5.7
June 2015	9.9	8.7	5.6
July 2015	9.7	8.4	5.5
August 2015	9.4	8.2	5.6
September 2015	9.3	8.0	5.4
October 2015	8.8	7.7	5.4
November 2015	8.1	7.2	5.1
December 2015	6.9	6.2	4.6
January 2016	6.8	6.1	4.5
February 2016	6.7	6.1	4.4
12-Month Avg.*	8.6	7.7	5.2

* Months Supply for all properties from March 2015 through February 2016. This is not the average of the individual figures above.

Additionally, closed sales in February, typically a slower month, were at 5,545, which was a 17.9 percent increase over last year.

To see more of what's happening in the state's housing market, check out the state, county, and municipal reports at njrealtor.com/10k. ■

Allison Rosen is the Director of Communications. She can be reached at arosen@njrealtor.com or 732-494-4730.



KEEPING IT SIMPLE ONLINE

By Bridget McCrea



In the rush to fulfill consumers' appetites for information and data, many Realtors® have bought into the idea that loading up a website with as much content as possible is the best way to attract and engage prospects online. From property listings to blog posts to community details and social media links, very little gets left on the editing floor by the time an agent or broker is done updating a website these days.

But if there's one thing that the top ecommerce and informational sites have learned over the last few years, it's that "less" really is "more" in the online world. By continually adding features, changing things around, and loading their sites with content in hopes that Google will give them higher rankings, agents often wind up damaging their websites and, in turn, their brands. The good news is that there are some easy ways to reverse the trend and simplify a site's design, approach, and content mix in a way that truly appeals to today's busy, information-hungry consumer.

Catering to the Masses

According to the National Association of Realtors®' most recent estimates, 42 percent of buyers in 2015 took their first step in the home-buying process by looking online at properties for sale. Among buyers who used the Internet during their home search, 87 percent found photos and 84 percent found detailed information about properties for sale "very useful."

One glance at Kathy Courter's website shows that she did her homework before rolling out her last site upgrade. Right on the front page—positioned in that highly-coveted "top left quadrant" is a user-friendly "Search NJ Homes for Sale" box that visitors can use to input their parameters and then view listings. To the right of that box are direct links to luxury, lakefront, and exclusive listings, as well as one "featured listing" with photos and details.

A sales associate with RE/MAX at the Lake in Landing, Courter says her ultimate goal is to keep the site clean,

Is Your Website Mobile-Friendly... or Not?

If you've ever tried to get a button on your tablet screen to respond to a simple tap without success or been forced to fire up a traditional website to get the information that you're looking for, then you know exactly what poor responsive web design looks and feels like. It doesn't feel good, nor is it engaging. A term developed by web designer Ethan Marcotte, responsive design refers to the "planning, development, and creation of a website that's fluid and optimized to accommodate any screen size."

With more buyers and sellers toting mobile phones and tablets, an increasing number of agents and brokers are re-thinking their traditional website designs and incorporating responsive design strategies into their new, upgraded, and/or overhauled sites. In doing so, real estate professionals are embracing the 89 percent of new home shoppers who use a mobile search engine to look for properties and the 68 percent who use mobile applications.

So what does a Realtor® need to do to get up to speed in this area? The key is to create a mobile-responsive site that adapts the content of the page in a way that displays properly in any format. If you don't have experience with web design, this is where a good web developer/designer can be worth his or her weight in gold. "One of the best investments I've made was in a designer who optimized my site not only for search engines, but also for mobile apps," says Kathy Courter, sales associate at RE/MAX at the Lake in Landing.

Non-responsive sites are difficult to navigate on a small screen, while those which incorporate responsive design make navigation possible across various mobile platforms. They can also detect which type of device is being used and then quickly reformat pages to accommodate. "We're at a point where mobile-friendly websites aren't a luxury; they're a necessity," says Mark Slade, a Realtor® with Keller Williams Real Estate Mid-Town Direct in Maplewood, and lead manager of Team Mark Slade Homes. "Realtors can't afford to ignore the high percentage of customers who have gone mobile."

uncluttered, and easy to use. "People should be able to get exactly what they need with just one click," she says. "They shouldn't have to spend too much time finding what they're looking for or you'll lose them; they'll move along to another site."

In real estate for 20 years, Courter says her website has gone through a few different iterations to get to its current state. Working with an experienced web designer, the most recent tweaks include a tighter focus on her commitment to the "one-click opportunity." That meant moving school reports, valuation information, and even her own bio to separate links that visitors can view if they want to, while focusing more tightly on the things NAR says consumers want: property listing information and photos.

Knowing that a high percentage of buyers are using mobile phones and tablets to view properties, Courter also has direct links to RE/MAX's iOS and Android app on the front page of her site. She sees this as a good move in today's mobile-oriented environment, where NAR reports that 68 percent of new home shoppers use mobile applications at the onset and throughout their research (and 89 percent use a mobile search engine). "It's really important to be where my customers are," say Courter, "and right now, a lot of them are searching on their mobile phones."

Video as a Boost

Pull up Mark Slade's website and the first thing you'll notice is the black-and-white photo of downtown Maplewood, a small map pointing out office locations, and a four-field property search engine. Slade doesn't waste much time when it comes to giving buyers and sellers what they want online. And in many cases, he says they want videos and pictures over text. That's why he produces regular segments of a video series "This Month in Real Estate" and posts them prominently on his website, along with other clips.

"I stand five times as much [of a] chance of gaining recognition and understanding when someone is looking at a video," says Slade, a Realtor® with Keller Williams Mid-Town Direct in Maplewood and lead manager of Team Mark Slade Homes.

After slowly honing the site over the last 7 1/2 years—the length of time he's been in real estate—Slade took a new slant last year and began optimizing his online presence to accommodate the new era of mobile users. He also added

"town" buttons for the 12 major geographical areas that he covers, knowing that someone who wants a home in Madison or Chatham doesn't want to waste time looking elsewhere for properties.

Click on New Providence, for example, and you get 33 relevant results, descending by price, and a full-sized photo of each home's exterior. "I did this because I was hearing from consumers that they didn't want to go through the motions of using the IDX setup to drill down and answer a lot of questions," says Slade. "I always keep the user experience in mind when developing or revamping my site, so it made sense to add the town buttons right on the front page."

Slade, who says his goal is to "take my website to the next level every year," says agents who are struggling with information overload online should simply put themselves in their buyers' shoes. Ask yourself: What would I want to see on the front page? How would I want to interact with the site and its various elements? What would I not care much about if I were to do my own home search? Do I get an idea of who this agent is and the role that they can play in the buying or selling process? A former brand manager, Slade says the final question should play a particularly significant role online, where agents have to not only clear their own clutter, but also stand out from the rest of it. "Ask yourself why they should work with you versus someone else," says Slade, "then use the answers to create an online experience that truly reflects your business, values, and mission."

Cookies, Anyone?

During the 15 years that he's been in real estate, Matt De Fede, broker-owner at Realty Executives Elite Homes in Nutley, has had a number of different websites. Today, he says his team focuses on using content to draw in viewers and create a dialogue with them.

To achieve this goal, he says every piece of content on the site was designed to be contextually-relevant for the company's audience. He tries to avoid large graphics and other elements that would create long download times, particularly for mobile users. "Nearly all of our customers are using mobile phones to search for homes," says De Fede, "so we've worked

hard to ensure that the site is optimized for those smaller screens."

For De Fede, one web strategy that's performed particularly well is the use of cookies. It works like this: all of the company's sites includes a script that "follows visitors around," and even if they haven't officially filled out a form or entered information in a search field. "We deposit a cookie onto their browser, and then we follow them around and remind them of our brand," say De Fede. "That level of strategic branding has worked really well for us."

De Fede, who estimates that 95 percent of his firm's new business comes from online sources, says he's always honing and perfecting his websites to make sure they're truly meeting customers' needs. "It's really a foundation for our office and for my brokerage as a whole," says De Fede. "We put a lot into it."

Getting to What's Relevant and Useful

To agents looking for help with their own site-decluttering projects, Courter says her first step was to "remove as much ridiculousness from the front page as possible." By taking this housecleaning-like approach to the process, she says she was able to focus on what was most important to visitors and then put those elements front and center on the main page.

"No one really cares about anything else but finding a home. Plain and simple," says Courter. "If you have too much content on there, and if you want customers to be able to get to what they want with just a click or two, you really have to cull through the content and center on what's relevant and useful." ■

Bridget McCrea is a Florida-based freelance writer who covers business and real estate topics for several magazines and newsletters. She can be reached at bridgetmccrea@gmail.com.



What's Your Favorite Tech Tool?



By Daniel Rome Levine



Jim Flanagan,
*broker/owner, Coldwell
Banker Flanagan Realty,
Toms River*

Favorite tech tool: **Videolicious**

Using Videolicious is as easy as one, two, three. Literally. The app allows you to take high-quality videos with a smart phone or other mobile device and walks you through the entire process, from shooting to posting, in three simple steps. "It's so easy even a real estate broker can do it," jokes Flanagan.

He uses the free app to create short marketing videos he posts weekly to his website and on social media pages, including Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The videos, called "What the Flanagan," cover everything from buying and selling tips to market updates, and are delivered in a funny, lighthearted manner. "I call it my weekly real estate-related rant," he says.

People are paying attention. "These videos have helped keep me and my brand top of mind in the market," he says. "I walk around town and people shout out to me, 'What the Flanagan!' People love them and look forward to them every Wednesday." Flanagan also uses Videolicious to create property videos.

Videos are easy to edit, you can combine photos and video and it even allows you to choose background music. Simple prompts guide you through the step-by-step process. "It's the easiest thing in the world," says Flanagan.



Ed Barski, *broker/owner, BK Real Estate, Cherry Hill*

Favorite tech tool: **FiveStreet**

When people reach out to a real estate agent, they expect an immediate response. And if they don't get it, they're more than likely moving on. "That pivotal window of opportunity can slam shut very fast if you don't respond right away to an Internet lead," says Barski. "FiveStreet is one of my favorite tech tools because it provides instant contact to those leads helping ensure they turn into actual clients."

Whatever the day or time, FiveStreet generates an automated text response that doesn't sound like a robot. It actually sounds like it was written by you and includes a question, which helps guarantee the person writes back.

No matter where the lead originates, FiveStreet adds it directly to Barski's Top Producer Customer Relationship Manager program so he can easily keep track of it. And since he is working with a team of agents, he appreciates the feature that sends every lead out to each of his agents at the same time and then lets whoever responds first claim the lead. "This first come, first serve type of assigning is great," says Barski.



David Tibbetts, *RE/MAX Preferred Professionals, Bridgewater*

Favorite tech tool: **Evernote**

This note-taking and organizing app allows Tibbetts to take notes on his smart phone, tablet or computer and have the information immediately available on all of them. These notes can be anything from written text to web pages to photos and they can be easily shared with others. "I use it to keep track of everything with my clients," says Tibbetts.

With buyers, he inputs what they are looking for in a home as well as keeping track of what he has showed them and their comments. On listing appointments, Tibbetts lends his buyer clients an iPad preloaded with the properties they will be seeing as well as a map showing their location. Clients can write notes on the iPad and then Tibbetts copies those to Evernote and emails them

a copy of what they wrote for their own records. When representing sellers, Tibbetts writes down everything he learns about a house in Evernote before listing it and attaches his own photos to the note.



Curtis Lee, *broker-salesperson, BHHS Zack Shore Realtors®, Manahawkin*

Favorite tech tool: **DocuSign**

Eleven years ago, when Lee first started in the business, Realtors® were sending contracts back and forth through fax machines to get signatures. "By the time you got the contract back you literally couldn't read it," he says. "You didn't have a clue what it said."

No more, thanks to electronic signature tool DocuSign, which allows parties to e-sign documents, and to be automatically notified when others have signed.

"Now I actually get a little offended when somebody sends one of my contracts through a fax machine," says Lee. "With DocuSign it comes back as a crisp, clean, beautiful document that is so much nicer to deal with."

Lee also loves DocuSign's mobile app, which allows him to access all its features on his Samsung Galaxy 5s phone and Samsung Note Pro tablet.



Joe Peters, *Weichert, Realtors®, Clinton*

Favorite tech tool: **Top Producer**

This marketing and lead generation system is such an effective and powerful tool, Peters thinks of it as having a helper in the office. "Top Producer is my assistant," he says. "If I didn't have it, I'd probably have to go hire someone, at least on a part-time basis."

Top Producer makes generating new leads and keeping in touch with current and past clients easy. Peters uses it to stay in contact with some 3,000 people he's worked with over the years. "Top Producer enables me to send them interesting articles and newsletters on a regular basis," he says. "I can also use it to easily do drip campaigns. It allows me to reach out and keep in touch with my customers."

Peters also relies on Top Producer to help him manage and keep track of all the important details of a transaction, such as closings, attorney reviews and inspections. "It takes care of all the little things that I need to do," he says.



Dawn Bricker, *broker/owner,
Century 21, Palmyra*

Favorite tech tool: **Realtors
Property Resource**

Bricker is crazy about this online real estate database, which is owned by the National Association of Realtors®. She loves the wide range of information it provides in one easy to use site and the sharp-looking and comprehensive property reports it allows her to produce.

An added bonus is that access to the site is a benefit covered by her NAR dues and she can use it at no additional charge. "I can't believe everybody's not using it," she says. "It's sitting there right in front of them, essentially free of charge."

Bricker says clients are blown away by the quality of the RPR reports she shows them and the range of information they contain, including everything from school information to taxes, maps, demographic data and market trends. Bricker also loves the fact that reports can be tailored to include only the information you want to share. "The reports are customizable so you can tweak them if you want," she says.

One of Bricker's favorite ways to use RPR is to generate material that can be handed out at open houses, such as property fliers, seller's reports, and mini property reports. "It's a really nice presentation tool that is so easy to use," she says. "It takes literally 45 seconds to generate a report. I love RPR. I really do."

"She really helps me remember to do things and it seems to impress clients," says Downey. "I just press the button on my iPhone and ask Siri to remind me of something that pops into my head at any given time."

If he is talking to someone on the phone and he tells them he will do something for them, as soon as he hangs up he accesses the app, taps the home button and says, for instance, "Remind me to send the seller's disclosure to Bill."

"Ok, I'll remind you," Siri answers cheerily. Downey can then input a time he wants to be reminded. Downey wouldn't know what to do without Siri's help. "I would be totally lost without my iPhone and its reminder app," he says.



Donna Spinetta, *vice president,
Web Solutions and Development,
Realty Executives New Jersey, Sparta*

Favorite tech tool: **Gmail**

Gmail is such an integral part of her everyday routine that Spinetta can't imagine life without it. Since Spinetta uses Gmail for her personal emails and her office uses it as well, she can easily toggle between her work and personal email boxes. And since her Gmail accounts are synchronized and updated on all her devices in real time, she can access messages on her Samsung Galaxy Note 4 phone, her Motorola Zoom tablet or her HP Pavilion laptop computer. "So much of my business is conducted on the road using my phone and other devices," says Spinetta. "Being able to access all my messages on all my devices at any time anywhere makes all the difference in the world." ■



Jackson Downey, *Greater Coastal
Realty, Manahawkin*

Favorite tech tool: **iPhone reminder
app**

Downey spends much of his day talking to Siri, Apple's wildly popular personal assistant. Siri, the voice of Apple's reminder app, helps Downey make sure he doesn't forget anything.

Daniel Rome Levine is a Chicago-based writer. A former senior editor with *Reader's Digest*, his work has also appeared in *Crain's Chicago Business*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *U.S. News and World Report*.



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YOUR CLIENTS' INFORMATION IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.

By John Shehata

Every day you receive sensitive, personal information about your clients, co-workers, and business. Having a sound security plan to collect only what data you need, and dispose of what you don't can help you meet your legal obligations, but can also give you a sense of peace in knowing all that information is safe. It's the unfortunate truth that while hackers do target the big fish, more often than not they target smaller, less protected organizations. The costs of a security breach can be significant. Think about lost revenue, business interruptions, lawsuits, fines, and most importantly, the damage to the trust you had with consumers and your brand reputation. According to Bank Info Security, the average cost of a data breach in the United States has risen to \$5.4 million, mainly attributable to the growth in malicious attacks. In light of the increasing threats over the past decade and coupled with a heightened concern for individual privacy, the responsibility to increase security, reduce fraud and protect your clients' identifiable information should be a top priority.

Start at the Front Door

Data security literally starts at the front door. Offices should be secure with alarms and monitoring systems. Sensitive information should never be left out in the open, but rather locked safely away.

The next level of defense is a firewall. This, matched with security software, can protect most of your systems from a majority of attacks. With the objective to prevent intrusions and any subsequent damage or service losses, software adds a range of "anti"-efforts for spam, malware, viruses, or malicious human activity.

It's important all staff manages their technological activities in a way that prevents the introduction of viruses or malware. For example, if an email looks suspicious, don't click on any links. And if a data breach happens, make sure staff knows to report it immediately so you or your company can rectify the situation and assess any damage.

What's the Password?

Do you have the same password for your bank accounts, emails, and mobile apps? You shouldn't. Passwords are what stands between your sensitive information and hackers. Your office should set guidelines for passwords — here are some suggestions:

- Avoid obvious combinations or personal information
- Change monthly or quarterly
- Cannot be repeated within twelve months
- Must not be shared
- Must not be used across multiple systems
- Contains at least one number and one uppercase letter
- No "default" passwords

Back It Up

While backing up data is mostly a storage and recovery issue, it is also a security consideration. Backup data should be secured with a limited number of authorized

personnel given access. Consider encrypting any data on backup drives, just in case it ends up in the wrong hands.

While you may not have control over most of your vendors, i.e., MLSs, forms vendors, transaction management systems, or CRMs, it is a good practice to review security practices to ensure they align with your standards. Any vendor you work with should be able to provide you with a Service Level Agreement which should highlight their obligations to you and how they protect your data. ■

John Shehata is the Director of Technology. He can be reached at jshahata@njrealtor.com



QUICK TIPS

- **Keep private data out of plain sight**
- **Lock the doors**
- **Use a firewall**
- **Be skeptical, think before you click**
- **Have a secure, strong password**
- **Backup your information**
- **Restrict access to data**
- **Make sure our vendors protect your data**

TWO NEW JERSEY REALTORS® NAMED FINALISTS ON NATIONAL ASSOCIATION'S 30 UNDER 30 LIST

Every year, the National Association of Realtors® *Realtor® Magazine* features its 30 Under 30 list, which showcases young professionals who exemplify high standards in real estate.

This year, two New Jersey members were named among the 50 finalists – Jocelyn P. Russo and Kyle Kovats.

Kovats took home the Web Choice Award winner and made the final 30 Under 30 list.

"New Jersey Realtors® is proud to support our members on their journey to be named to NAR's 30 Under 30 list and I applaud them for their dedication and strong work ethics," said Tg Glazer, 2016 President. ■



Russo, 28, is a Realtor® with Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in Upper Montclair and had an individual 2015 sales volume of \$5.4 million. "As a future leader in real estate, my goal is to be a role model for other successful Realtors. Being a 30 Under 30 nominee is allowing my goals to become reality!" Russo said recently, adding she is, "absolutely thrilled and honored to be a part of such an amazing group."



Kovats, 25, is a Realtor® with Keller Williams Suburban Realty in Livingston and had a 2015 individual sales volume of \$10.9 million. "Being a finalist for the 30 under 30 is truly humbling. When I first got into the real estate industry, one of my immediate goals was to join this distinguished group of young professionals," he said. "To be a finalist is surreal. The overwhelming support I have received from both fellow Realtors® as well as my students at Kovats Real Estate School has been incredible."



BOARD / ASSOCIATION NEWS

Realtors® Donate Chairs to the Hawthorne Boys and Girls Club

In keeping with the National Association of Realtors® partnership with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the RealSource Association of Realtors® donated lightly used captains chairs to the Hawthorne Boys & Girls Club.

“We recently redecorated our association and were looking for an organization that could use our board room chairs,” said RealSource Association Executive, Suzan Koren. “We were thrilled to be able to assist the Hawthorne Boys & Girls Club in furnishing their new science and technology center for teens.” According to the CEO of the club, John Bertollo, they had the tables, but no chairs as of yet and this was perfect timing.

The National Association of Realtors® and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America have joined forces so America’s kids continue to have a bright future. As the premier youth-serving organization in the U.S., Boys & Girls Clubs have doors open to youth in communities across the country, serving as a “home away from home” for nearly 4 million kids each year during the critical time after school and in the summer.



▲ Director of Sports at the Hawthorne Boys & Girls Club Kyle Graham, CEO of the Hawthorne Boys & Girls Club John Bertollo, RealSource Association Executive, Suzan Koren and RealSource President, Kathleen Houston.



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