

REALTOR® AE

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Get Your Message to Consumers

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"WE ARE THE VOICE FOR REAL ESTATE"
"10 REASONS TO USE A REALTOR®"
"NOW IS A GREAT TIME TO BUY!"
"JOIN REALTORS® IN THE FIGHT FOR FAIR HOUSING"
"GET REALTOR®"



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REALTOR® AE

Fall 2017

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What I Saw at the Revolution



Michael Theo, RCE, CAE,
CEO, Wisconsin
REALTORS® Association,
2017 chair of the
AE Committee

NAR President Bill Brown’s theme for this year was “Revolution,” an inspiring leitmotif focusing on the insurgency of change and innovation in our industry and our association and the ensuing challenges and opportunities we face as a consequence. As his presidency draws to a close, so, too, does my chairmanship of the AEC, so it seems like a good time to ruminate on what I saw at the Revolution.

The challenges presented by this rolling revolution can fill volumes, but I’ll focus on two biggies: advocacy and professionalism.

Like politics, all markets are local, yet real estate transactions have become increasingly affected by Washington-based regulations, infused with a churning of political partisanship. Tax reform, financial reforms, and regulatory reforms each has a direct impact on real estate. Therefore, like no other time in our association’s past, we need to acknowledge and embrace the primacy of being an advocacy organization and mobilize like never before to ensure the outcome of these epic policy battles end favorably. This revolution has already begun so time is of the essence. We must commit whatever

human and financial resources necessary to prevail on these blockbuster issues now.

Equally challenging is a multiplicity of issues surrounding professionalism in our industry. Perhaps more than any single issue I’ve witnessed in my 32 years with the REALTOR® organization, our members yearn to improve the level of professionalism. Yet despite our codes of ethics and conduct and the professional standards processes we’ve developed, our standards and aspirations are often ignored or not adequately pursued or enforced. The revolution needed here still eludes us. We must devise a road map to achieve professionalism and implement it now.

“We must commit whatever human and financial resources necessary to prevail on these blockbuster issues now.”

This professionalism applies to us as AEs as well. As the incoming president of the Wisconsin Society of Association Executives, I speak from experience when I say REALTOR® executives are among the best association managers in the country. But given the magnitude of the challenges we face today, what we have isn’t good enough.

We should set a national goal that every AE, at every level of the organization, in every corner of the country, should either hold the RCE designation or be actively working toward it. Only after we demand the highest level of professionalism from ourselves can we effectively assist our members in realizing the highest level of professionalism they espouse.

What I saw at the revolution this year was a strong advocacy organization that needs to get stronger. I saw a fantastic group of professional REALTORS® who rightfully seek to improve the level of professionalism in their ranks. And I saw a remarkably talented group of AEs that can and should recommit to improving themselves and their organizations. I am supremely optimistic that each of these will come to pass.

I leave this post with sincere thanks to NAR President Bill Brown for giving me the opportunity to serve. I leave still looking for the adequate words of praise for the turbo-charged NAR staff I’ve had the pleasure to work with. Their job is extraordinarily difficult but Cindy Sampalis and the entire NAR AE support staff epitomizes professionalism in every sense of the word. And I leave with high expectations for incoming AEC Chair Rebecca Grossman and Vice Chair Duncan McKenzie. And finally, I leave with much gratitude to all of you. REALTOR® AEs are truly inspirational—professionally and personally. Thank you all for the opportunity to serve.



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For more information, please contact Richard Maxson: richard@catylist.com



REALTOR® Associations Nationwide Spring Into Disaster Relief Mode

In communities across Texas, Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, REALTOR® associations are distributing hurricane relief aid and issuing grants to help those affected rebuild their lives. REALTOR® associations across the nation that have sent tens of thousands of dollars in donations and relief supplies have helped make this possible.

In the first two weeks following the hurricanes, the National Association’s REALTORS® Relief Foundation collected more than \$1.8 million from state and local associations, members, and others. “The National Association of REALTORS® wants our members and the consumers they serve to know that the REALTOR® family is here for them,” says NAR President William E. Brown. “We encourage one and all to join NAR in donating to the REALTORS® Relief Foundation.”

Donations also are pouring in from REALTOR® associations across the country to the Texas REALTORS® Relief Fund (\$2,500 from the Greater Nashville REALTORS®, for example). Yet, despite the nearly \$3 million collected, the fund is no longer accepting applications for assistance due to overwhelming demand.

In Florida, the Florida REALTORS® Disaster Relief Fund continues to collect donations to assist the state’s affected members. “Power just beginning to be

restored to many areas so the need assessment has just begun,” says Margy Grant, Florida REALTORS® vice president and general counsel.

Taking action and heavy lifting

To help their fellow Texans to the south as they recover from hurricane damage and flooding, Collin County Association of REALTORS® not only donated to relief funds but is helping REALTORS® get back to business by waving secondary membership dues and fees.

“Members of 14 Texas REALTOR® associations were among those impacted by hurricane Harvey,” says Jonna Fernandez, RCE, Collin County’s COO. “To help ease their burden, several local franchise offices have extended offers to practitioners within their brand to temporarily relocate their business to the Dallas-Fort Worth area. We’re doing our part to assist these REALTORS® as they get back on their feet by waiving dues.”

Here are other ways local REALTOR® associations have found to aid fellow associations and their members:

- The Northeast Florida Association of REALTORS® had just finished packaging 1,000 Totes for Hope—Ziploc bags filled with needed toiletry and health items—to send to Texas for Hurricane Harvey relief when Hurricane Irma hit. Fortunately, there was no

major damage to the association building or staff’s property, but the power outages and flooding kept the office closed for nearly a week.

- The Houston Association of REALTORS® launched a new program enabling members, property owners, landlords, and property managers to post homes that they agree to make available on a temporary basis to those displaced by storm damage and flooding. Some of the postings on har.com/temporaryhousing are available for reduced rent or even free, depending on the owner.

- Hilda Ramirez, director of PR, communications, and education for the Santa Clara County Association of REALTORS®, Calif., flew to Houston in September with a group of Vietnamese- and Spanish-speaking members to help majority ethnic communities with both translation and clean-up.



Santa Clara County Association of REALTORS® Hilda Ramirez working in the evacuation center at Port Arthur Community Center in Texas.

Ramirez teamed up with Keller Williams, which canceled its planned annual conference in San Antonio and instead invited all Keller Williams agents to help in hurricane relief. “There is one thing you cannot crush in this country and it is the human spirit,” says Ramirez, after what she called a humbling and beautiful experience working in an evacuation center. “I can’t wait to go back and help some more.”

Stay tuned to REALTOR® AE magazine on Facebook for more on how local associations are springing into disaster relief mode.



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Local Association Finds Secret Formula for Boosting Broker Involvement in Advocacy

In three years, Cape Fear REALTORS® in Wilmington, N.C., has moved from having one of the lowest levels of Broker Involvement Program participation to one of the highest. NAR's Broker Involvement Program provides broker-owners with a free tool to rally their agents on critical legislative issues affecting the real estate industry. Member participation in NAR calls for action is increased because notices are sent through the broker's email system, not through the general NAR email.

"We tried several things to secure broker buy-in," says Shane Johnson, Cape Fear REALTORS®' chief operating officer. "First, we sent a letter to brokers explaining the value of BIP, followed with scripted calls." The script was brief and, beyond the initial benefits, explained that enrollment would help the association comply with Core Standards.

Locals Launch Home Buyer Grant Program

The Silicon Valley and the Santa Clara County associations of REALTORS® are using a \$100,000 grant from the California Association of REALTORS® Housing Affordability Fund to aid first-time home buyers in their area.

Through the grant, first-time home buyers can receive up to \$5,000 toward their closing costs. Because of the extraordinary cost of housing—where the median price of a single-family home is about \$1.1 million—the grant program is attracting a lot of positive press for the associations.

"We are extremely excited to contribute to the affordable housing efforts in a community where affordable housing is almost non-existent," the associations said in a statement. For more, visit housingtrustsv.org.

"We don't call brokers often, so when they picked up the phone, we used it as an opportunity to ask if they had any suggestions about services. That provided us with good, timely customer feedback," said Johnson. Once the calling effort was completed, the broker membership form was changed to include a BIP enrollment opt-in check box. "Almost all of our new brokers now automatically sign up for BIP. Those who don't, usually come on board once they get a better understanding during a follow-up call. It's an ongoing effort, however, due to constant changes in membership," says Johnson.

"Cape Fear REALTORS®' approach is simple to use, and hopefully more local associations can reach this high level of participation," says Bill Malkasian, NAR's vice president of political strategic planning.

For copies of Cape Fear's BIP recruitment materials, email shane@Capefear.realtor.

Proposed Change to MLS Dues Policy

In November, at the REALTORS® Conference in Chicago, the National Association of REALTORS® Multiple Listing Issues and Policies Committee will consider a change to NAR policy to eliminate an MLS's ability to require participation by all offices of a real estate firm (within the shareholder association's jurisdiction) when one office of that firm participates. A companion proposal would require MLSs to provide a no-cost waiver of MLS fees, dues, and charges for licensees who do not want or use the MLS's data and can demonstrate their subscription to another MLS. Plan now to attend the committee meeting on Nov. 4 to hear the discussion and pose questions. For a text of the policy change and a list of FAQs, visit nar.realtor and search for "statement 7.42."

Join NAR's Yearlong Fair Housing Act 50th Anniversary Celebration

Join NAR in commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act by advocating housing opportunity in your community and across the country.

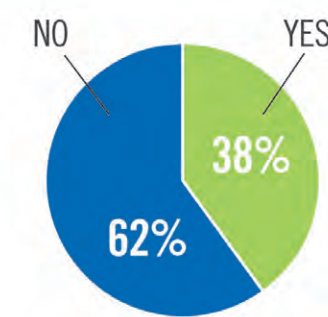
In a yearlong awareness and action campaign throughout 2018, NAR will provide a variety of resources to support new approaches to fair housing issues. New and refreshed member training materials will emphasize the importance of awareness, understanding, and compliance with the Fair Housing Act.



NAR will also develop campaign materials, including flyer and email templates; customizable print and banner ads; and articles, videos, and written content. These materials, found at FairHousing.realtor, will help you share the story of the value that Fair Housing brings to our industry and your community.

The NAR campaign will coordinate with multicultural real estate organizations featuring pioneers and leaders throughout our industry. Their activities will be highlighted at the 2018 REALTORS® Legislative Meetings in Washington, D.C., as well as a special event at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture that week. For more resources and to get involved, visit FairHousing.realtor.

REALTOR® SAFETY: DID YOU KNOW?*



38% of REALTORS® have felt threatened on the job






44% of REALTORS® use a smart phone safety app



Only 44% of offices have a standard procedure for agent safety

SHARE THE MESSAGE OF SAFETY WITH YOUR MEMBERS!
Tap into the many resources available for Associations at www.NAR.realtor/Safety, including:

-  **HOST A SAFETY COURSE AT YOUR ASSOCIATION**
Offer the "Real Estate Safety Matters" course from the Center for REALTOR® Development.
-  **USE THE MARKETING MATERIALS WE'VE CREATED FOR YOU**
Download free flyers, web banners and videos to display on your website.
-  **DOWNLOAD THE HOMEOWNER SAFETY & SECURITY TOOLKIT**
Access materials and best practices to get the word out about homeowner safety and security.
-  **SOCIALIZE NAR'S WEEKLY SAFETY TIPS**
Follow NAR on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram to share the new tip posted every Monday.

*According to The National Association of REALTORS® 2017 Member Safety Report



Innovate to Attract Commercial Members

Developing commercial programs and services made easier with grants and success stories.



If you'd like to engage more commercial practitioners in your association but aren't certain where to start, the National Association of REALTORS® has a wealth of resources for you. One in particular is the **Commercial Innovation Grant Program**, which can provide funding to grow your commercial member base and benefits. Grants typically range from \$500 to \$2,500 and can be used for such things as commercial education, commercial real estate advocacy, and commercial events. Here is one of the most recent success stories from a local association that used the grant to boost its visibility and value to commercial real estate practitioners.

If You Build It, Business Will Come

Earlier this year, the Greater Fort Worth Association of REALTORS®, Texas, received a Commercial Innovation Grant to partially fund its first Economic Development Expo, an event the association hopes will become a core annual program.

The association's primary goal was to connect REALTORS® with major developers, elected officials, municipal staff, and

economic development councils. The event would facilitate deal-making and networking opportunities where members could receive concrete information, strong leads, and action plans. "Organizing our event this way facilitated cities getting in front of commercial members to say 'these are the projects we're offering, this is what we're doing,'" says Robert Gleason, the association CEO.

Gleason feels strongly that there is great value in enhancing commercial services. "Most of us run a very good show with residential members," he says, "but anything you can do to attract commercial brokers makes you a stronger association locally and politically. The gravitas and experience they bring is invaluable."

The Economic Development Expo was held at Cendera Hall. Exhibitor booths were sold on a first-come first-serve basis for \$450 each.

A task force of seven commercial members was appointed to oversee marketing while members prepared a pamphlet and reached out to area economic development councils and developers to participate, as well as larger commercial brokerages that

were not currently members. REALTOR® members could attend for free, and association leadership staffed a booth to talk about the value of REALTOR® membership and answer questions. Finally, the task force worked with the Fort Worth Business Press to provide marketing before the expo and coverage on the day of the event.

Measuring Success and Planning for the Future

The response was overwhelmingly positive, with more than 200 of the association's commercial members attending. The association also has attracted new members since the event, which Gleason says have been one of two types: "The first was residential agents who showed up and wanted to learn more about transitioning to commercial real estate, and the second was established brokers who joined after learning more about the organization."

Gleason already has plans for expanding the Economic Development Expo in 2018. "We'd like to get out in front of the marketing side of things earlier," he says. "Some of the (councils) we wanted were double booked, and so it's wise to plan this out as far in advance as possible." He also wants to facilitate more assistance and input from members during the planning stages. "From a staff perspective, those commercial brokers will know who they want to hear from at the event. They will point you in the direction of what type of exhibitors to invite and often provide the connections or do the invites themselves."

Commercial Innovation Grant applications along with a library of past projects and resources are online at nar.realtor/commercial-innovation-grants.



Jacob S. Knabb is a commercial communications and services associate at the National Association of REALTORS®. Contact him at 312-329-8212 or jknabb@realtors.org.

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consumer outreach

Much of the success of the REALTOR® organization depends on capturing the hearts and minds of consumers.

How effectively are you reaching out?

When consumers understand what a REALTOR® brings to the transaction, they are more likely to work with one. When residents understand how REALTORS® are advocating for their private property rights and more livable communities, they are more likely to join in that fight. And when home owners and buyers receive unbiased information on navigating the local housing market and homebuying programs, they are more likely to view REALTORS® as the experts.

Reaching out to consumers through the media and social media, going door to door, and hosting events has been a core activity at REALTOR® associations long before it became required under the Core Standards. But now, as more associations engage consumers at every level of the organization, the REALTOR® voice grows even louder.

There are many ways associations engage consumers and effect change in their communities—from homeownership fairs and neighborhood beautification to media appearances and advertising. Here,

we take a look at three kinds of consumer outreach. First, why use a REALTOR® promotions—like NAR’s “Get Realtor®” campaign—that speak directly about the value members bring to consumers; second, political and legislative advocacy campaigns that enlist consumers in defending property rights and building communities; and third, educating local consumers on their local housing market.

To get started on—or reinvent—your consumer outreach, first have a clear objective. For example, you want to boost consumer advocacy efforts and engage the public in legislative and political issues that impact homeownership, real estate investment, and related issues.

Next, take advantage of the vast amount of resources and expertise from the National Association of REALTORS®, including the consumer outreach strategic plan templates that cover dozens of objectives and come in three sizes (for small, medium, and large associations), available at nar.realtor; search for “consumer outreach best practices.”

By Carolyn Schwaar, Kelsey R. Croston, Suzanne Westrum, and Kailey Waring

consumer outreach: why use a REALTOR®?

Helping consumers understand the value a REALTOR® brings to the homebuying and homeselling process boosts members’ business. Most associations post REALTOR® value talking points on their websites, many produce marketing materials for members to pass on to consumers or the media, and a few (with the resources to do so) create media campaigns, which include television commercials, print and electronic advertising, and social media posts that address their local market conditions and unique communications needs.



All associations are encouraged to amplify the REALTOR® value message by using NAR’s Consumer Advertising Campaign tools and creative materials in your own market. NAR’s current campaign, Get

Realtor® (pictured left), communicates REALTOR® brand value to consumers, targeting up-and-coming generations of home buyers, sellers, owners and investors. The Get Realtor® campaign also includes 200 pieces of entertaining and highly shareable free content (at nar.realtor/adCenter) that you and your members can post on social media. For more, visit nar.realtor/consumer-advertising-campaign.

Our Consumer Campaign: We Are The R

Savvy social media materials and member buy-in boost the REALTOR® brand

By Kelsey R. Croston, director of brand experience, Richmond Association of REALTORS®, Va.

When I polled a room of Virginia’s local AEs in July, only a couple said they have run consumer campaigns. Yet the majority raised their hands when asked, “Would you start one if there was a realistic way to fit it into your organization’s strategy?”

So here’s how we did it at the Richmond Association of REALTORS® and MLS.

“We Are The R” is our public awareness campaign to promote using a REALTOR®. The campaign launched in 2012 and, every year since, we’ve added new commercials and social media material, all directing consumers back to WeAreTheR.com.

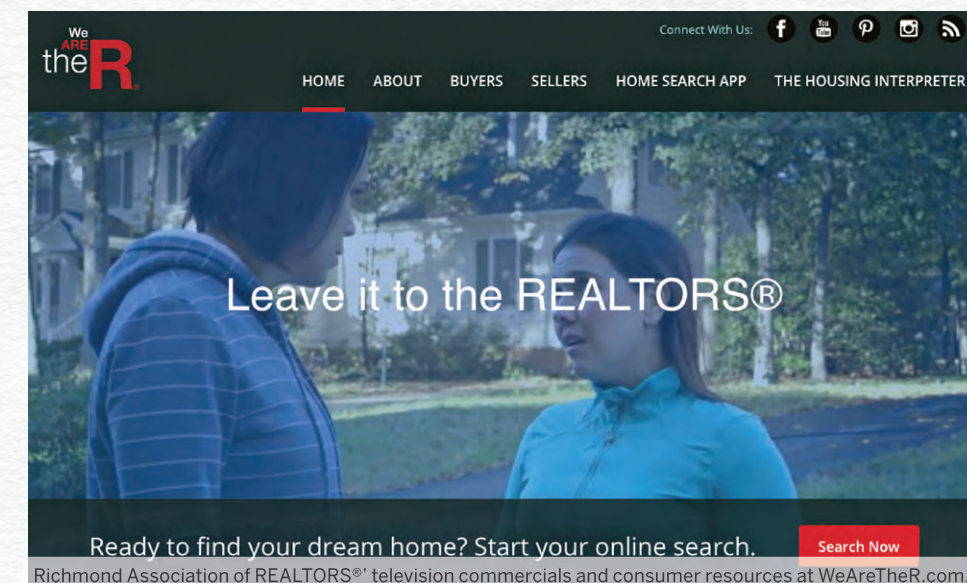
The original idea came from our leadership, and because the campaign is producing results, subsequent leaders have embraced the program.

Public outreach like this is not for every

association because it eats up resources, both financial and staff, and the results are difficult to quantify. We knew we could afford it only if we got members to back the content and drive the campaign to consumers. If your campaign is a top-down, all staff-driven effort, it will cost much more and be far less effective. But if you can rally member support and get their buy-in, which isn’t easy, you can build greater momentum because members will feel they are an essential part of the campaign to promote themselves. We’ve found it’s both more economical and effective if we empower members to promote the consumer materials we create. Without member excitement, we would be solely at the mercy of social media algorithms and paid advertising.

If step one is to design the campaign around member buy-in, step two is to include member “influencers” in the brainstorming process for the creative.

The concepts for our campaigns come from merging the talent and instincts of our board, communications committee, CEO, and communications staff. That sounds like a lot of cooks in the kitchen, but after



all ideas are gathered and vetted, our CEO makes the final decision on concept and gives communications staff full ownership over how the ideas are implemented.

Each campaign we've had focuses on where we think the market will be and incorporates the current market conditions.

Do we need to encourage people to buy or list? Do we need inventory or do we need buyers? For example, our 2014 campaign focused on attracting buyers by promoting the low interest rates and rising rents. This year's low inventory inspired our "Leave it to the REALTORS®" campaign, aimed at owners and focused on the ease of using a REALTOR® to manage everything related to selling a home.

We don't stray from content that can be mostly conceptualized and produced in house. But when we do hire vendors, we make sure that they understand that consumer campaign materials are created with consumer considerations taking distant second to membership considerations. Even though the campaign is for consumers, the



The California Association of REALTORS® has an extensive TV, radio, and digital campaign, and a robust tool-set that REALTORS® can use to enhance their personal branding.

The long-running "Champions of Home" campaign emphasizes the benefits of working with a REALTOR® and how REALTORS®

What's the VALUE of using a REALTOR®

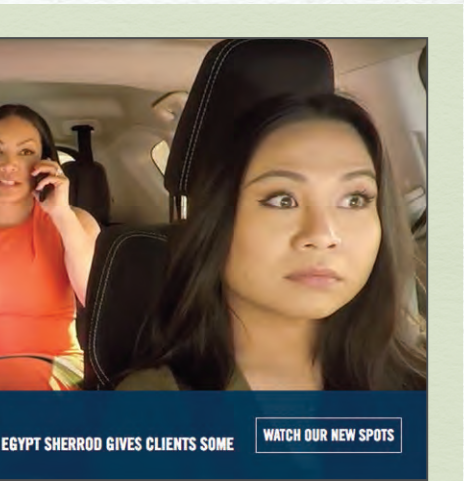


Richmond Association of REALTORS®' "Value of using a REALTOR®" infographic.

members are the ones using the materials—and they won't use them if they don't like them.

Video has yielded our highest engagement rates with members. They're aware it catches the consumer's eye, and it's so easy for them to show their personal brand by tacking on an often pithy comment when they share.

To save money, we use services like Biteable and GoAnimate to create animated videos in house. Live action is created through a hodgepodge of resources. We write scripts, host casting calls, and direct on set, but often outsource the videography and post editing.



are connected to their community and the economic health of the state.

The latest campaigns feature REALTOR® Egypt Sherrod, host of HGTV's "Flipping Virgins" and "Property Virgins"; Telemundo star Edgardo Gazcón; and a selection of "real Californians" sharing their personal stories about why they used a REALTOR®.

Pinterest, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are the social platforms that now complement the WeAreTheR.com campaign site. We are continuously evaluating the decision to house this content on a separate domain from our member site. At this point, the divide is still working for us because it helps members understand what's for their eyes and what we are putting out there for them to share with consumers.

Material on social platforms suggests that we want members to share it, but that message isn't always understood, so we give members express permission and encouragement to share via text, mass email, and briefly speaking at classes, WCR meetings, and sales meetings.

The real ROI of consumer campaigns

Unfortunately, there is no way for us to know if members are getting more clients because of the work we're putting out there to consumers. What we can do is gauge the overall feedback from members on the campaigns and how excited they get for the materials. For example, we made promotional posters, which members hang on their office walls and give as closing gifts.

You can look at the clicks and engagement metrics on social media and see what content is popular, but at the end of the day, you don't know if it's members or consumers looking at it.

The real payoff is intangible. Members get a sense that the association is doing something for them and their business. They are interacting more often with association materials, and the association is more present in their daily business.

For those venturing into a local campaign initiative for the first time, my advice is to not be overly concerned with what you or your board defines as success. The long-term understanding about the needs of the members is well worth any potential failures when creating consumer material.

Our Consumer Campaign: REALTORS® play many roles

Media campaign highlights all the ways members serve clients and the community

When the leadership of the Kansas City Regional REALTOR® Association came together to brainstorm how best to put investment earnings into new programs for members, they considered a wide range of services and products. The goal was to find something impactful for the community and something that would reach and benefit all members, says Christian Zarif, 2016 association president.

Two programs made the cut; one was working with Habitat for Humanity and the second was to develop and implement a multi-media consumer marketing campaign to promote the use of a REALTOR®.

"We felt this provided a benefit not only to

our members but also to the community and the clients we serve," says Zarif.

Leadership and the association's creative team focused the campaign message on educating consumers on the many roles REALTOR® play to serve their clients and communities from adviser and concierge to negotiator and advocate.

The television commercials debuted in June to wide member acclaim. Videos, social media, and print materials drive traffic back to the campaign microsite WhichRole.com.



The campaign is designed to last and change focus along with consumer needs and market conditions. The materials are easily sharable and available to association brokerages and members to tag and use for their own promotion. "We have no reason to promote the association brand," says Zarif. "We want to promote [members] and the REALTOR® brand."

Our Consumer Campaign: Using a REALTOR® should be a priority

Television ads and media appearances highlight REALTOR® value

By Suzanne Westrum, vice president of communications and marketing, San Antonio Board of REALTORS®

It is inevitable in our line of work that we have had to explain to a friend or family member that not all real estate agents are REALTORS® and that the process of buying or selling property is actually much more complex than it looks on the internet or television. In a time when the DIY mentality reigns, the task of informing the public about the value of a REALTOR® is more important than ever.

At the San Antonio Board of REALTORS®, we use several platforms to spread this message to the public and help them understand why using a REALTOR® should be a priority. Through a strategic mix of paid advertising in print, online, and on television and efforts aimed at earning unpaid media mentions and features, our goal is to provide a convincing case for the REALTOR® value.

Our consumer outreach, which focuses mainly on why consumers should use a REALTOR®, began more than a decade ago, and today members view it as a core benefit that they receive from their association. We make sure they know about all of our efforts by giving them a monthly list of our media appearances and advertising buys.

Our most popular and successful outreach has been paid segments on local morning television talk shows. In these segments, our spokespeople, who are current association volunteer leaders, discuss buying and selling tips while emphasizing why a REALTOR® is a necessity in each step. These segments allow us to go in-depth on the REALTOR® value, but appear

as interviews rather than sponsored content, which lends increased credibility. And since the segments are universal to REALTORS® and not specific to anyone, our members



San Antonio's most popular and successful outreach has been paid segments on local morning television talk shows.

share these clips widely online as tools to market themselves.

Each of our paid efforts ends with a call for action to visit our consumer website at

SABOR.com to find a property and a REALTOR®. In our earned media interviews, our spokespeople are trained to highlight the use of a REALTOR® and how to find one.

Our print ads in popular local publications, including the daily newspaper and several magazines, are a staple and allow us to have a continued presence in front of consumers and members. Our digital ad strategy goes further by allowing us to target

internet users who have already visited SABOR.com, searching with specific keywords that we have selected. Tracking impressions and click-through rates is instant, and we can adjust keywords and artwork mid-campaign as needed. These ads follow the users wherever they go online.

Although we have found success with these platforms, we continuously evaluate how well each is working and where they

falter. This allows us to determine whether we should scale back one method while amplifying another or add in a new platform or media partner altogether. By remaining nimble and flexible with our campaign, we expect this mix of digital, television, and print advertising to continue building the consumer impression of REALTOR® value in the San Antonio area and garnering further earned media attention for our message.

consumer outreach: advocacy

Increasing consumer engagement in the REALTOR® organization's political and legislative activity is one of the most immediate goals of the National Association of REALTORS®, CEO Bob Goldberg told the association leaders gathered at the 2017 Leadership Summit in Chicago in August. "There's strength in numbers," he said. "The more

consumers we bring in, the more our voice is elevated." REALTOR® associations at the state and local level have access to an abundance of resources from the National Association of REALTORS® to reach out to local voters for support on issues critical to ensuring property owner rights and maintaining livable communities nationwide.

Get Consumers on Your Side

Two new initiatives from NAR make advocacy outreach easier

For your association's advocacy efforts to be successful you need more than members on your side, you need consumers.

When the North Bay Association of REALTORS® sought to defeat a rent control ordinance earlier this year, they reached out to consumers with a public awareness campaign that showed the negative impact the proposal would have on homeowners' rights.

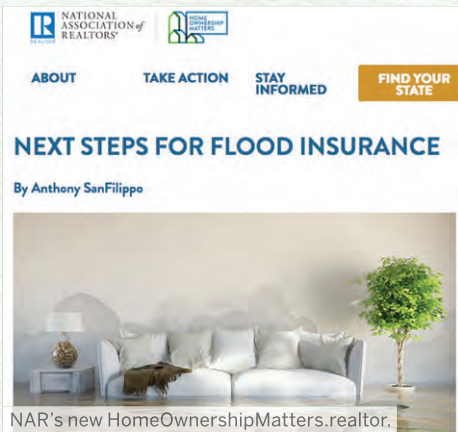
Working in conjunction with the National Association of REALTORS® Campaign Services Team, which provided focus groups and polling to determine the campaign's viability, identify voters, and craft the campaign messaging, North Bay launched the "No on C" campaign, referring to the ballot initiative known as Measure C. In addition to four targeted postcard mailings, door-to-door canvassers, and TV, radio, and online advertising, the campaign benefited from the support of the chamber of commerce and groups from across many local industries. The campaign's website fairhousingforall.

com was a central hub for consumer education materials. On June 6, the ordinance was defeated by 52 percent of the vote.

State and local associations have, over the years, launched dozens of consumer-facing websites similar to fairhousingforall.com for all types of issue advocacy. But now, with the recent redesign and relaunch of HomeOwnershipMatters.realtor, every REALTOR® association has access to a customizable portal to house information and calls for action on local issues.

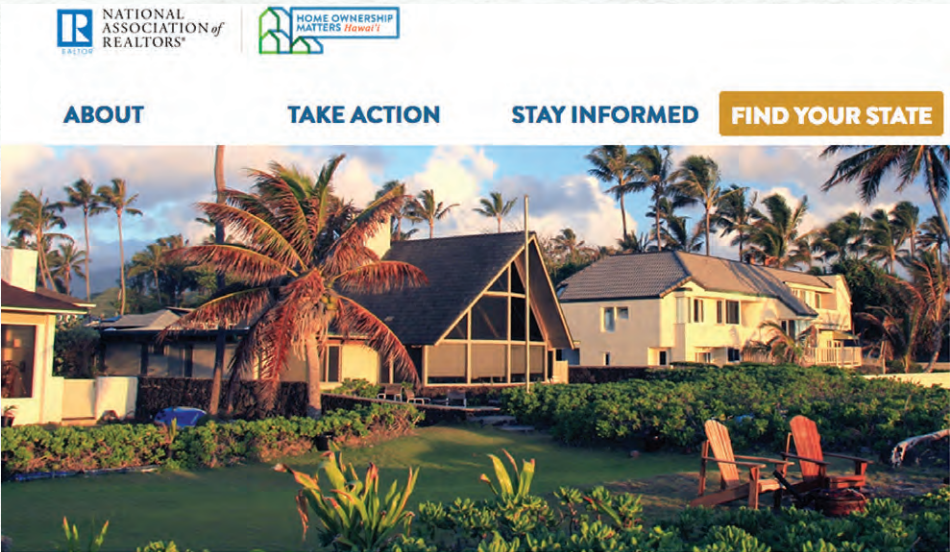
HomeOwnershipMatters.realtor offers a platform where consumers and members can engage representatives on important homeowner and property issues and take immediate action easily.

The Hawaii Association of REALTORS® has customized and branded its state page on the HOM site to focus on local issues, including flood insurance reform, and provide news on REALTOR® efforts to revitalize the business district of Lihū'e.



Through your state association's behind-the-scenes access to HomeOwnershipMatters.realtor, you can create a page for your state association or make use of NAR's Consumer Advocacy Database of 7.5 million names to send targeted emails and social media to your state or local consumers.

The Illinois Association of REALTORS® was the first to capitalize on this new resource and reach out to thousands of state residents to overturn Home Rule, a local governance status that would adversely affect private property rights. "Using the data from the Consumer Advocacy Database, we've been able to drill down and engage



HOME OWNERSHIP MATTERS IN HAWAII

The Hawaii Association of REALTORS® customized and branded page of HomeOwnershipMatters.realtor.

in highly targeted social media campaigns, reaching voters we know are paying attention," says Jon Broadbooks, Illinois REALTORS® director of communications.

Another new NAR initiative to increase REALTOR® and consumer participation in calls for action is the Advocacy Everywhere program, which features new technology and new professional services from NAR.

In early 2018, NAR will be transitioning from the current REALTOR® Party Hub to a more efficient and user-friendly system from VoterVoice. This will include a redesign of the REALTOR® Action Center website, which will launch by the end of 2017.

One difference in the Advocacy Everywhere model is that state associations will continue to have direct access to the advocacy platform, but local associations will not, says Jim MacGregor, NAR's managing director of communications and REALTOR® mobilization.

"The decision to allocate these resources to only the state associations is based on an analysis of usage of our REALTOR® Party Hub system over the past six years as well as the cost of for these advocacy tools." A plus is that local associations will no longer need to have dedicated staff trained on the latest advocacy tools and can focus on messag-

ing and targeting, with NAR managing the technology.

All associations will have the option to contact NAR to set up a call for action on their behalf using this Advocacy Everywhere's concierge service model. State or local associations are responsible for the content of a CFA and which lawmakers will be targeted, but NAR will manage the technical work of setting up the letter the lawmakers receive, the email campaign, mobile alert, social media shares, and more. NAR will also give advice on best practices—those shortcuts to get your action rates up faster and other strategies to engage your membership along the way.

"Our new Advocacy Everywhere initiative coupled with the Consumer Advocacy Outreach program gives every state and local association, regardless of their size or resources, the opportunity to mount effective consumer advocacy campaigns on issues that affect their communities," says MacGregor.

For more, visit realtoractioncenter.com/advocacyeverywhere and sign up to attend a webinar or training session.

Our Consumer Campaign: Helping New Yorkers achieve their dream of homeownership

Campaign to pass home savings bill passes with consumer support

New York is among the states that have reached out to consumers to get their support in establishing home buyer saving accounts. In New York, the legislation was called NY First Home and established a program whereby state residents could save for the down payment and closing costs of their first home purchase while receiving tax deductions of up to \$5,000 per year (\$10,000 for couples) based on those savings.

"NY First Home will make homeownership more easily attainable by helping New Yorkers bridge the gap between where their savings are and where they need to be to receive the keys to their first home," the New York Association of REALTORS® said in a statement.

In 2017, the state association launched a campaign to pass the bill that included the website nyfirsthome.com, where members

and consumers signed a form letter sent directly to their state representatives.

Similar efforts are underway across the country and six states have passed first-time homebuyer savings account legislation.

In Mississippi the state association launched its successful campaign with a consumer website, firsthomeMS.org, featuring a clear argument for the consumer benefits of the program.



The NY Association of REALTORS®' nyfirsthome.com consumer advocacy site.

consumer outreach: market conditions & expertise

REALTORS® are the experts on the local housing market as well as the home buying and selling process. They know communities, home values, and whether now is or isn't a great time to sell a home. Collectively, along with their association, they represent an enormous wealth of information, yet getting that message out to consumers is often a challenge.

REALTOR® associations across the country work to position themselves and their members as the definitive source for housing

data and market analysis. Whether it's redistributing market information and reports from the National Association of REALTORS® or your state association of REALTORS® or generating your own local market analysis, REALTOR® associations show they are the voice for local real estate by keeping members and consumers informed.

As a source for information on home financing, housing assistance programs, and fair housing, associations boost their members' value in the eyes of consumers.

Our Consumer Campaign: The Housing Translator

Explaining real estate market conditions in terms residents can understand

By Kailey Waring, marketing, communications and design manager, Seattle King County REALTORS®

“Complicated language, policy, and prices—our housing market can be confusing. But not when you have Seattle King County REALTORS® by your side. For over 100 years, REALTORS® have been passionate about creating healthy communities and a balanced housing market. We want to help you understand all the nitty-gritty, the nuances, and anything and everything you need (and didn't realize you needed) to know about housing policy.”

This statement above is on the opening page of the HousingTranslator.com site, which is the cornerstone of our Housing Translator campaign, designed to reach out to consumers and demonstrate REALTORS®' understanding of today's complex real estate market. The goal of the campaign also is to position the association and its members as leaders in proposing solutions for those who desire to be homeowners in our region.

Here's how it worked

The spark for Housing Translator came in June 2016 after our 22nd Annual Housing Issues Briefing. This special event is for state senators, state representatives, legislative

assistants, and candidates for the state Senate and House. The event features experts' and consultants' take on the housing market, consumer preferences, and the policies that may be solutions to the vexing issues of affordability and supply. The information was so powerful and relevant, we knew we needed to share it with a wider audience.

First, the association developed a set of legislative principles and initiatives to correct the current housing shortage, which is the top challenge for our members and the clients they serve. This shortage of inventory manifests itself as ever-increasing home prices, multiple offers on existing homes, inflated offers on homes of marginal value, and accepted offers of sale tens of thousands of dollars above asking price. We felt this critical lack of supply must be addressed for consumers to view our housing market in a positive light.

One of the regulatory solutions we chose to advocate for: legalization of mother-in-law cottages and other accessory dwelling units to increase supply without impacting a neighborhood's character. We also supported improved transportation systems and increasing the amount of buildable land in the area through the Growth Management Act.

With our legislative priorities in place, we sought PR representation to create a

targeted media campaign with the goals of increasing awareness of the value of membership among the 6,000 members of the association in King County; educating members and consumers about the legislative efforts made by REALTORS®; and promoting the use of REALTORS® by consumers.

In January, with local agency Green-Rubino, we launched a multisegment, integrated campaign that includes television advertising buys, digital media ads, radio spots, bus ads, and news and features in local media outlets, all driving consumers to HousingTranslator.com for more information. The website featured an easy-to-navigate list of FAQs such as, “Why aren't there enough new condos?” “Is it better to rent or buy?” “What would it take to create more affordable housing?” and “How do interest rates impact buying a home?” The site also explained the role and value of REALTORS®.

By the time the initial campaign wrapped up in April our digital media materials logged 10.7 million impressions, reaching approximately 67 percent of adults aged 35 and over in the Seattle area.

Our association's volunteer leadership was so impressed that we launched a short-term summer campaign, and we're currently discussing ways to keep it going in the future.

Our Consumer Campaign: Orlando is a fabulous place to live

A REALTOR® is an invaluable resource and a trusted ally

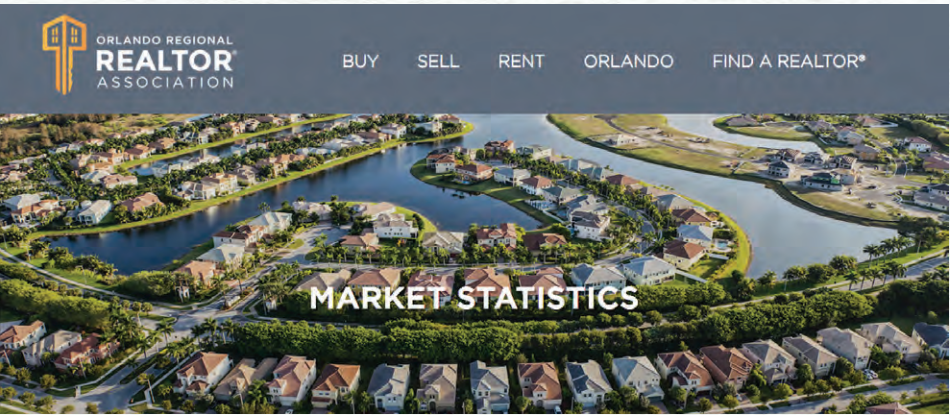
Facebook posts boasting the vitality of Orlando and its housing market generate a tremendous amount of likes and shares among the members of the Orlando Regional REALTOR® Association. In fact, social media posts that get the greatest engagement



Orange County REALTORS® in California have established themselves as the go-to source for housing market and housing policy information for community leaders, elected officials, and real estate practitioners. But now their new and extensive consumer-facing website (realdealoc.com) is set to broaden their reach. The site features useful and sharable videos and infographics as well as monthly reports on the association's 13 distinct communities.

The “For Real Estate Pros” section has information directly for members, while the rest of the easy-to-navigate site features in-depth information aimed to cement OCR as the source of housing information and advocacy in Orange County.

“We are planning on launching a print version that will primarily be for members to use in their firms, but we will also be sending it to our community partners and local elected officials,” says Tony Capitelli, the association's government affairs director.



are those that are specifically designed for members to pass along to their consumer followers.

“Market-related content and ‘Orlando is a fabulous place to live’ content are our best performers on social media,” says Lisa McDuffie, the association's communications manager. “We almost always include some sort of ‘Call Your REALTOR®’ language in our posts so that members recognize them

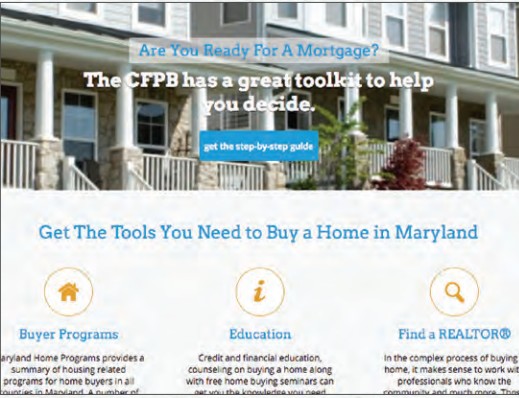
as content to spread to consumers.”

The association's social media materials, distributed on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, and LinkedIn refer readers back to the association's REALTOR®-branded, consumer-focused website, Orlandorealtors.com, which also features a “find a REALTOR®” member directory and houses a wealth of area market information for buyers, sellers, and renters.

Our Consumer Campaign: The tools you need to buy a home in Maryland

The more you know about buying, the more you value your REALTOR®

At MarylandHomeownership.com, the consumer-facing website from the Maryland Association of REALTORS®, features a wealth of reliable information on homebuying, housing assistance programs, fair housing, avoiding foreclosure, and much more. “With the growing nationwide crisis in housing affordability, Maryland REALTORS® need to continue to be proactive in our consumer outreach efforts, both through our members and directly to the public,” says association CEO Chuck Kasky. “MarylandHomeownership.com provides an effective platform to present REALTORS® as the best resource for home buying expertise.” The website also gives members a REALTOR®-branded place to refer



clients to and has been recently updated to include a searchable database of mortgage programs and down payment and closing cost assistance incentives for first-time and low-to-moderate income buyers. The site is intended to be a clearinghouse for all information related to the home buying process. “The website complements our Workforce Housing Certification education program, which prepares REALTOR® members to guide working individuals and families through what can be a challenging and confusing process,” says Laurie Benner, the association's director of housing programs.

Earn Positive Media Coverage, 101

Low-cost and free ways to communicate REALTOR® value to the press.

Media relations is one of the most valuable yet complex pursuits for any association, but it is especially challenging for small associations that don't have a trained public relations professional on staff. In today's multimedia, content-hungry environment, it's critical to have the REALTOR® brand positively represented to elevate the value of REALTORS® to consumers.

Although the REALTOR® brand is promoted nationally via the National Association of REALTORS® consumer marketing campaigns and media appearances, reinforcement at the local and state levels bolsters the image among local consumers. Despite how daunting a task this may seem, earning regular and positive media coverage is achievable with a solid game plan.

Local media needs have changed

Just sending data (such as home sale stats and median home prices) to media outlets is no longer a viable value proposition for associations. Reporters and consumers can typically find this data online, so data without context is simply that—facts and figures. What reporters need—and what



their readers want to read—is what that data means to people looking to buy or sell property in your area.

This is where you and your leadership come in because you know your local markets better than anyone. After all, it's your members who are in the community building relationships and business. This intimate knowledge is a prime opportunity for you to explain the circumstances and stories around the data. For example, NAR is constantly issuing reports and studies on the housing market. (You can find them announced in your weekly INS reports, sign up to have them e-mailed directly to you, or find them at narnewsline.blogs.realtor.org.) Read any of these reports and find the local angle. Take the National Association of REALTORS® 2017 Moving With Kids Report issued in August, which looks at the different purchasing and selling habits of people with children at home compared with those without. Put a local spin on this data by finding a member who recently helped a buyer or seller with kids. Pitch the expert NAR data with a local example for an on-camera interview or a print story.

Journalists' jobs have changed

Journalists wear multiple hats in today's publishing environment. Rarely is a writer just a writer anymore. They're also the researcher, the producer, and sometimes the videographer. As much information as you can provide media contacts to make their job easier, the more they will come to you for real estate coverage. Can you, the AE, provide them with a quick quote on the market? Can you provide a member to speak to them knowledgeably on a particular topic, such as commercial real estate or the mortgage interest deduction?

Be proactive and call or email your media outlets and offer to be a resource whenever they need it, even when there's nothing in it for you. Over time, you will build a close relationship with the media, and they will know they can count on you as a source for real estate-related content and information.

Media relations tools you can use

There are multiple free or inexpensive web-based tools and apps that every local association should be using to monitor your local media. From a news release distribution per-

spective, consider using tools such as PRLog to send your press releases to main search engines and news aggregator sites where members of the media can pick them up. Of course, forming personal relationships with local editors and reporters and sending personalized pitches to earn media coverage is your best option.



After you send a news release to the media, monitor media outlets and websites for proof of coverage. This can be done manually with some quick strategic keyword searches for the name of your association and scans of targeted media outlets. Why monitor coverage? First, to ensure that the story wasn't misrepresented in the media; second, to track which outlets are receptive to your news release so you can target them directly in the future; and third, so you know what other companies or organizations are trying to influence home buyers or home sellers in your area. Don't forget to include social media in your scanning efforts. Plus, setting up Google Alerts with keywords and people referenced in each release is a great timesaver. A quick search on the web will also provide several premium monitoring tools.

Give reporters original content

A strong original content strategy is very appealing in today's content-hungry environment. Do you have members who blog or post videos? Keep on top of their content to find any nuggets you can send to the media.

If you have the inclination, start an association blog where you can demonstrate your thought leadership on the local market and show the personal side of the association. Ask leaders and committee members to contribute to dive deep into the nuances within your communities and membership that makes your association unique. Published either on your own marketing platforms (website, blog, social media channels, YouTube channel) or through trade and industry publications, this content enables you to create connections with the media on a more personal level.

But where do you find these rich stories that are hiding among your membership? For starters, train your staff and leadership to keep their ears to the ground for personal interest stories. You also need to identify potential writers or speakers—those with a knack for and interest in writing or making videos. Next, you need to create opportunities to uncover stories—networking opportunities where members and stakeholders feel comfortable talking at leisure about their interests, passions, and recent accomplishments.

Another way is to survey members. Set up a simple five-question survey on a platform such as Survey Monkey, and ask your members to provide story ideas. What amazing community projects have your members undertaken lately? Who won an award recently? How did a member help a special family buy their first home? NAR even offers a wealth of story ideas and resources for local associations online (see sidebar).

Great stories are everywhere—you just need to tell them.



Tracey Gould is the vice president of communications and marketing at NC REALTORS®. Reach her at tgould@ncrealtors.org or 336-808-4228, ext. 228.

NAR Resources Help Associations Reach Out to Their Local Press

Real Estate Story Ideas:

These housing and real estate story ideas frequently updated at nar.realtor are designed to help media generate content for news stories. You can take these story ideas and create content for your local newspaper, magazines, newsletters, blogs, and websites. Encourage members to do this as well to boost their own brand along with the association's. Three timely topics, accompanied with background information and facts related to the real estate market, are featured each month. nar.realtor/newsroom/real-estate-story-ideas

Social Media Sharable Materials:

Repost NAR's social media materials and videos on your association's Facebook or Twitter page and encourage members to add the local perspective. Find materials on the NAR Facebook page (@NARdotRealtor) and follow NAR on Twitter at @NARMedia. Sharable videos are also at nar.realtor/videos/housing-minute and NAR's YouTube channel at youtube.com/user/NAREALTORS. You can also share videos from REALTOR® Magazine, found at youtube.com/user/REALTORMagazine.

Blog Articles to Share and Inspire:

NAR hosts eight blogs covering specific aspects of real estate from staging and technology to international and commercial. Share these blog posts with your local media and offer the local perspective along with members ready to be interviewed (blogs. realtor.org).

News Releases:

NAR's press releases can also generate great local story ideas (nar.realtor/news-releases).

Forge Genuine Relationships, Make Strong Connections

How you can recognize and cultivate intangible skills to be a better AE.

There's no doubt you need people skills to do your job. Whether it's building working relationships with leaders who are very different from you or uniting volunteers to achieve a particular task, AEs need to know how to work with people.

That brings us to this column, the third in a series exploring the intangible skills great CEOs possess. Of the 10 intangible skills identified in my study earlier this year, there are five pairs that are mirror images and may be exhibited differently by two CEOs, depending on their personality or style. In this issue, I discuss the intangible skill pair of relationships and connections.

Everyone wants to be the CEO whom everybody likes and respects. But how do you get there?

What is the skill of relationships? CEOs with the ability to foster relationships can connect with a variety of personalities in different situations and establish a positive personal or working environment. It's often called "people skills." These CEOs make an impact through other individuals.

The skill mentioned most often when associations search for new CEOs is relationships; in other words, it's the ability to work with all types of people in virtually any situation. Among the intangible skills AEs desire, relationships is at the top of the list. Everyone wants to be a CEO whom everybody likes and respects. But how do you get there?

High-performing CEOs with this skill engage people actively and build friendships with intent. Relationship-focused CEOs

enjoy the process of getting to know people, and the more complicated the personality the more challenging (and rewarding) the ensuing friendship. These CEOs strive to establish positive, professional, and lasting bonds with virtually everyone they meet.

Develop better relationships

One approach to developing better relationships is to focus your conversations on the other person, which results in them feeling good about themselves. This is especially useful with association leaders when discussions are on challenging issues.

Rob Authier, RCE, CAE, CEO of the Massachusetts Association of REALTORS®,

has the skill of relationships. "When I have an issue to discuss with Rob, he listens intently and then proposes alternatives," one of his association leaders said. "We come to a consensus. Regardless of the issue—even if it is contentious—I always feel good after talking to him."

People like Authier who have this skill find something they genuinely like about each member—even those that get on their nerves. Certainly, members come with a wide variety of temperaments, but successful CEOs look for the positive, the admirable, or the trait they have in common with the member and focus on that.

Begin by getting to know members through research and personal conversation, such as by asking about their business,

family, and interests to uncover points of commonality. There are sites online to conduct personal research, but nothing has more impact than direct conversation.

Take the long-term view

Although volunteers and leaders often think in the short term regarding their relationship with the association (such as the few years of volunteering or the one year of presidency), CEOs take the long view. They know patience usually is more productive than quick decisions. So, they work ahead with leaders as they are ascending through positions of responsibility to build deep and lasting relationships.

According to Travis Kessler, CEO of the Texas Association of REALTORS®, "There must be a desire for common ground and goals. This means adapting and learning new ways, but the reward of flexibility is immense." This echoes sentiment of other successful CEOs: Relationships change over time, but if built on listening and consensus, the bond will strengthen. This is most valuable in times of stress or confrontation.

Start with small steps

A simple but effective way to grow your people skills is to be available. Take member calls and have daily in-person contact with others. Make eye contact as you engage others and meet everyone with a smile. Learn members' names and use them often in conversations.

For positive relationships to move the association forward it can't be the CEO alone who practices good people skills.

Successful CEOs prioritize and institutionalize relationship-building by ensuring that staff know and practice basic techniques, including clear instructions on appropriate relationships and confidentiality, and even formal policies, such as always having a person answer the phone. Provide training if necessary on ways staff can enhance relationships with members, leaders, and others contacting the association.

What is the skill of connections?

CEOs with the ability to build a network of people to accomplish specific goals are said to have "connections." They are people with influential personal contacts throughout an organization or industry. Unlike the hundreds or thousands of LinkedIn connections you may have, these connections are a group of trusted individuals that the successful CEO deploys to accomplish a result.

Connections are not technology-based. They are not social media friends. They are human-to-human, genuine, and personal. Many CEOs view them as extensions of themselves. Of the intangible skills, "connections" has the greatest reach.

Having connections is an especially useful skill since it enables the CEO to accomplish things quietly in the background. Connections are stealth power and also valuable in maneuvering in complex organizations with multiple layers.

Connected CEOs are thoughtful in the composition of their network. They are built step-by-step and person by person. However, when completed, connections become a powerful tool.

Leverage multiple networks

Successful REALTOR® association CEOs have fine-tuned connections within the real estate industry. The purpose is to accurately and deeply know the "real world" of the real estate business and become the expert.

Connected CEOs create multiple networks and have connections in the extended real estate world such as homebuilders, chambers of commerce, economic development entities, and financial institutions. Some CEOs have groups without any discernible connection with real estate or association management. They find that this involvement heightens their creativity and

awareness. As one said, "It gives me new antennas."

How to build connections

Start honing your connection skills by building a network of the REALTOR® leaders you work with every year. Focusing on advancing the interests of a leader can strengthen this network. Enable leaders to recognize their own particular skills and ability.

When considering connections, do not neglect the strength of the REALTOR® organization and its natural interconnectedness. Top CEOs not only leverage the REALTOR® three-level cooperative arrangement but also support it. If there are problems at any level, they seek to be part of the answer.

Take connections seriously

Average CEOs may comment that the relationship skill is a natural part of being an executive. But highly successful CEOs are more serious about their connections. They focus on an area and even specific individuals to include in their network. It's more intentional than making friends.

These CEOs also know it must be a mutually beneficial relationship. They must contribute in order to acquire.

Create your own group based upon your interests and needs. Building inside the REALTOR® organization enhances your career, but building outside it enhances you.



Jerry Matthews' executive career spans more than 20 years as a REALTOR® state association CEO and more than 12 years as an industry consultant. His consulting practice focuses on facilitating change for executives and organizations. JerryMatthews.com.

Does the ADA Apply to Your Website?

Take steps to protect your association against ADA noncompliance claims.

REALTOR® associations and members should be aware of a growing legal threat from unscrupulous law firms hoping to cash in on the federal government's delay in issuing final rules for how to make websites accessible to Americans with disabilities. NAR has learned of real estate brokerages receiving threatening letters claiming that their websites are not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The law firms that filed the suit often say they would be willing to settle the matter for a small fee.

According to the *National Law Review*, the number of lawsuits complaining that business websites are not accessible to impaired users is on the rise.

REALTOR® associations operate websites and so could face these allegations even though the courts are split on whether websites currently need to be accessible to people with disabilities.

In a letter to the Department of Justice last year, NAR offered its support for the adoption of clear website accessibility standards and requirements. That letter also urged the agency to expedite its rulemaking on this issue since the lack of clear rules has contributed to a growing number of lawsuits. The DOJ, however, has recently “deprioritized” this rulemaking, meaning that clarity on this issue is not likely to come anytime soon.

Here's where the courts stand today on compliance

Because websites did not exist when the ADA was enacted, website accessibility is not addressed in the statute, and so whether website operators need to comply with the

ADA remains an open issue. Two federal courts have recently considered whether the ADA applies to websites and came to different conclusions, showing how this issue remains an unsettled area of the law.

California court says no requirement to comply

In *Robles v. Domino's Pizza*, a California federal court ruled that the pizza chain was not required to comply with website accessibility guidelines because the U.S. Department of Justice has failed to issue clear guidance on the accessibility requirements. However, the department has, in some cases, required website operators to comply with an international accessibility standard called the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

The lawsuit filed against Domino's alleged that its website, dominos.com, violated the ADA because it prevented individuals who used screen-reading devices from making purchases and failed to comply with the international guidelines. After the lawsuit was filed, dominos.com began referring people

who had trouble accessing the site to a 24-hour phone number.

The court found that it would be impossible for the owner to determine the proper standard for website accessibility since the DOJ had failed to issue website compliance rules. Further, the court also commented that the website user had failed to demonstrate why the chain's 24-hour phone number did not constitute a reasonable accommodation under the ADA. Because there

The court commented that the website user had failed to demonstrate why the 24-hour phone number did not constitute a reasonable accommodation under the ADA.

NAR added this statement (right) to its website not only to advise visitors of alternative ways to access the information at nar.realtor, but to confirm its commitment to accommodating persons with disabilities. Access this statement at nar.realtor/accessibility



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Two federal courts have recently considered whether the ADA applies to websites and came to different conclusions, showing how this issue remains an unsettled area of the law.

were no clear requirements for website accessibility, the court dismissed the lawsuit.

Florida court orders website operator to follow web accessibility guidelines

A Florida federal court, meanwhile, ruled that a grocery chain’s website violated the ADA and ordered the website operator to conform the site to the international guidelines. In this case, *Gil v. Winn-Dixie Stores*, the court found that disabled individuals were unable to download coupons, order prescriptions, or find store locations on the website even with screen-reading software. Unlike the Domino’s Pizza site, there was no phone assistance that could help with these functions.

The court ruled that the ADA required the site to be accessible because the site was “heavily integrated” into the owner’s store locations and operated as a “gateway” to the stores. The court stated that it was not ruling that the ADA required websites to be accessible to disabled individuals, but ADA required accessibility in this instance because of the site’s integration into its physical stores.

As these cases show, the law regarding the ADA’s application to websites remains unclear and attorneys are capitalizing on this uncertainty. In fact, the ADA allows anyone to file an accessibility lawsuit. Plaintiffs are not required to make prior demands to a business before filing suit, and there’s no requirement that the plaintiff be a patron of the business.

How you can protect your association

The good news is that you can protect you

association by adding a statement to your website that provides a contact phone number for anyone having difficulty accessing it (see NAR’s statement at nar.realtor/accessibility). Although it’s no guarantee that you won’t become the target of an ADA noncompliance threat, offering some accommodation for disabled users on your site makes it more likely that the lawsuit mills will move on to easier targets.

Next, talk to your website provider about implementing a plan for making your site compliant with WCAG 2.0. Even though compliance may not be the law yet, it is coming, so now is the time to prepare.

To find out where your website stands on compliance, run an accessibility scan of the webpages using a free online tool, such as wave.webaim.org. The report will show areas of the webpage that may not be accessible and recommend a solution. Keep records of your ongoing efforts in pursuit of accessibility and prioritize any content accessibility violations.

If you’re planning a website redesign or upgrade, chose a vendor that can create compliant pages.

Additionally, associations should follow the progress of the DOJ rulemaking, as eventually it will issue guidance for ADA website compliance.

Talk to your members about ADA compliance

REALTORS® typically have an abundance of contact information on their websites and may prefer that home buyers and sellers phone them to explore listings and selling strategies. Nevertheless, it’s in members’ best interest to also post a clear accessibility statement offering direct assistance

Pending legislation aims to curb ADA-related lawsuits

Lawmakers in both the Senate and House proposed legislation called the ADA Education and Reform Act of 2017 to reduce the number of lawsuits filed by requiring plaintiffs to give businesses written notice of the alleged violations and an opportunity to address them before filing suit. The legislation stalled in Congress but is expected to gain new momentum with the current administration. Opponents of the measure say it would create new hurdles for citizen enforcement of the Act and weaken its effectiveness.



to anyone unable to take advantage of the services, including home search, offered on their websites.

More Resources

The National Association of REALTORS® provides up-to-date resources on complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) at nar.realtor.



Finley Maxson is a senior counsel at the National Association of REALTORS®. Contact him at 312-329-8381 or fmaxson@realtors.org.

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Work-Life Balance in the Eye of the Beholder

“Far and away, the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.” —Theodore Roosevelt

This quote sums up how work-life balance can pose a particular challenge for REALTOR® AEs. We are presented daily with the opportunity to work hard at work worth doing, which tempts us to do so well past the posted office hours.

We serve an entrepreneurial industry of type-A personalities who work evenings, weekends, and holidays. On top of that, many of us have an organizational mission to engage and serve the greater community as well. It’s rare that I have an evening when I don’t check email after I’ve tucked my fifth-grader into bed, and rarer still when I unplug entirely. But in my interpretation of balance, that’s OK.

“Bonus” hours and being connected doesn’t mean I lack balance in my life, no matter how many TV shows and magazine articles tell me I’m supposed to unplug at 5:30 p.m. and spend my weekends taking long walks in the woods. I really enjoy what I do for a living.

I see balance as consistently meeting the needs of work, home, and personal life that does not come with a strict computation of

hours. My approach to cultivating balance has been to take a big-picture view. Balance is not something I can measure by a single day, week, or month. Balance is something I feel taking place over a longer period of time, typically the entire year, so my cultivation and measuring of it must take place over time, also.

Work hard, play hard

Balancing the scales with a purpose-driven profession on one side means acknowledging that the job I love requires a lot of time, energy, and creative resources. Counterbalancing this to attain a happy, whole person means putting the same amount of energy and creativity into my personal pursuits, but it, too, takes strategy and planning.

One of the most effective planning tools I have to create balance in my life is the annual work calendar. Looking at the annual association/MLS calendars of events and meetings gives me a pretty good idea of what the year will look like in terms of when I might be donating more of those bonus hours. I can identify the pressure points in the coming

year, when time will be short and tensions will run high, and begin to sow the seeds of balance by carving out necessary times around those white-knuckle days to tend to my personal priorities. Sometimes just knowing that relief is around the corner can help me through some of the more challenging moments. When balance is a challenge in my life today, it means that busy calendars probably are too, so I set these days aside for myself early each year before meetings and commitments fill the spaces in my schedule.

As small as it may seem, strategically planting these calm spaces or thrilling adventures into my calendar and allowing myself to refocus my time and attention on my personal life when it is needed most can shift the balance of an entire year from feeling like an occasional runaway train to being poised to bring my best self to both work and home, consistently.

For me, a few chapters of a good book serves as a daily microvacation, and weekly enrichment classes help me achieve personal goals that keep me from slipping into a work-home-work routine. A few times each year, I get together with amazing friends to take on new adventures. These take a day or two but give us fresh new perspectives that endure. The key really is as simple as doing things you enjoy most.

I know work-life balance articles tend to focus on enriching the life side of the equation, but it benefits the work side, too. A happy employee, no matter what your job title, is a more engaged and productive employee. So the good news is that I know the time I take to do the things that matter can really be chalked up as an investment in helping the association be successful.

Work worth doing really is a wonderful thing, but so are lives worth living—so get out there and enjoy the best of both.



Tessa Hultz, RCE, CAE, is the CEO of the Raleigh Regional Assoc. of REALTORS® and Triangle MLS in N.C. Reach her at TessaH@RRAR.com or 919-229-4953.

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“My approach to cultivating balance has been to take a big-picture view. Balance is not something I can measure by a single day, week, or month.”

Build an Impact Beyond Your Association

Rebecca Grossman on leading the AEC and being a community influencer.

Your 2018 AE Committee chair, Rebecca Grossman, RCE, GREEN, CEO of the Scottsdale Area Association of REALTORS® in Arizona, has a full plate of AE projects and programs to foster in the upcoming year. Yet her main focus, she says, is to continue the work of the REALTOR® Association Collaboration Work Group charged with finding ways to identify and overcome issues hindering effective relationships among local, state, and national associations. “I’m very excited about the great minds that we have pulled together to really take a deep dive into how we can all be stronger through collaboration,” she says.

It will be a busy year for Grossman, who already leads one of the most progressive associations in the country. RAE spoke recently with this dynamic CEO about consumer outreach and other matters near to her heart.



What consumer outreach does your association conduct and why?

We recently participated in a segment on buying versus renting for the Fox News show “Property Man.” It was a great opportunity to show the expertise of some of our members and to speak about the importance of using a REALTOR®. Anytime you are contacted by TV, radio, or news, my advice is to

always say yes. You can figure out the details later, but if you hesitate, they will move on to the next call. You can always find a member who can speak on the topic, whatever it is, and I’ve never had anyone complain about who we chose to put in front of the camera. We make sure they are prepared and that they are speaking on behalf of the association and the industry.

You’re involved with your city’s chamber of commerce and other groups. How does this benefit your association?

Until you have one-on-one conversations with community leaders and businesses, they cannot possibly understand what REALTORS® are all about. The connections I’ve made through the chamber and Envision Scottsdale, Scottsdale Citizens for Today and Tomorrow, and Scottsdale Leadership have been extremely powerful for our association because now these influential groups know who we are and how much we care about the economic vitality, sustainability, and environmental health of our communities. I am a true believer in getting out of the office and engaging with those who may be able to help us the next time we’re fighting a sign ordinance or advocating for infrastructure improvements. I know it’s hard, because we AEs have so much going on in running our associations and dealing with the next staff or volunteer crisis. But getting involved in community leadership is a must in our business if we want to ensure that our members have a healthy market to practice in.

What is the biggest challenge facing your association today?

Reaching members has become more difficult in recent years. Some of the large

brokerage firms have powerful filters on their email servers that push association emails into orbit. Today we have to rely more on social media, face-to-face meetings, and phone calls to rise above the fray. Recently, we had only 500 out of 8,200 primary members respond to our sign ordinance call to action. I don’t know what the answer is, but one of the things that we are doing is getting out and telling the story of our association’s value as much as possible. My communications staff put together a slick presentation about how we were able to turn the tide on an egregious sign ordinance and achieve a huge win for our members by working the well-oiled system that the REALTORS® have created over the years. Now we have to take that presentation and dog-and-pony it in person until we drop. That is the best way I can see to show member benefit in a tangible, meaningful way.

Why is the GREEN designation important to you personally?

I achieved my GREEN designation early after it was first developed. I’ve always been interested in a more sustainable future, and I think REALTORS® are in a great position to educate the public on healthy homes and energy conservation and efficiency. Although I don’t teach the GREEN designation class anymore, I’ve found that having the designation and the expertise has helped me engage in important community dialogue, bring sustainability education to our area, and promote important green data fields in our MLSs. GREEN is a great opportunity for members to add more value to the transaction. For AEs, the designation reflects on your association and positions it as a stakeholder and influencer in the local sustainability discussion.



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