Software helps buyers compare homes online

'Comparables' link on realtors' websites will display properties of a similar type

BY GILLIAN SHAW

VANCOUVER SUN

Combustion Labs Media, the local software developer that introduced Vancouver real estate agents to online blogging has come up with a new feature to help buyers wend their way through the jungle of real estate listings.

Building on the technology of its popular Ubertor software program for agents, Combustion has added a button that takes buyers on a virtual tour of comparable real estate listings in a neighbourhood.

So if you're in the market for a two-bedroom apartment downtown and you want to look at everything that fits that description and your budget, you can click on the comparables link on an agent's website and details of the listings line up on the screen.

The company has been testing a new version of the feature on real estate agent Andrew Hasman's website. Stephen Jagger, Combustion's founding partner, said the company expects to offer a final version in the coming days.

The beta test can be viewed at www.andrewhasman.com/ViewProperty/115/.

Real estate agents are anxious to take advantage of the latest tweak to push their websites into the forefront of online technology.

"We have a lineup of people wanting to put the comparables feature on their website," said Jagger. "It has generated a lot of excitement.

"It is an innovative feature and it is just going to get better as we get feedback from people who have seen it."

The technology company, which had its roots in Web hosting and made the transition into a software developer for real estate agents, has thousands of agents as customers across North America.

When blogging rose in popularity, Ubertor added that capability to agents' websites, giving sales people a new way to communicate online.

"Comparables is the latest innovation but it is not about wanting to differentiate ourselves from the competition as much as insuring our agents are up to speed with what's available," said Jagger.

Jagger said real estate agents can run details of other agents' listings with permission under reciprocity agreements they have through the real estate board.

He said potential buyers appreciate the quick and easy route to finding all the properties similar to the one they are considering, and agents, who know their clients will seek out such information on the Internet, want to be first to offer it.

"Agents are very excited," he said. "We have tons of e-mails from people saying, 'put it on my system.' "

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SOFTWARE THEFT

Claims settled

Two B.C. firms have agreed to pay $31,279 to settle claims they had unlicensed copies of software programs on their computers, the **Canadian Alliance Against Software Theft** said. Settlements, involving Richmond-based **Brican Systems** and Victoria-based **eTraffic Solutions**, were part of a large enforcement effort across Canada that included firms in Ontario and Alberta with amounts totaling over $250,000. Brican Systems agreed to pay $18,779, while eTraffic Solutions agreed to pay $12,500.

— Business Reporter