

2011 CMLS

**Listing Syndication**

**Challenges and Opportunities**



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## **Listing Syndication Challenges and Opportunities**

In May 2011, the Council of MLS created a dialog with the MLS industry discussing the challenges and opportunities of Listing Syndication and MLS Data Distribution online. This paper is a follow-up to that conversation. The purpose of this paper is to help MLSs and their leadership better understand the key issues surrounding Listing Syndication.

This paper will first discuss the risks and rewards of data syndication. The paper will then summarize emerging methods for controlling data quality and distribution. The paper also includes a snapshot of the growing strength of third parties using data extracted from WAV Group WIN Reports featuring Experian Hitwise data.

The paper will also outline a “decision tree” to help MLSs decide the approach they would like to take for better controlling their MLS data.

The paper draws on works created by leading consultants and thought leaders in the industry.

### **What is Listing Syndication?**

Before we begin we thought it would make sense to first define the concept of listing syndication. Listing syndication is a method for brokers to authorize distribution of their listings to consumer portals hosted by third parties like Zillow, Trulia, Homes.com and many others. By syndicating, or publishing, listings to third party sites, a broker enables these sites to post their listings online for display to consumers.

In most MLSs, any broker who is an MLS participant may authorize syndication of his/her company’s listings only. Syndication is not to be confused with IDX policies.



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IDX authorizes brokers to display the listings of other participants on their company websites (and, if approved, on agent websites). In syndication the broker can only determine whether his/her own listings can be pushed to third party sites.

### How Does Listing Syndication Work?

Syndication is most commonly handled by two third party listing syndication services – [ListHub](#) and [Point2](#). Some franchisors also syndicate listings on behalf of their franchisees. Some of these tools pull data from MLSs and others recommend that agents update the listing information to be published to third parties.

There are also several other types of marketing software like virtual tours, CRM software and even online real estate magazine publishers like Homesandland.com and others syndicate listings as well.

In still other cases, some MLSs offer a feed directly to consumer portals without the use of 3<sup>rd</sup> party syndication partners or use their own tool like [RETSGenie](#) offered by NORMLS in Ohio.

Each major syndicator provides the ability for brokers to set up a free account through which to syndicate their own listings.

Typically there is a dashboard available through the MLS for the broker to select which sites he/she wishes to authorize to display their listings.

Using the channel selections of the broker, listings are then distributed to the approved sites. In the case of ListHub, for example, there are currently 195 opportunities for promoting listings online.



## Why is Listing Syndication So Popular?

Listing Syndication began a few years with the promise of “free” promotion of listings to consumers. The idea was that brokers would supply listings and then other non-REALTOR® advertisers would promote their products and services on the site.

Brokers and agents flocked to these sites believing they would help generate online exposure helping to sell their listings more quickly and cost-effectively. Since these third party sites were built from the ground up with the consumer in mind and funded with millions of dollars of venture capital, they quickly became popular destinations for consumers. Today, consumers selling homes insist on their home being distributed online on as many sites as possible.

There was a problem with the assumption that advertisers outside of the real estate industry could create consistent revenue growth. There simply were not enough non-REALTOR® advertisers to foot the bill so third party portals quickly turned back to the real estate community to fund their technology and promotional efforts.

## The Listing Syndication Conundrum

Consumers believe that quantity is more important than quality. They believe that the more sites their home is listed on, the faster their home will sell.

This is the crux of the issue our industry now faces. How does an agent win a listing if they do not participate in a variety of third party sites? How do they win a new client if they do not upgrade their listings everywhere?

Brokers and agents provide their listing inventory FREE to third party sites only to be strongly encouraged by consumers to buy featured promotion on those sites. In some cases agents actually have to buy a featured promotion on their own listing in order to push back the FOUR other agents that have also bought featured promotion on their very own listing.



### So What's the Problem?

Listing Syndication has been designed to increase exposure to listings to help generate leads and sell property. So what's the problem? Sounds like a positive way for agents and brokers to generate commission dollars right? Like some things in life, listing syndication may be "too good to be true".

#### **Becoming "the" destination for consumers**

Third party search portals are very attractive. They are easy to use and built with consumers in mind. Most have rich content surrounding each listing because they are not bound by IDX display rules or other restrictions- they simply get listing data and display it in the best way they know how.

Because many of these companies are so well funded and consumer-centric with search engine optimization specialists on staff, the top sites have captured a large share of the online traffic. According to the following chart pulled from a WAV Group WIN Report featuring Experian Hitwise data. In September 2011, 25 of the top 30 sites are now owned and controlled by non-REALTORS®. Five of the top 30 sites are controlled by real estate franchises. There is not one broker in the top 20 sites nationally even though there are a few standout broker sites in the country from companies like [Howard Hanna](#), [Edina Realty](#) and [Shorewest](#), REALTORS® that dominate in their region.



**Most Popular Websites in Business and Finance - Real Estate ranked by Visits Share**

Month of September 2011

Report Details ▾

10 20 100 ◀ ▶

Custom ▾

Chart ▾

Add To Dashboard ▾

Export ▾

<input type="checkbox"/>	Websites (3,620 returned)	Total Visits	Visits Share ▾	Rank Aug 11	Rank Jul 11	Rank Jun 11
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 Yahoo! Real Estate	29,054,236	7.35%	1	1	2
<input type="checkbox"/>	2 Realtor.com	25,969,499	6.57%	2	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	3 Zillow	25,228,352	6.38%	3	3	3
<input type="checkbox"/>	4 Trulia.com	21,944,412	5.55%	4	4	4
<input type="checkbox"/>	5 Homes.com	10,681,082	2.70%	5	6	6
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 6 AOL Real Estate	9,050,816	2.29%	8	8	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 7 MSN Real Estate	8,227,487	2.08%	6	5	8
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 8 Rent.com	7,126,808	1.80%	7	7	7
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 9 FrontDoor Real Estate	6,929,301	1.75%	24	31	29
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 10 Apartment Guide	5,702,740	1.44%	9	9	9
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 11 ZipRealty	4,946,931	1.25%	12	12	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 12 MyNewPlace	4,923,543	1.24%	10	11	15
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 13 Apartments.com	4,748,064	1.20%	11	10	12
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 14 LoopNet	4,030,514	1.02%	15	19	17
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 15 RE/MAX Real Estate	3,971,776	1.00%	16	14	14
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 16 Weichert.com	3,762,606	0.95%	14	16	16
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 17 Rentals.com	3,706,881	0.94%	13	15	11
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 18 Redfin	3,528,596	0.89%	19	20	22
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 19 HomeFinder	3,485,106	0.88%	17	17	19
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 20 ForRent.com	3,328,541	0.84%	18	18	18
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 21 Listingbook Services	3,210,405	0.81%	22	22	20
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 22 Century 21 Real Estate	2,949,758	0.75%	23	24	24
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 23 HotPads.com	2,927,806	0.74%	21	21	21
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 24 HomeAway	2,909,417	0.74%	20	13	13
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 25 HAR.com	2,747,316	0.69%	26	23	23
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 26 U.S. Department of Housing an...	2,357,313	0.60%	28	28	28
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 27 TReND	2,321,376	0.59%	32	32	32
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 28 HomePath.com	2,320,429	0.59%	31	30	30
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 29 US Department of Housing and ...	2,295,761	0.58%	27	29	31
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 30 Coldwell Banker Real Estate	2,151,639	0.54%	33	34	35






Source: Experian<sup>SM</sup> Hitwise – Copyright 2011 WAV Group WIN Reports<sup>TM</sup> - Not to be reproduced without the written approval of WAV Group



### “Hijacked” Listings

In an effort to create more promotional revenues, some sites are now selling space on listings to multiple agents. In order to find the contact information for listing agents you need to page through four pages of listing detail information to find a minimal image and description of the actual listing agent. In some cases the listing agent's face is literally “blacked out” unless they upgrade to premium sponsorship of their own listing. Brokers and agents send their listings to third party sites only to have to buy promotion on their listing to receive any exposure on it. As traffic continues to build on third party sites the cost of these promotional programs continues to increase.

### Contact local agents near 895 Auklet Ct Want to be listed here? [Learn more »](#)

<div style="margin-bottom: 5px;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  <b>Pat Okura</b> (LISTING AGENT)</div> <div style="margin-bottom: 5px;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  <b>Ken Taylor</b> (805) 214-6848 - Helping Local Buyers &amp;... <span style="background-color: orange; color: white; padding: 2px;">PRO</span></div> <div style="margin-bottom: 5px;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  <b>Jane Faber</b> (805) 214-6690 Call Me For All Your Real... <span style="background-color: orange; color: white; padding: 2px;">PRO</span></div> <div style="margin-bottom: 5px;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  <b>Hubbell Real Estate...</b> Call us for all your Real Estate needs -... <span style="background-color: orange; color: white; padding: 2px;">PRO</span> (805) 214-6836</div>	<input type="text" value="Your name:"/> <input type="text" value="Your email:"/> <input type="text" value="Your phone: (optional)"/> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px;"><b>Your message:</b> I was searching on Trulia for homes in 93420 and I found 895 Auklet Ct, Arroyo Grande CA 93420 with 3 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms for \$629,000. Please send me more information about </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"><span style="background-color: #f4a460; color: white; padding: 5px 15px; border-radius: 3px;">Send</span></div> <div style="font-size: small; text-align: center; margin-top: 5px;">By sending, you agree to <a href="#">Trulia's Terms of Use</a> and <a href="#">Privacy Policy</a>.</div>
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### Duplication

The process of listing syndication is anything but clean. A single listing can be syndicated first by the agent through their virtual tour. Then the same listing may be syndicated by the agent's franchise. Then the agent's local broker may syndicate the listing again either on their own and/or through the MLS syndication service.



Now which of the listings takes precedence with the third party sites? Which version of the listing is the most up to date? How does the third party prioritize the sources of the listing if they receive multiple versions?

It's not difficult to see why the process of listing syndication quickly gets muddy and difficult to control.

### **Outdated Information**

While sites controlled by the real estate industry, like REALTOR.com, update their listings every 15 minutes in just about every market in the country, other sites are not bound by these performance criteria. Most update at least daily, but there is no guarantee that the data will be fresh.

### **Expired Listings**

Some sites are more about quantity than quality. They will not remove a listing even though it is expired because it increases the number of listing results a consumer will receive when they do a search.

Some agents are not concerned about sites that include expired or outdated listings—they consider them “lead bait”. Even though the consumer may not be able to view a home they are interested in because it is not for sale any longer, some agents believe they can convert them to another one of their listings so “any listing is a good listing”.

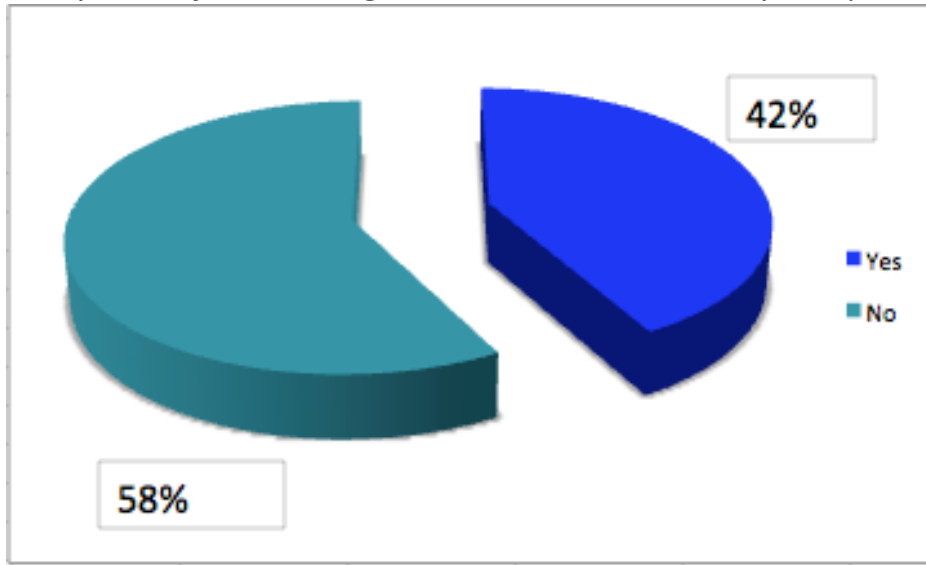
Unfortunately, consumers do not share this opinion. They think of this tactic as “bait and switch” – the type of tactic used car salesmen use to get you to the lot with a ridiculous offer and then upsell you to a much more expensive vehicle.

In a study recently performed by WAV Group across a number of MLS Consumer websites, 42% of the consumers in the study said they had found a “dead” listing in searches on third party sites. This has a negative impact on the perception of the site with the expired listing, the broker offering the listing and especially the listing agent. It also helped to drive up the perception that MLS Consumer Websites have more accurate listings than third party sites.



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*Have you ever found a listing that was not available when you inquired about it?*



Source: WAV Group Consumer Website Study

### Re-Syndication

Some of the sites involved in listing syndication send their listings to other sites in addition to their own sites. Some sites, like [Homefinder.com](http://Homefinder.com), are upfront about their partnerships with leading online newspaper sites around the country. Others however, are not as forthcoming. In an interview with a luxury broker in Carmel, California we were told of a story where a \$22 million listing was found on Overstock.com. Needless to say the client of the incredible luxury property was not happy to find their listing on a discount site. Without a clear understanding of the re-syndication relationships brokers can experience unintended consequences that can place them in tenuous position with some of their most important clients.

### Unauthorized Use

Some less reputable sites may be scraping data from large sites like Realtor.com and others. At the CMLS meeting on Listing Syndication in May 2011, Errol Samuelson, President of Realtor.com discussed the fact that they have invested



\$10million in technology designed to stop third parties from scraping data from their site. He said, “We have invested a large amount of capital to stop this practice on our site. Unfortunately, that means the sites that were scraping from us are now going to scrape data from MLS consumer sites or broker sites. Without spending millions of dollars, it’s nearly impossible to stop this practice.”

### **“Syndegration”**

Yet another form of abuse has been dubbed “syndegration”. In this case, a third party site will contract to receive listing data, but will have no intention of using it to promote listings online. They are using the database to get the roster of the listing agents actively involved in selling real estate. They will, in effect, syndicate listings just to get a great database of agents they can target with products and services. In the view of CMLS, this is way beyond the scope of the concept of listing syndication. This is again another unintended consequence of listing syndication.

### **Unfavorable Terms of Use**

Some of the largest risks of listing syndication are buried in the terms of use of third party websites. Some sites take ownership of all of the listing content once it is sent to them. Others reserve the right to repurpose the listings without any specific definition of how they will use the listings. Some maintain broker contact information, but do not attribute sold listings to them. There are many ethical and legal risks buried in the terms of use of listing syndication agreements.

Here’s one of the charts drawn from the WAV Group Study – Listing Syndication – Be sure to read the Fine Print. It indicates some of the potential dangers brokers are exposed to by publishing their listings on third party sites. The full study can be found in the CMLS Listing Syndication Toolkit.



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	Broker Keeps Protection	Broker Keeps Some Protections	Broker Loses All Protections
AOL Real Estate	X		
Google Base		X	
Listhub		X	
Point 2	X		
Postlets			X
REALTOR.com	X		
Trulia			X
VAST			X
Zillow		X	

### **Quantity Does NOT Necessarily Translate to Quality**

While listing syndication service providers continue to increase the number of participating publishers in their network, the reality is that the top 10 sites create the bulk of the traffic and listing exposure. In fact, the top five sites in the ListHub network create 80% of all of the traffic and the top 10 sites generate 91% of the traffic. A broker could syndicate only to the top 10 sites and get the benefit of online listing exposure without having to monitor the 500 sites included in the ListHub network.



**Most Popular Websites in ListHub Network 0811 ranked by Visits Share**

Month of July 2011

10 20 100 [Navigation icons]

Custom Chart Add To Dashboard Export

<input type="checkbox"/>	Websites (127 returned)	Total Visits	Visits Share ▼	Rank Jun 11	Rank May 11	Rank Apr 11
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 Yahoo! Real Estate	32,699,101	25.74%	1	1	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	2 Zillow	25,737,409	20.26%	2	2	2
<input type="checkbox"/>	3 Trulia.com	23,480,846	18.48%	3	3	3
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 4 Homes.com	11,212,350	8.83%	5	6	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 5 AOL Real Estate	8,402,973	6.61%	4	5	4
<input type="checkbox"/>	6 HomeFinder	4,199,308	3.31%	6	8	8
<input type="checkbox"/>	7 HotPads.com	3,751,139	2.95%	7	7	7
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 8 HomePath.com	2,391,629	1.88%	9	9	9
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 9 FrontDoor Real Estate	2,291,706	1.80%	8	4	6
<input type="checkbox"/>	10 RealtyTrac	1,816,396	1.43%	10	10	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	11 Foreclosure.com	1,351,752	1.06%	11	11	12
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 12 Landwatch.com	1,230,760	0.97%	13	14	14
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 13 TourFactory.com	1,180,730	0.93%	12	12	13
<input type="checkbox"/>	14 RealtyStore.com	961,383	0.76%	14	18	19
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 15 Homes and Land Magazine	852,172	0.67%	17	15	15
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 16 I Rent To Own	798,206	0.63%	18	17	18
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 17 realestate.oodle.com	728,848	0.57%	16	16	16
<input type="checkbox"/>	▼ 18 HUD foreclosed	721,261	0.57%	15	13	11
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 19 AJCHomeFinder.com	284,682	0.22%	20	21	24
<input type="checkbox"/>	▲ 20 Allhud	279,734	0.22%	21	23	22

Source: Experian<sup>SM</sup> Hitwise – Copyright 2011 WAV Group WIN Reports<sup>TM</sup> - Not to be reproduced without the written approval of WAV Group

## Potential Strategies to Listing Syndication

As we outlined in the last section, while listing syndication can create exposure and leads for listings, the space is fraught with potential risk and opportunity. In this section of the paper we will outline a few strategies being tested by brokers around the country. Since MLSs serve the needs of brokers in listing syndication, some of these elements are applicable to MLSs as well.

### Selective Syndication

Like everything in life all third party sites are NOT created equal. Some, like Realtor.com, for example, doggedly protect the rights of the broker. Others, like



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Zillow, Trulia, Homes.com and other leading sites create SIGNIFICANT traffic to listings. The top 10 third party sites capture 91% of the traffic. Some brokers have opted to limit distribution to only the largest sites and others have even limited distribution to just a few or even one of the large sites. They focus their marketing efforts and create a significant promotional presence capturing an unfair share of voice on selected sites.

By focusing on just a few sites brokers can more closely review the terms of use on the site. Below are ten suggested questions to ask when negotiating a program with a third party site.

### **Negotiate More Favorable Terms of Use**

Before turning on any syndication source, an MLS can work with their selected syndication partners to negotiate terms of use that better protect the data and the rights of their brokers and agents. An MLS can use the following ten questions as a way to uncover the weaknesses in a contract and ensure there are better protections built in.

## **Top 10 Questions to Ask Before Syndicating Your Listings**

1. What rights, benefits or protections do I lose by posting my listings on the site?
2. What ability do I have to control distribution of my listings or listing data?
3. What happens to my listing information when the listing expires or the property is sold? What about if I stop syndicating my information to the site?



4. If the site receives multiple entries for the same listing from different parties (MLS, agent, broker, franchise, third party listing site) which one gets priority over the others and why?
5. Does the site receive or send my listings/listing data to/from a primary or secondary source? If so, which ones? What control do I have over the display/ownership of my listings on the secondary source?
6. What are the rules/terms for updating/maintaining listings and listing data on the site? What is the process for updating listings – how easy is it to reach customer service to update an error or required change in the database?
7. What rules/terms are in place to guard the listings from being “scraped” and from being sent to other places?
8. If the site is reporting sales, do the rules/terms require the site to give the broker for the buyer and seller side credit?
9. Do the site’s rules/terms restrict the type of content that can be placed in ads near listings and prohibit inappropriate topics (e.g., political, sexual, alcohol, firearms?)
10. Do the site’s rules/terms guarantee there will not be competitive ads next to my listings?

### **Discontinue Syndication**

Some brokers have deployed a less popular, but more radical approach. In the case of Shorewest Realtors in Wisconsin, they decided to pull out completely from syndicating their listings beyond Realtor.com. They already had a very strong presence in the marketplace with the #3 ranked website in the region. They removed their listings from all sites except Realtor.com. In two months, their site moved to the #1 position in the marketplace. This may be an anomaly since most broker sites are not as strong as this example, but nonetheless it is another strategy to consider. The MLS can provide the broker with as much flexibility as they can allow for every broker to opt-in or opt-out of any site or all sites as they wish.



## Listing Syndication Quality Control Solutions

The issue of Listing Syndication is anything but simple and the risks and rewards are equally as complicated. In this section of the paper we are going to provide an overview of a variety of services and solutions being proposed by several companies to address various elements of Listing Syndication. For each of the solutions we will provide you with a definition of the problem(s) they are trying to solve, and an overview of the solution being offered.

### 360° Insight by Onboard Informatics



#### Problem(s) Being Addressed:

It's impossible to demonstrate value of online listing exposure to members without standardized tracking, performance or usage information flowing back to the MLS. There is no single system utilizing relevant technology on the tactical MLS admin side of the business to manage licensing.

MLSs try to manage, monitor and measure hundreds of unique contracts, license fees and compliance rules with developers, publishers, third party syndicators and extended networks (comprised of hundreds of online publishers) without tracking and imposed accountability. The result? Cost, burden and frustration where there should be value and benefits. The pace of technological innovation, both in our



industry and at large, ratchets up the stakes for the MLS. The answer? The time for MLSs to take the lead and reclaim the role of primary data steward for their members is now.

The Listings 360°insight Data Management System solves problems related to the end to end management of listing data to include:

- MLSs can reclaim the position of the “primary data steward” role: With the information, tools and systems in place to effectively monitor, measure and manage licensee relationships, MLSs can stabilize their role and right-size the role and control of third parties in the process
- Low cost new services and products for members - at zero cost to members - that help them demonstrate value, make business decisions and ultimately sell more real estate, faster
- A secure, near-real time distribution method that: inspires the cost effective development of valuable new Member tools; lessens the cost of managing hundreds of data feeds; streamlines the data distribution process and improves data quality online
- Real-time tracking for compliance, auditing and valuable usage information collection
- Never before seen, end to end visibility on data usage - comprehensive, across all sites/all licensees
- Revealing online, user-unique visibility portals that slice and display online listing usage information in a meaningful, valuable way
- New, real, monetization opportunities for the MLS

## Product Offering:

**Listings 360°insight** by Onboard Informatics was born from one vision: utilize our knowledge and expertise to transform today’s cumbersome, disjointed MLS listing distribution model into a comprehensive listing management platform - enabling MLSs to effectively manage, monitor and glean comprehensive 360°insight from the distribution, online display and usage of the listing asset.



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The comprehensive **Listings360°insight** platform is comprised of two components that work seamlessly together:

**(1) 360°Advisor™:** Comprehensive data usage tracking and online reporting system. At the heart of the 360°Advisor™ system is a “tracker” that enables the collection of content usage information. Valuable, never-before-seen usage information (where your listing data is going, how it is being searched, viewed and digested) is tracked, registered and transformed into insightful, on-demand dynamic reports that reveal near-real time information within user-unique online 360°Advisor portals, answering vital questions about the performance and activity of both publishers and listings. The reports can be socialized, emailed, saved, printed, dissected, downloaded and set-up for automatic delivery with the goal of creating valuable dialogue with clients, demonstrating value and supporting marketing and pricing decisions.

**(2) 360°Gatekeeper™:** Keeps the data behind the “gate” (with the MLS and/or Broker) by empowering MLSs and real estate Brokers the choice of providing access to data via 360°Gatekeeper™ OR delivering data via RETS. Providing access to listing information and photos via a high-performance, real-time search API for licensees, it enables the effective management of access permissions and user-based fee structures.



## RETS IQ by Bridge Interactive



### RETS IQ Contact™

#### Problem(s) Being Addressed:

RETS IQ has been designed to help those MLSs that are serious about taking back control of their listing data and providing much richer ways to help brokers and agents more effectively market their services.

RETS is a powerful transport tool that can be used to improve the quality and control of listing distribution if used properly. Bridge Interactive set out to use RETS as an effective method for providing better controls and analytics than ever seen in the real estate market.

#### Product Offering:

##### 1. RETS IQ Contact

RETS IQ Contact has been dubbed the most sophisticated and robust web server on the market. This tool allows MLSs to monitor their data distribution activity very explicitly. It allows an MLS to see how much data is passing to a specific website or technology provider and specifically what data is being requested. This allows an MLS an easy method to be sure the data that is being pulled is within the agreed to allowed data fields. It also allows an MLS to drill down to an individual data query. MLS users of RETS IQ also receive alerts if a connection between their server and a third party has been interrupted, allowing them to rectify the situation quickly.

**2. RETS IQ Check for the MLS** – RETS IQ Check makes it really easy for MLSs to take back control of the data distribution rights they provide to third parties. They can automate the process of applying for a data feed and even collect a credit card if the MLS desires. This process also enables MLSs to take back the terms of use of their data on behalf of their brokers. Instead of just agreeing to the terms of use of



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third parties MLSs can now require that third parties agree to THEIR terms of use before they are granted data rights. This tool puts the control for the terms of data relationships back in the hands of the MLS where it belongs.

**3. REAL TIME RETS solution** – REAL TIME RETS is a unique method for delivering real estate information to consumers on agent or MLS sites. When a consumer creates a property search, this solution “calls” the database and delivers absolutely the most up to date information available at that moment. No more updating the database once a day or even every 15 minutes. With REAL TIME RETS the data is up to the minute. In addition REAL TIME RETS provide rich, deep analytics of what types of homes are being searched for most, what neighborhoods are the most popular, what price points in a particular neighborhood are getting the most activity, etc. etc. The richness of this data will revolutionize the level of analysis and evaluation available for brokers. For MLSs and brokers who are trying to differentiate themselves from third party sites with more accurate and up to data and significantly better analytics this solution will be very valuable.



## CoreLogic

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### Problem(s) Being Addressed:

It is clear that aggregations of listing data are very valuable to many. There are situations when those authorized and those not authorized to receive MLS data are receiving it regularly and even re-distributing it to third parties. CoreLogic has built a mechanism to more effectively monitor where data is being distributed so it will be easy to track back wrongdoing to a specific distribution source.

CoreLogic recognizes the need to keep track of listing data once it is distributed by a RETS feed. It is an administrative nightmare and nearly impossible today to track nefarious activity online. The company is offering solutions that will reduce the burden while increasing the effectiveness of policing and monitoring activities on the Internet.

While data sharing has solved many important business issues it can be another source of trouble for listing syndication and distribution. CoreLogic's data sharing solutions address the need for permission-based distribution of listings by participating MLS.

### Product Offering:

**1. RETS Professional** - CoreLogic regularly services 200,000,000 listings from its RETS servers. The company is focusing on how to use RETS Technology to make it easier to keep track of listings by tagging images. Each data distribution partner will be assigned a unique tag. With these tags, it will be simple to determine where the listing originates from and what account it came from.

**2. Database Refresh** – When transmitting data, many times there are downloads on a nightly basis. Occasionally the transmissions can go awry or the receiving servers malfunction. With the indexing capability of CoreLogic RETS servers an IDX vendor will be able to refresh the entire database as needed to be sure all of the data is completely up to date.



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**3. MLS Data Co-op** – Today there are many successful data sharing initiatives in place. There can be an unintended consequence of data sharing, however. Sometimes data is distributed to unauthorized resources once it is aggregated into a centralized data set. With MLS Data Co-op – the listings are not distributed. They are hosted on a central server and kept in a common area to give MLSs better control of their data.

**4. Partner Infonet** – There is a demand and a gray market where your data is being used in nefarious ways. For an MLS that would like to monetize its listing data, Partner InfoNet can license MLS data and distribute it legitimate ways for use in a controlled manner.



## ListHub by Move, Inc.



### Problem(s) Being Addressed:

As the pioneer of aggregated listing distribution, ListHub is well aware of some of the pitfalls of listing syndication. They are consistently innovating to find ways to help MLSs and Brokers make more well-informed decisions about what syndication partners are right for their individual business needs.

### Product Offering:

#### 1. Channel Scorecard

ListHub has a tool called [Channel Scorecard](#) that helps short circuit the process of finding syndication partners that meet your individual business needs. A broker can review a scorecard for every participating site in the ListHub network that will highlight the type of search features, property types displayed, data management policies including links to re-syndication policies and an outline of the data quality control policies.

**Channel:** HotPads

**Parent Company:** Hotpads.com  
**Website:** <http://www.hotpads.com>

**LISTING FEATURES**

- Listing View/Detail Page: Yes
- Redirection Link: Yes
- Displays Brokerage Name: Yes
- Displays Agent Name: Yes
- Displays Broker Contact Info: Yes
- Displays Agent Contact Info: Yes
- Inquiry Form on Listing View Page: Yes
- Consumer Registration Required to View Listings: No

**PROPERTY TYPES**

- Primary Types:** Residential, Land
- Sub-types:** Residential Rental, Auction, FSBO, Farm & Ranch, Foreclosure, International, Mobile Home, Multi-Family, Vacation Rentals
- Search Types:** Condo/townhome, Foreclosure, New Construction, Pre-foreclosure, Vacation

**DATA MANAGEMENT**

- Provides Mobile Application: Yes
- Re-syndicates ListHub Data: No
- Powers Other Sites: No
- Removes Duplicate Listings: Yes
- Published Duplication Policy: [click to view](#)
- Terms and Conditions: [click to view](#)

**Stats:**

- ✓ Data Refresh Frequency: Daily
- ✓ Inactive Listing Removal Frequency: Daily
- ✓ Provides Listing Error Reports: Yes
- ✓ Provides View & Inquiry Reports: Yes
- ✓ Provides Support to ListHub: Yes
- ✓ Site Notes:

**View ListHub Reports**

[View Reports](#)

Full reports include site-to-site comparisons of listing views, visits, inquiries and more.

#### 2. MLS Control Panel

The MLS Control Panels allows MLSs to do several things. It allows an MLS to get access to the Listing Tracker which gives you the ability to go through the process of figuring out which ListHub sites meet your unique definition of MLS business practices. Through the panel, an MLS can define an MLS preferred site by going into the panel, applying criteria and then anointing any or all of sites as “MLS Preferred”. The tool also allows you to measure the overall performance of all of the



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sites in your syndication network and compare their performance. You can then share these insights with your brokers to increase the value of the MLS.

### **3. Realtor.com**

Realtor.com is committed to creating the most highly accurate and most well trafficked site on the Internet to drive back leads to REALTORS®. The company continues to invest in efforts to make sure that the data is accurate by updating every 15 minutes with 80% of MLSs. Realtor.com is very careful to use the data in proper ways. MLS Data is only live on Realtor.com servers and will never co-mingle MLS data with FSBO's like so many of the other third party sites too.

In addition to maintaining the most accurate database possible. Realtor.com has also invested millions of dollars putting technology in place to stop scraping and mis-use of data in addition to a legal team that issues multitudes of cease and desist notices very year. The company can also boast the most engaged real estate consumer audience on the Internet as well the largest mobile audience.

### **4. FIND**

Currently many third party sites display highly inaccurate valuations of homes not currently on the market because they are drawing from public records data. Inaccurate valuations cause headaches for agents who are trying to price a home right or suggest a reasonable offer price. By displaying sold information directly from the MLS the consumer will benefit from a much more accurate view of the market and will be more likely to purchase or sell a home at the right price. REALTOR.com has a product called FIND, which is a robust search engine platform. The company will provide FIND free of charge in exchange for the rights to display SOLD listings on REALTOR.com



## MLS Internet Data Co-op

### Problem(s) Being Addressed:

Many of the largest MLSs in the country recognized that they were not meeting the brokers' demands to effectively control distribution of listings nor providing the necessary analytics to better manage online marketing budgets and promotions.

### Products to be offered:

Seventeen of the largest MLSs collaborated on a program to evaluate the potential of the formation of an entity built to solve the problems surrounding data control and distribution.

The group has completed a business plan and is the process of evaluating the formation of a company wholly owned by organized real estate entities to bring back control of listing distribution and evaluation to the MLSs on behalf of their brokers.

## RE Data Vault by Real Estate Digital

### Problem(s) Being Addressed:

**Efficient management of vendors and MLS licensing** - By registering approved vendors, defining MLS "products" and providing an online licensing workflow system complete with document storage and retrieval, reDataVault simplifies MLS data licensing and potentially saves staff time. License renewals are handled by the reDataVault system via alerts to all appropriate parties.

**Staying in direct control of the distribution of the listing data** - Publisher agreements can be negotiated directly between the MLS and the publisher. All contracts are stored online and references quickly by license ID and by vendor.

**Monetization of listing data** - reDataVault provides a platform to put a value on and negotiate a license with users of the listing data.



**Managing all “opt-in” opt-out” requirements** - MLS staff can define a syndication Product that is then visible to all Brokers. (This could be any data export). As Brokers opt-in or opt-out, the MLS staff is notified. If RED is delivering the data, the listing inclusions and exclusions are automatically taken care of and sent to the receiving Publisher or Licensee.

**Data delivery** - reDataVault offers data delivery via flat files, and RETS. All data delivery is tied to and driven by approved licensing. Real Estate Digital handles vendor support, saving the MLS time and money.

**Compliance** - Selective Watermarking (which provides user-controlled variable watermarked images by Publisher destination) allows for tracking mis-use of images. Tracking code pixels (2012) will be used to further seed data and trace display.

**Product Offering:**

**1. reDataVault** - is a single web application, to help MLSs effectively manage their MLS data licensing needs and then automatically deliver and track the MLS data and image usage as well.

Over the last eighteen months, the company has developed the very first web-based application that provides an integrated MLS or Association branded website to collect Broker and Vendor registrations, manage the data licensing request process, electronically collect and reference all documentation (including signed agreements), manage Broker “opt-in” and “opt-out” requirements, automatically deliver data, automatically



renew licenses, track the data as it is delivered, and much more.

This MLS content licensing management system provides MLS data services to a wide range of clients, powering their applications with standardized MLS data, URL based images, redundant systems and networks and best-in-class support mechanisms.

**2. reDataVault Content Aggregation** – reDataVault uses a set of software tools and components developed to facilitate each specific data aggregation function.

These tools convert loose type data to strong type, verify zip codes, standardize addresses, parse data, match disparate lookup codes, verify load variance and resize images.

RED also create a standard, optimized photo for display with a standard size and optimized thumbnail photo. Photos are delivered with remarkable speed by providing the URL from our content delivery network (CDN) servers. The system monitors the data to ensure we have loaded new files and processed them properly.

Highlights of the reDataVault Data Aggregation Services include a data distribution system, which supports:

- Multiple property types;
- A common format for all listing data;
- A common format for all listing photos;
- A common format set of features and feature codes;
- Listing data, which has been cleansed and sterilized to improve data quality and accuracy;
- Listing data that has been Address Standardized and listing data that includes URL and Open House information



## Safe Syndication by Clarity Security

### Problem(s) Being Addressed:

MLSs receive calls from their members asking, “Why is my listing showing on this site?”, “Why isn’t my listing showing on this site?”, and “I changed the list price on the MLS and that site isn’t showing the new list price?” Compliance teams are spending countless frustrating hours searching through file cabinets and spreadsheets and on the phone to provide those answers.

Clarity Security recognizes the symptoms of out-of-control data distribution and proposes SAFE Syndication™, the only unified platform for managing complaints about real estate listing data appearing outside of the actual MLS system - *wherever* it is found online. This system helps manage and measure data licensing compliance, including workflow management for evaluating portals such as Realtor.com, Trulia, Zillow and Yahoo!, and consistently manages rules compliance for VOWs and IDX sites. SAFE Syndication brings new efficiencies to MLS compliance departments while increasing the quality of response to your customers and vendor partners.

Describing SAFE Syndication™ really needs to start with first describing what it is not intended to accomplish. SAFE Syndication is not a data distribution/syndication tool. It does not move data or provide API access to the MLS database. We are already integrating with ListHub to share information back/forth and will integrate with the other various data distribution technologies being offered. SAFE Syndication is extremely complementary to these technology providers yet doesn't require the MLS to select a single technology (unfeasible in our book) nor change the current method of data distribution (difficult & long term at best).



## Product Offering:

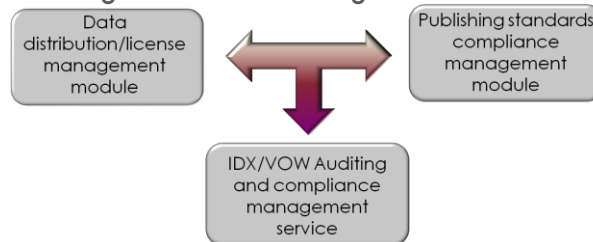
**SAFE Syndication™** – Safe Syndication is the only unified platform for managing listing data distribution compliance. SAFE Syndication manages data licensing agreements, provides workflow management for evaluation portals & publishers, and helps the MLS consistently manages rules compliance for VOWs and IDX sites.

The portal and publisher compliance module also allows the MLS the opportunity to establish a scorecard based on their own established criteria (such as the Clarity Bill of Rights) and delivers a mechanism for measuring publishers and portals based on MLS preferred criteria. This service can be used to deliver additional value to brokers by providing them with the information they need to make informed syndication decisions.

Clarity Security also provides fully outsourced, independent third party compliance audit service to either supplement or fully replace current compliance efforts.

### **SAFE SYNDICATION:**

SAFE Syndication includes three main modules, a management dashboard tying them together, and a managed service offering:



### **Data License Management Module:**

The Data License Management module tracks/answers the two key questions that MLS staff are often faced with: Where is my data authorized for display? And why is my data on this site? It's a management tool that allows the relationships between the MLS, the vendors and their products, and the brokers and the agents to be documented, tracked and reported on. It replaces the file cabinets full of paper and/or hard to maintain and low-functionality spreadsheets many MLSs use to manage their data license agreements.



**Portal Compliance Management Module:**

Brokers and agents are sending their listings to portal websites without a consistent and clear understanding how well each site aligns with their business objectives. Syndication services can have a difficult time rating the performance of these portals, especially those syndication services being paid by the portals. The Portal Compliance Management Module gives the MLS the ability to better manage data on national and local portals, allowing you to create evaluation criteria, rate portal compliance, and create exports to help keep your brokers and agents well educated on their best syndication options.

**IDX/VOW Auditing Module:**

Most MLSs currently don't have a system for managing *when or how frequently* to audit IDX and VOW sites, leading to the complaint by many IDX/VOW vendors that they are being "singled out". With the IDX/VOW Audit Module, SAFE Syndication provides an approach to consistently manage *when* broker and agent websites are to be audited. SAFE Syndication also provides a framework for managing how sites are audited, documenting audit procedures and providing reporting.

**SAFE Syndication Dashboard** - provides a consolidated dashboard system for measuring and reporting on all listing distribution activity. This dashboard can be set up to deliver timely reminders to MLS staff.

## Conclusion

CMLS sincerely hopes this paper will help provide MLSs and their Board members with a more clear understanding of the key issues surrounding Listing Syndication today as well as provide potential strategies and solutions providers to consider.



If you would like more information about Listing Syndication, please be sure to review the CMLS Listing Syndication Toolkit available to all CMLS members and attendees of the 2011 CMLS Conference.

If you would like to become a member of CMLS so that you can receive all CMLS communications and participate in CMLS member-only events, you can register [here](#).

### About the Authors

**WAV Group** is a leader in providing consulting services to the real estate industry and is comprised of corporate executives with a depth of expertise in both the real estate market as well as the consumer market. The company has conducted studies for some of the largest organizations in the industry including the Council of MLS, National Association of REALTORS®, California Association of REALTORS® and others. It has also authored several of its own studies including its annual MLS Technology Survey, Mid-Year Technology Update and many others.



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The company works with Multiple Listing Services, real estate firms, franchise organizations and technology vendors in the US, Canada and Europe. WAV Group has expertise in the areas of content development, market research, strategic planning, product development, distribution, marketing, and technology evaluation, selection and implementation.

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