

Winning on the Web

How Daniel Gale Sotheby's competes at a higher level



Daniel
Gale

Sotheby's
INTERNATIONAL REALTY



Researched and Compiled By
The Swanepoel T3 Group



Commissioned By
Real Estate Webmasters

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The Shift

More homebuyers begin their home search online (57 percent) than anywhere else, according to the National Association of Realtors' 2016 profile of Home Buyers and Sellers. The study also reveals that the overwhelming majority of buyers use websites during their home search (95 percent), more than any other tool.

According to the 2016 Zillow Group Report on Consumer Housing Trends survey, a significant percentage of buyers (26 percent) and sellers (18 percent) find their agent online, second only to referrals (33 percent and 24 percent, respectively).

With the Internet playing a dominant role in how consumers choose their agent and shop for property, it's critical that real estate brokerage websites succeed at the highest level.

A decade ago, a website with a reasonable search experience and basic SEO best practices could support the consumer search experience, and, with some effort, even rank competitively in search.

Today's market is different. Over the last decade the portals have spent millions of dollars improving the real estate search experience, which has set consumer expectations sky high. Portal dominance in listing, address, neighborhood, and area-based search terms has become a significant challenge, as these large companies have outgunned local brokers with cutting-edge SEO techniques, national press and paid search power.

The stakes have changed. In order to effectively compete today, brokers must play at a higher level.

Real Estate Webmasters believes it has a solution real estate brokerages can use to overcome these challenges and thrive. It commissioned T3 Sixty (a division of the Swanepoel T3 Group) to review its offering and review how one of its clients, Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty, uses it.

These are our findings.

In today's market,
portals have redefined
the consumer
experience.

Four Must-Have Elements

Winning on the web requires understanding the challenge and successfully implementing the following four key elements.

1. Customizable Property Search

The national portals and contemporary website products have many strengths, including strong mobile-optimized user experience and property searches. But these sites and products have a weakness, borne of their history and need to work at a national scale. These property searches cannot always effectively serve all local audiences since they often have only a subset of MLS fields available. Further, their national search design does not incorporate local preferences, lifestyles and requirements of consumers in a brokerage's local market.

In order to win, brokerage companies must exploit this limitation.

This is why an effective local and customizable property search experience is critical. With this capability, brokers can design a richer and more effective search experience in their local market. If they succeed, consumers (and the company's agents) come to prefer the company's search tool, perhaps even more than the MLS search tool that so many agents rely on for client searches.

2. SEO Expertise and Content Power

National portals and property search products have systematically dominated most, if not all, of the common and most popular search terms consumers use to search for property, including address-based searches (123 Elm Street), MLS number, neighborhood name and area names. Through agent profiles, portals have even dominated name-based searches for agents – notice how often portals come up when you query an agent's name.

The game of search requires an astute “match and exceed” strategy. This means that brokerage companies must have an SEO solution that matches their competitors, and then does more. To “do more” involves adding local content and marrying that content with listings to create an effective SEO target for hyperlocal search terms. This can include

pre-market listings, new construction, condo buildings and lifestyle-oriented content in conjunction with listings (i.e., “homes for \$350,000 or less near public transit in Denver”).

This capability is not only important for local search, but also for the burgeoning market for voice search, where Alexa, Siri, and Google return limited results – and people are more likely to give longer search phrases. As we talk to our machines more, we expect better, more accurate results, and rich local SEO will play an increasingly central role in fulfilling this need.

Today there are hundreds of different real estate lead generation products available, offering new solutions almost every day.

3. Integrated Lead Conversion Tools

If the real estate industry has proven anything in the last decade, it has no problem generating leads – millions of them. Hundreds of lead-generation products exist, and new lead-generation platforms emerge almost weekly.

When lead generation is ubiquitous, the criteria for winning shifts to conversion. The broker who can both generate leads and reliably convert them has market power – to attract more agents and improve its financial performance. Brokers more successful at converting leads can also afford to pay more for leads and drive competitors out of the market.

For this reason, competitive brokerage web solutions must have strong lead-conversion tools. These tools should route leads to the right agent for a particular customer, enable a fast response through mobile interfaces or apps, empower agents to quickly sift through large volumes of leads and identify those most likely to act, have automation capabilities for longer-term follow up, and allow brokers to oversee the effectiveness of lead-conversion efforts.

4. Integration Capabilities

Today’s software must play well with other systems, allowing brokers to integrate tools to maximize efficiency and capabilities. In a brokerage, integration among websites, CRMs, marketing tools and back-office and transaction management software make agents’ lives easier and better, stoking production and fostering strong allegiances with their brokerage.

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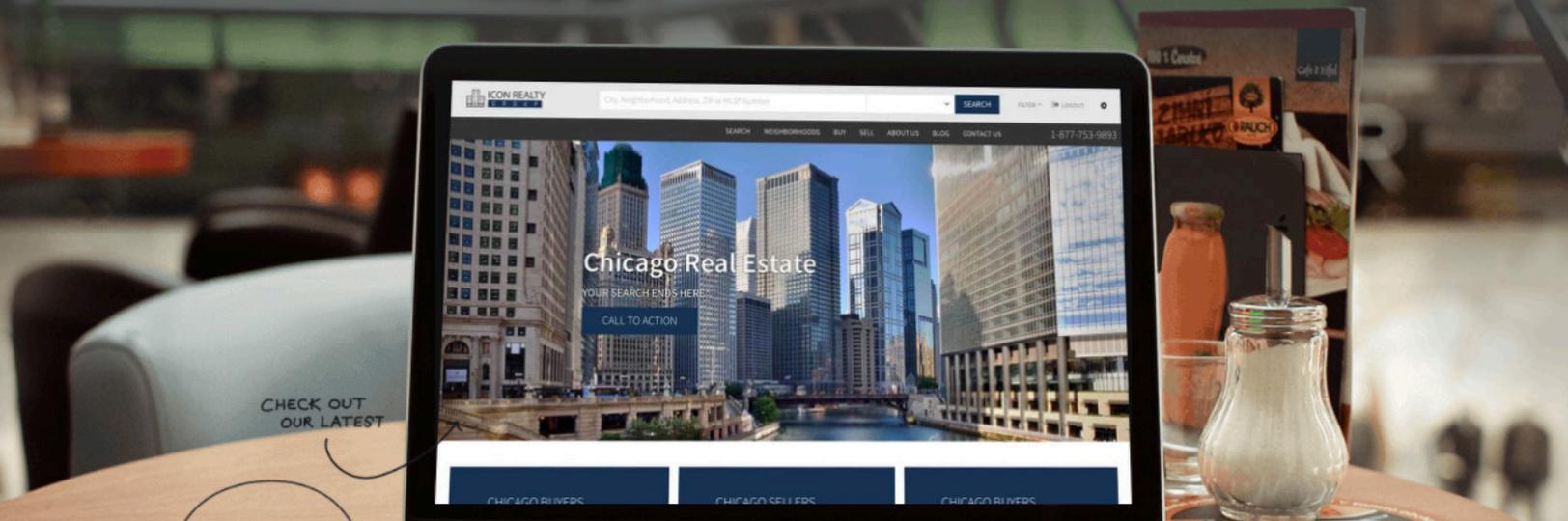


Figure 1. Screen shot of Real Estate Webmasters's homepage.

A web platform in today's environment must have integration capabilities baked into its DNA to enable brokers and their technology partners to offer modern, seamless solutions to agents. In this context, T3 Sixty investigated Real Estate Webmasters as a solution partner.

The Company

British Columbia-based Real Estate Webmasters is a 13-year-old custom web provider with 170 full-time staff. It provides real estate brokerage companies, teams and agents a platform that includes websites featuring IDX search, a customer and lead relationship management platform (CRM), and a content management system (CMS), all of which are integrated into their platform. The firm also offers a supplemental set of services such as design, programming, copywriting, marketing, pay-per-click advertising (from Facebook, Bing and Google AdWords) and SEO-enhancement work.

Costs for the all-in-one tech platform are charged on a per-agent basis, with prices ranging from \$10 to \$50 per agent per month. The company serves approximately 2,500 clients – typically the top 5 percent in their respective markets – and a growing number of enterprise brokerage clients with agent counts of 500 and above. Clients pay for additional

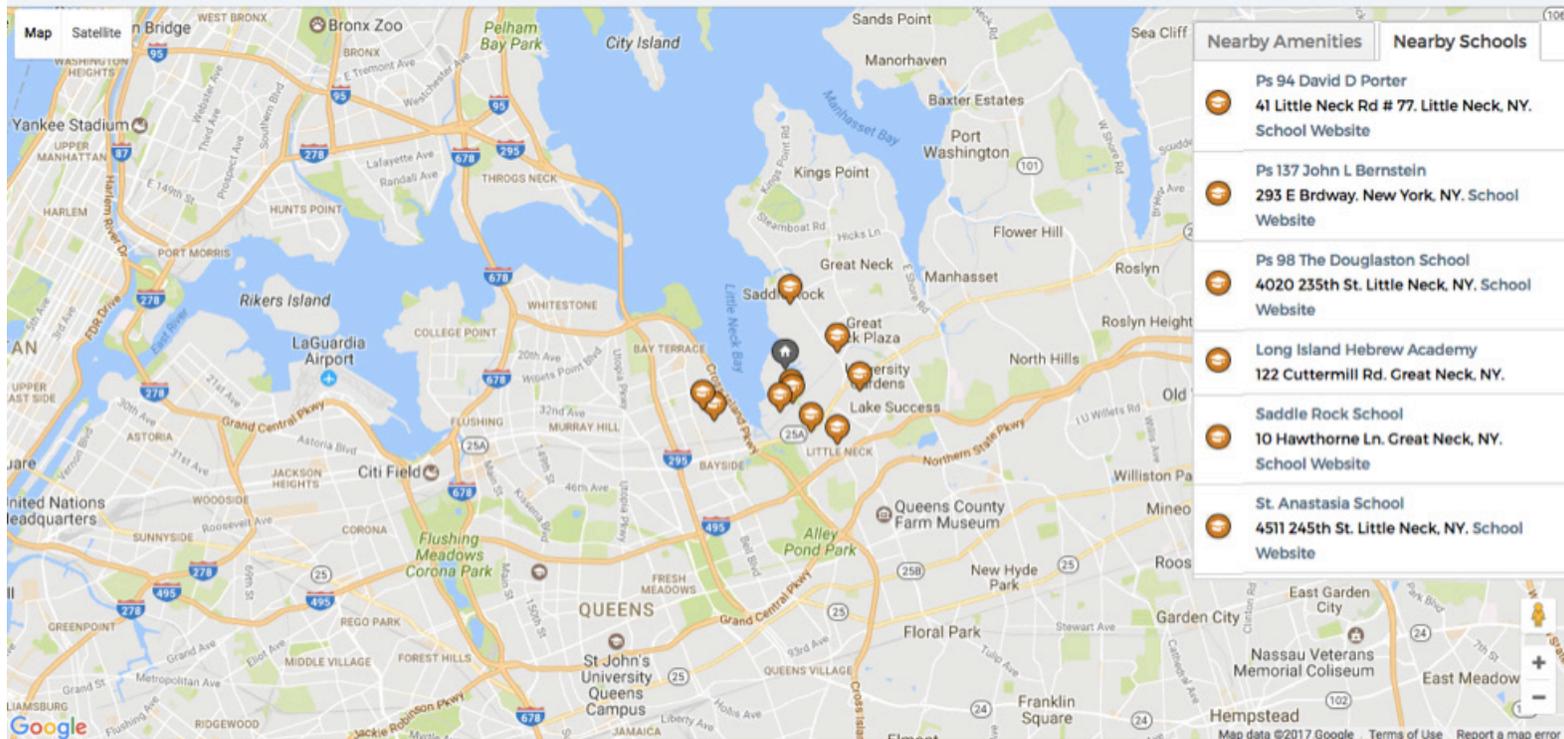


Figure 2. Screen shot of a map on a listing details page on Real Estate Webmasters's enterprise client Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty with school info from Onboard Informatics.

development services outside of the scope of a contract through hourly fees. Real Estate Webmasters's enterprise offering is the focus of this case study.

Their Service Offering

Real Estate Webmasters offers its platform as a baseline for brokers to use as-is, or they can customize it to meet their specific needs. Real Estate Webmasters makes more than 100 developers available to clients for projects, whether to build a native mobile app, add a new mapping feature to listings, build a mobile-tailored version of the website or whatever tech dream a broker has. Real Estate Webmasters websites are tied to a comprehensive back-end system, which includes a content management system, IDX search controls, listing management capability, lead and contact management, agent rosters, and reports. We have evaluated the company's capabilities against the ideal offering outlined above.

1. Customizable Property Search

Real Estate Webmasters's IDX offering includes a base set of features with capabilities common in most IDX solutions. These include:

- Map search, with radius and draw-your-own search.
- Search by approximately two dozen common IDX search fields, such as city, ZIP code, bed, bath and price.

- Ability to include IDX search results using widgets anywhere on a Real Estate Webmasters website.
- Pre-MLS and pocket listing entry.
- Search engine-indexable listings, and indexing features such as the ability to edit listing meta-information to enhance SEO.

The base property search can be modified to the client's choosing, including pre-built customization capabilities, such as:

- Client-modifiable listing detail pages using pre-built widgets, including price change history, status change history, Google directions and neighborhood information.
- The ability to modify the site-wide listing URL framework to boost SEO; for example, users can create structures like www.website.com/city/neighborhood/123-main-street for listings.

Real Estate Webmasters offers its platform as a baseline for brokers to use as-is, or to customize to meet their needs.

With customization, even more changes can be made to the property search including:

- Inclusion of third-party data from Real Estate Webmasters data partners, including Onboard Informatics and RealtyTrac in property search and results.
- Complete customization of search fields, allowing users to conduct MLS field-specific searches.
- Customization of the entire search experience, including search forms, map search and results, listing search results and listing detail pages.

2. SEO Expertise and Content Power

Real Estate Webmasters's content management system allows clients to create new content, redesign existing pages or create new pages themselves. The CMS's features include:

- A content-creation tool that includes what-you-see-is-what-you-get and HTML modes.
- The ability to customize page layout.
- Widgets to include common site elements such as contact forms (for buyers, comparable market analyses, sellers, etc.), featured

The screenshot displays the CRM interface for 'Leads, Unassigned'. On the left is a sidebar with navigation options: '+ Add New', 'Leads', 'Groups', 'Campaigns', 'Action Plans', 'Form Letters', 'Auto-Respond', 'Files', and 'Calendar'. The main content area shows a lead card for 'Johnny Adams' (initials JA) received 10 minutes ago. The lead details include: Phone: 241-251-7264, Email: demolead1@rewdemo.com, and Value: \$376k. Below the details are filters for 'Me', 'Buyer Leads', and 'iOS Leads'. At the bottom are two buttons: a green 'Accept' button and a grey 'Reject' button.

Figure 3. The Real Estate Webmasters’s back-end includes a full-featured CRM, where agents can visualize and manage all of their leads.

listings, a mortgage calculator and a site map.

- A consumer testimonials and reviews submission and management tool.
- An IDX search results widget that displays related content next to specific listings.
- An SEO dashboard that allows clients to verify their site on search engines such as Google and Bing.

Further, Real Estate Webmasters offers content services including content research, writing and SEO work.

3. Integrated Lead Conversion Tools

The Real Estate Webmasters back-end contains a full-featured customer relationship platform, which includes lead-scoring, custom, automated action plans and email marketing. The CRM has the following features:

- A lead-management dashboard showing lead activity, lead information and lead scoring.
- Customizable lead-scoring, enabling users to weight how specific consumer activities on the website affect lead scores.
- Visibility into website visitor search activity.
- Lead-distribution controls, including round-robin, price and search-specific lead routing, and first-to-respond (broadcast and claim) lead features.
- SMS and email auto-response for leads.
- An email system for email blasts, drip marketing and automated listing and search updates.

- Action plan tools that include tasks, emails and the ability to automatically reassign leads when they are not being followed up with according to specified action plans.
- The ability to trigger specific follow-up actions based on consumer activity on the site.
- The ability to specify certain consumer activities as a “conversion,” allowing brokers to automatically track conversion rates.

Clients can monitor their site and agent performance by calling up reports on site traffic, agent response to leads, listings (how many favorites, recommended, viewed and other details from consumer activity) and agent tasks (how many action plans, pending tasks, completed, expired, etc.).

Clients can monitor their site and agent performance in a number of ways by calling up reports on site traffic, agent response to leads, listings, etc.

4. Integration Capabilities

The Real Estate Webmasters platform has an application-programming interface (API) that enables connections with other software systems. Some existing API integrations include:

- **Happy GrassHopper**, an email marketing platform
- **BombBomb**, a video marketing platform
- **Mandrill**, a data-infused tool from email marketing platform MailChimp
- **SendGrid**, an email marketing system
- **Zillow Group**, a lead-gen/advertising platform
- **Dotloop**, a digital transaction management tool
- **Dropbox**, a cloud document storage/collaboration tool

Additional Capabilities

Additional capabilities worth mentioning include:

Custom permissions: A detailed permissions structure allows clients to give agents and other users specific roles, with different back-end permissions. A broker/admin can add new content, reconfigure lead-routing, set appointments and more, while agents only have access to leads and content on their agent-branded sites.

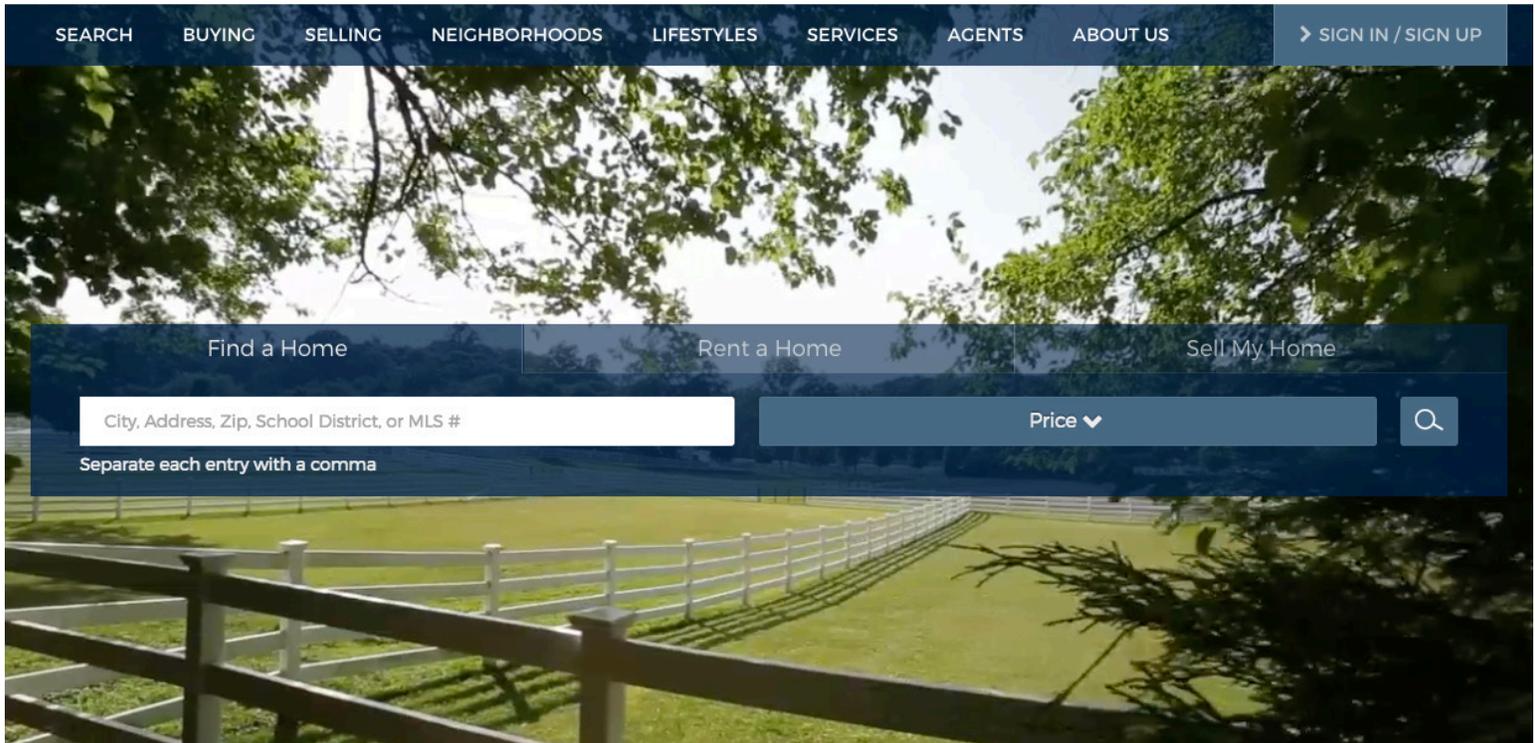


Figure 4. Screen shot of Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty homepage, a customized version of Real Estate Webmasters's "Limited Edition Custom" website offering.

Team-readiness: Real Estate Webmasters's platform also helps brokerages support teams by giving them limited admin roles in the back-end. A team lead can set lead-routing, assign leads to agents and give access to the same group of leads to more than one agent, among other things. The back-end also allows agent team leads to show more than one agent as the contact on listing detail pages and to designate more than one agent as the listing agent.

Marketing tools: The system also has capabilities for creating listing flyers by pulling relevant listing information and allowing agents to choose the feature photo.

The Client

Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty (danielgale.com) has over 900 agents in 27 offices in New York's Nassau, Suffolk and Queens counties. The firm does approximately 3,600 sides totaling \$2.5 billion in sales volume each year. The 94-year-old brokerage is a member of The Realty Alliance.

The Situation

When the brokerage's chief technology officer Jonathan Evans arrived at the firm in 2015, the company website was in need of significant redesign; it hadn't been updated in nine years.

The website was not mobile-responsive, performed poorly with SEO and the bounce rate (the percentage of visitors who viewed just one page on a visit) was significantly higher than market average. The brokerage wanted to increase the number of visitors to the site, have them stay longer and visit more areas to ultimately capture more clients.

The company also wanted a platform that offered capabilities beyond an off-the-shelf IDX website solution, such as integration with other software products, the ability to market in-house listings and new construction, and offer custom search parameters specific to its market. Last but not least, the company wanted to centralize other parts of its business including agent services and reporting.

The company wanted a platform that offered capabilities beyond an off-the-shelf IDX website solution that included several integrations and custom search parameters specific to its market.

The Solution

After approximately six months of development, Daniel Gale's Real Estate Webmasters site debuted on June 15, 2016.

Development started with one of Real Estate Webmaster's "Limited Edition Custom" sites; Daniel Gale was allowed to change the design and operations to its specific needs. These elements included:

- **Homepage:** Incorporating a background homepage video that can be toggled on or off.
- **Search:** Adding a "Rent a Home" and a "Sell My Home" tab on the homepage; customizing the search bar (add translucence and custom search icons); incorporating an auto-complete feature that pulls up possible terms as users type; and including a slew of alias terms such as alternative spellings and abbreviations for popular areas and terms such as "ct" for "court."
- **Design:** Ensuring that the site's design worked the same regardless of the client's screen size.
- **Agent roster:** Adding a "languages spoken" tab to the agent

search, covering the dozens of languages spoken by Daniel Gale agents.

- **Advertising:** Adding the ability to display advertising of its listings and to manage advertising on the back-end.
- **Google cards or “Google Schemas”:** Incorporating meta data into the site to help content show up clearer on search results pages. For example, the results for Google searches for “open houses” in the firm’s market include links to Daniel Gale’s upcoming open houses.
- **New developments:** Building a custom search page that allows visitors to search new developments and enable the company to manage the content on the back-end.
- **Lifestyles page:** Customizing design for a page that features real estate lifestyle search.
- **Listing pages:** Creating a custom lead form, adding a mortgage calculator and making links to videos and virtual tours prominent on listing detail pages. They also added U.S. Census data, weather information and school data from Onboard Informatics.

The following technology partners were integrated with the new web platform:

- **BuySide**, a listing tool that showcases buyer interest
- **ListTrac**, a listing performance-tracking tool
- **Instanet Solutions**, for real estate forms, signatures and transaction management software
- **Clareity**, for brokerage intranet
- **Yext**, for local SEO and directory listing management

Hyperlocal content on key neighborhood pages were created to give SEO a boost.

To boost SEO, the site URL structure, page titles, page descriptions and copy were aligned to support specific search queries. Hyperlocal content on key neighborhood pages were created to give SEO a boost. This included a short description, photos, market stats, an automatically updated market video, a neighborhood video produced by Daniel Gale featuring interviews with local residents, and a search bar that allows users to find homes within the neighborhood.

The Results

Shortly after the launch of the new Daniel Gale site, performance and search results improved by almost every metric. The new site has deeper engagement, more visitors and fosters longer site visits than the previous one. Six months after launch, traffic and organic traffic has

Website Performance

Metric	Before Implementation (Jan 1– Jun 14, 2016)	After Implementation (Jun 15 – Dec 31, 2016)	% Change
Unique visitors	114,965	298,645	260% increase
New visitors	101,050	296,480	293% increase
Returning visitors	94,095	245,020	260% increase
Page views	507,025	3,100,000	611% increase
Average session duration (minutes)	2.33	4.75	200% increase
Page views per session	2.5	5.9	270% increase
Bounce rate	64%	52% ¹	18.6% reduction
Daily registrations	8 ²	40-50 ²	500% increase

1. Bounce rate is still high on account of big jump in social traffic, which typically carries a higher bounce rate.
2. Daily registrations are approximate.

Figure 5. Website performance before and after implementation by Real Estate Webmasters.

Source. Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty.

tripled, Internet leads have more than doubled and the site currently sees between 40 and 50 registrations per day, roughly five times the number of daily registrations of the original site.

All agents now have their own IDX website they can customize with photos, bios, design tweaks and listings under the permissions Daniel Gale set. As subdomains, the agent sites also support SEO for the company site.

In less than a year Daniel Gale has gone from an outdated site to one that is featured in agent recruiting appointments, with the new website playing a meaningful role in the firm's net 200-agent growth in 2016.

When evaluating any product or offering there are always shortcomings. These include:

1. The scope and amount of work required by Daniel Gale to build and customize the new site was more work than they expected. With hindsight, more guidance and clarity from Real Estate Webmasters would have helped David Gale set more realistic expectations and

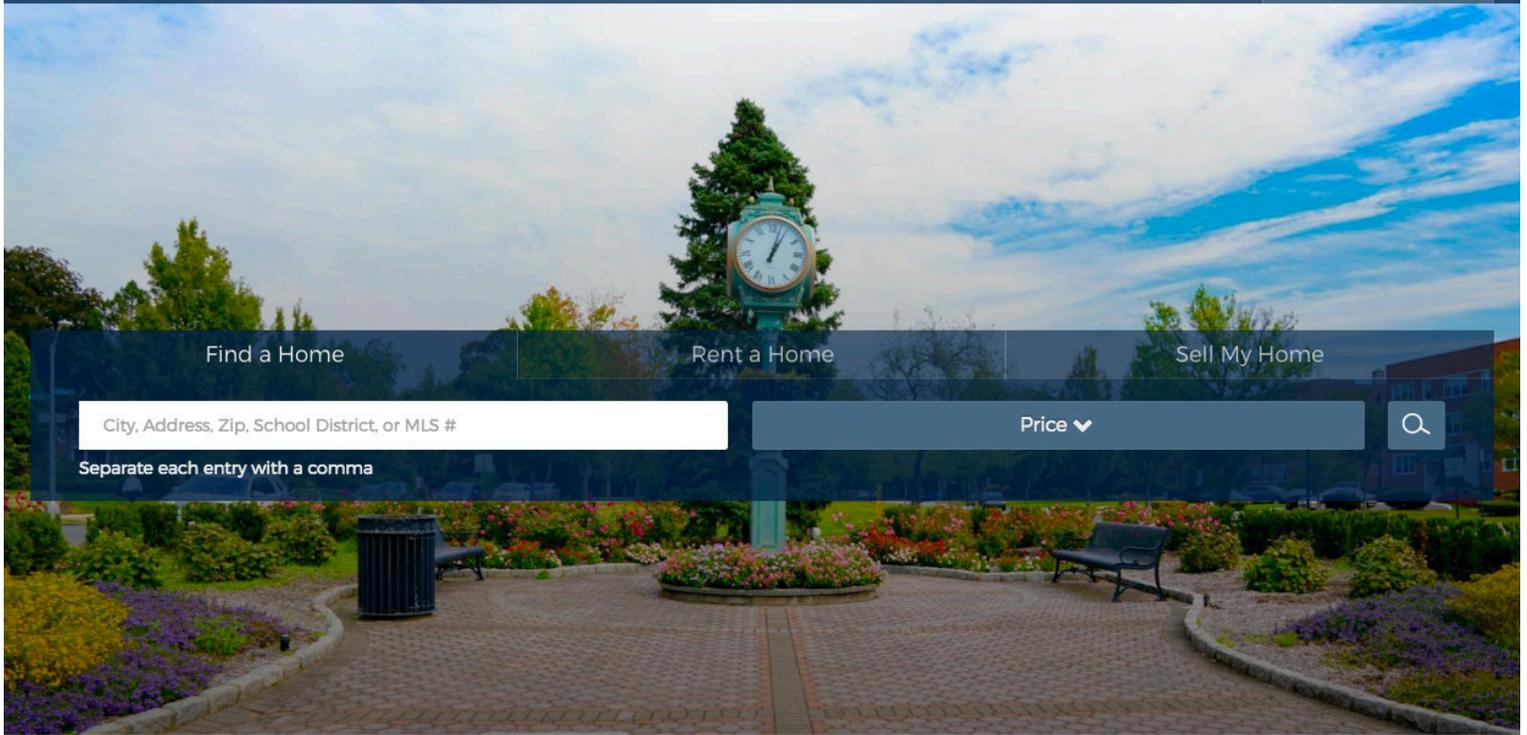


Figure 6. All agents receive their own website with the Real Estate Webmasters enterprise brokerage offering. One of Daniel Gale’s agent sites is seen here.

make for a smoother process.

2. Daniel Gale’s prior site had many URLs that needed to be re-mapped to the new site, and the complexity of this process was not well understood by Daniel Gale staff. When the new site launched, many of the old pages had not been mapped, leading to site visitors encountering a “404 page not found” message. Although Real Estate Webmasters was quick to assist in correcting the orphan pages, it is proposed that in the future Real Estate Webmaster provide more education about this important step and that brokerage companies also take a longer time to identify the appropriate pages.
3. Some adjustments to the site and platform took a long time for Real Estate Webmasters to complete. No two updates take the same time and understanding that some changes can take longer needs to be better communicated by Real Estate Webmasters.

Takeaway

The results were unsurprising but nevertheless impressive. When both parties – the client and the service provider put in the effort, substantial improvements should happen.

Real Estate Webmasters clearly worked hard to produce the desired results for its client, and the client's narrative about the project is that they enjoyed working with the company.

Part of the success of building and launching this website had to do with Daniel Gale's willingness to do their part of the heavy lifting. In T3 Sixty's general assessment, the client plays a big role in website projects, and Daniel Gale played that role well. Also in T3 Sixty's experience, clients usually say that projects like this are "more work than they expected" because in most cases that is what it takes to produce a competitive website presence.

Real Estate Webmasters' enterprise brokerage website and platform product are powerful solutions for brokers wanting a customized high-performance website integrated with an all-in-one back-end platform. In our assessment Real Estate Webmasters is an effective partner for these types of initiatives.



Winning on the Web

A T3 Sixty Case Study commissioned by Real Estate Webmasters to review how one of its clients, Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty, competes on the web at a higher level.

Interviews

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