



c. 100,000
October 2006

The 12 Best Websites You've Never Heard Of!

By Donna Kozik

Need to get word to a client about the area's hottest-selling neighborhood? Drowning in a sea of paperwork and looking for some office support? Want to rid yourself of the mid-day doldrums with a game of Bejeweled?

There's a "best website" for those things — and a whole lot more. Almost everyone has a site or two they turn to daily for industry news, local happenings or a little bit of day-dreaming. We asked real estate pros across the country to share the addresses of their must-visit Internet sites for work — and play.

BEST INVESTOR FORECASTING TOOL

TheSpillZone.com

At The Spill Zone, agents can apply any property to a mathematical model that will predict the strength of the property's location.

Predictions are based on high-end mathematical formulas. The higher a forecast number, the greater chance of property appreciation. The lower the forecast, the greater risk of future price deceleration.

"As a real estate broker and heavy investor, I heavily rely on calculating and forecasting future home valuations in various geographical areas," says Ed Ross, author of *The Spill Zone*. "Why buy in a market that is not going to appreciate or, even worse, depreciate?"

BEST FOR SCOPING OUT A COMMUNITY

Bestplaces.net

Since 1999, Sperling's BestPlaces has provided data on thousands of metro areas, cities and neighborhoods, including information on schools, crime, climate and more. When viewers become members,



Do relocating clients want to know about local schools? Check out BestPlaces.net.

they receive access to premium content, studies and the opportunity to contribute knowledge of the places where they live.

And the best part? Membership is free.

BEST VIRTUAL RECEPTIONIST

Onebox.com

Onebox provides a comprehensive suite of outsourced phone services that let small companies leverage the features and functions of a Fortune 500 phone system — without the associated expense. Its flagship

product, Onebox Receptionist, provides all the features expected from a more expensive, in-house phone system but in a cost-effective service that can be implemented quickly.



There are billions of webpages out there. Explore some websites you've never visited before, and you may find a new favorite that enhances your life — and your business.

Bob Boog, author of *Finding Killer Real Estate Deals: Proven Insider Secrets for Investors, Real Estate Agents and Bargain Hunters Like You*, says it's a website he can't live without.

The company offers an e-mail service that automatically converts any fax into a PDF file and any voice message into a text message or listenable WAV file. "You can tell clients that you have a toll-free message service," says Boog. "Also, you can enjoy being on vacation and still check for voice messages or any faxed contracts, which you can easily print out or just forward to another party."

Boog uses the Onebox.com service to forward multiple copies of the



Can't afford an actual receptionist? Try using a 'virtual' receptionist like Onebox.com.

same document by doing a blind carbon copy to one or several e-mail addresses. He also keeps copies of forms, such as purchase contracts or counter offers, in his online briefcase.

BEST NEIGHBORHOOD MOVIE

Turnhere.com

This website offers visitors a chance to get a close look at neighborhoods in the United States and abroad. Primarily used for planning vacations or finding a good restaurant, TurnHere's films can also be used to get an insider's view about a neighborhood's culture and feel — with some interesting twists.

Foodies can compare fares from the East Coast to the West. The New York, NY, short feature is called "Street Cart Named Desire" and proclaims that some of the best food in the Big Apple can be found not in four-star restaurants, but on the city's ubiquitous street carts. Then take a bite out of Berkeley, CA's "Gourmet Ghetto." Thirsty? Surf over to Imperial Beach, CA, and take part in the hotly contested debate about which bar is located in the most south-westerly point in the United States.

BEST FOR FOREIGN INVESTORS

UnitedStatesTaxation.com

"One site I find completely invaluable to helping me is UnitedStatesTaxation.com," says Amy Lautin, PrudentialWCI, Ft. Lauderdale, FL. The site provides a basic introduction to United States tax laws as they apply to foreign investors. "I have a lot of South American and European clients looking for properties in south Florida, and the tax information, often in their native tongue, is just so helpful." The site gives information in English, Spanish, French, German, Italian, Chinese and Arabic.

Boca Raton attorney Richard Lehman provides the site's information, which includes points on U.S. taxation of foreign corporations,

BEST SITE YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF... **RealEstateJournal.com**

As part of the Dow Jones family, the prestigious RealEstateJournal.com is definitely worth visiting regularly.

The award-winning site offers agents and clients solid reporting on residential and commercial real estate happenings. It provides negotiating tips, sales trends and relocation tools for people who are moving up, seeking a new neighborhood or considering a job offer out of their area.

"It offers the latest news, plus the ability to research a new city, determine the best places to live and track down the sales history of a house," says Beth Brody of Pacific Union GMAC Real Estate in Greenbrae, CA. "You can also find luxury properties, second homes and vacation homes." The site has a database of distinctive properties, in addition to more than 2 million residential property listings.

Content for RealEstateJournal.com comes from the editorial resources of *The Wall Street Journal*, WSJ.com and its own editorial team — an array of respected columnists and other key resources.

tax planning before immigrating to the U.S. and tax planning for the foreign real estate investor.

Lautin is so impressed, she wants to give credit where it's due. "I have never contacted the people who run the site, but one of these days I will call to thank them," she says.

BEST FOR FINDING A VET

Insiderpages.com

Insider Pages helps homeowners find businesses, complete with user reviews, in their areas. It's a great service when clients come from out of the area and need to figure out, for example, where to get themselves — and their pets — groomed.

"Two years ago, my wife and I decided to remodel our house, but we didn't know any contractors," says Insider Pages CEO Stu MacFarlane. They looked in the local phone book but weren't sure whether the listed businesses were reliable. "I ended up going from house to house asking my neighbors. I thought there had to be a better way," he says.

At the site, locals share their reviews of businesses. "We strive to provide you with a better way to find a great dentist, hairstylist, pediatrician or even a hypnotherapist," says MacFarlane. The site now has more than 500,000 customer reviews from across the U.S. and over one million people visit it each month.

BEST FOR UMBRELLA ALERTS

Weatherplus.com

No need to wait for 10 minutes after the hour because this site offers up-to-the-minute information and video of area weather forecasts anytime. Keep tabs on the weather at your house, the soccer field where your kids are playing or your favorite national park. Puttering around the garden? Going boating? Want to prep your small business in case a hurricane strikes? There's information on all that, too.



Taking clients out? Avoid running into a storm with Weatherplus.com.

Michelle Wingate is with MMI Associates, Coldwell Banker Howard Perry and Walston, in Raleigh, NC. "The local WRAL radar maps are my favorite," says Wingate. "When it begins to

rain, even if it's miles away, I am on that site looking for the direction and intensity," adds the self-proclaimed weather nut. "I cannot live without it, and it also acts as an escape."

BEST FOR PRESENT AND ASPIRING 'NEATNIKS'

HousekeepingChannel.com

HousekeepingChannel.com is for those who are keen on clean. It



PHOTO BY DORI O'CONNELL | DREAMSTIME.COM

Good housekeepers — and those who want to be — may want to tune in to the HousekeepingChannel.com.

has a mission of helping viewers clean, protect, enhance or, in other words, spiff up home environments with tried and true processes and practices. Site contributors feature some of the world's top cleaning experts, such as Tara Aronson (better known as "Mrs. Clean Jeans"). There's a laundry list of articles, too, ranging from tips for getting rid of fleas to banishing spots with acne creams.

BEST NEW LISTING SERVICE

Listingbook.com

Listingbook, based in the Triad area of North Carolina and in the process of expanding both regionally and nationally, partners with MLS systems to provide targeted marketing services on listings with an online interactive community comprised of agents, buyers and sellers. It identifies potential buyers, promotes listings to these buyers and then provides agents and sellers with results of the promotion in one streamlined process.

"Listingbook is a valuable new tool for my buyers and sellers. The fact that the information is current and not delayed gives my clients power to search new listings and changes almost as they happen," says Nikole McClanahan, RE/MAX 1st Choice, Greensboro, NC.

Listingbook's suite of online, automated services also provides

Luxurious vacation ideas await you at Luxurylink.com.



the integration of interactive buyer notes, property notes, agent notes and private notes on listing agents, and their clients can communicate in real time.

BEST ADDICTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Popcap.com

For an online escape — and a chance to beat your personal best at Bejeweled — check out popcap.com. It features puzzle and word games for PC and Mac that can be played for five minutes or five hours. Popular challenges include Alchemy, Bookworm, Bonnie's Bookstore, Chuzzle and Zuma.

BEST FOR TRAVELERS — AND DREAMERS

Luxurylink.com

This site is a great place to start planning your dream vacation — or simply dream of far away places.

Founded in 1997, Luxury Link is an online luxury travel resource showcasing over 1,000 hotels and resorts, cruises, tours and villas in more than 60 countries. It offers auctions, fixed-price offers, a la carte bookings and gift certificates.

"What makes it such a great site is that they have dream packages from the most exclusive destinations in the world at incredibly discounted prices," says Chappy Adams, President of Illustrated

Properties in Palm Beach County, FL. "But the fun starts when they combine that with the excitement of an auction, and you're able to bid on and hopefully win one of those exclusive offers."



BEST 'FORE' GOLF FANATICS

Golfbuzz.com

Calling itself a "My Space" for the golf-obsessed, golfbuzz.com has golf-related news updates, member profiles, etiquette tips and lesson instructions. Visitors can meet potential new playing partners, and there's a way to

Attention golf lovers! Golfbuzz.com is sure to pique your interest.

invite friends to join you for a round.

Great for those on the move is the site's course finder, where you type in a ZIP code or airport code and discover all the courses in the area, complete with driving directions, weather updates and course reviews.

Donna Kozik (DonnaKozik.com) recently earned an APEX 2006 Grand Award for Publication Excellence for her national feature contributions to Real Estate Executive magazine. Kozik, who owns a writing, marketing and consulting business in San Diego, is also the national editor and marketing expert for the real estate technology site Housetopia.org. ■