

# TITLE *News*

MARCH-APRIL 1997

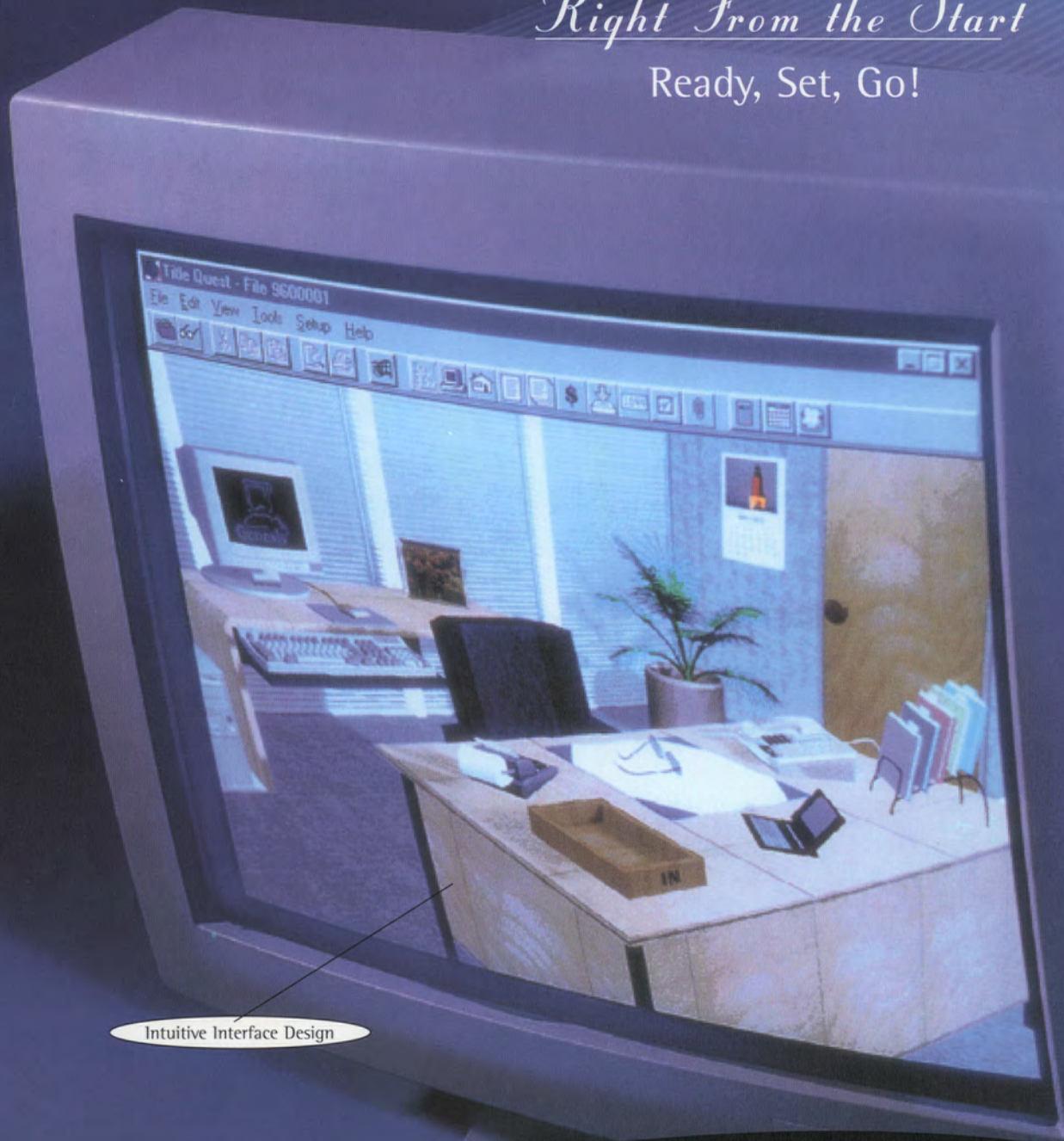


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# TITLE *News*

MARCH • APRIL 1997

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On the cover: As lenders and brokers turn increasingly toward bundling residential transaction settlement services, more home buyers are encountering a comprehensive list of closing costs on their settlement sheets - including those for title work. A growing number of buyers as a result are asking about title insurance and taking a more active role in the decision to purchase the coverage. All this points to a newly emerging priority market audience for the consideration of title executives. For a discussion on what can be involved in beaming a title insurance sales message to home buying consumers, please turn to page 11.

## FEATURES

### **4** State Regulation, Consumer Safeguards Sought in ALTA Policy Change

State insurance laws have been pre-empted by federal regulatory and judicial developments. Under new policy approved by the ALTA Board of Governors, the Association might not oppose federal legislation or regulation allowing banks to own title insurance agencies or insurers - if it recognizes the pre-eminence of state insurance regulation and includes adequate consumer safeguards.

### **7** Title Claims and Electronic Commerce - Remember to Ask: 'What If?'

*By Albert Rush*

Through increased claims awareness, training and professionalism, title industry claims experience has improved significantly. Now that "faster and cheaper" title service is a mantra for real estate lenders, does the title industry response through electronic commerce point to a reversal of the claims trend?

### **11** New Priority Market for Title Insurance?

Marketing communication with home buyers calls for rethinking the approaches previously used with more traditional audiences. Two veteran title executives and an advertising agency professional explore the possibilities.

### **15** Workplace Dynamics Are Dramatic

Leadership instead of management? Empowerment, flexibility and teamwork commanding greater value among employees than financial compensation? All this and more promise to make life abundantly interesting for title executives in the years immediately ahead.

### **17** When Public Records Move to the Web...

*By Todd A. Hartle*

State and county governments have begun efforts toward uniform property records access by leveraging public data stored through their operations and migrating it to the Web. As an increasing volume of public records is moved to the Internet, title managers will encounter an intensified need to demonstrate that their plant access systems are of major importance to the real estate market.

### **20** Designing Killer Web Sites

*By Todd A. Hartle*

To be successful on-line, a title company cannot just take what it has in print and move it to the electronic realm. Experienced designers implement principles that make Web sites attractive and easy to navigate.

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## State Regulation, Consumer Safeguards Objectives Sought in ALTA Policy Change

**F**ederal regulatory and judicial developments broadening the powers of national banks that have occurred within recent years have pre-empted state insurance laws. Consequently, members of the ALTA Board of Governors have approved the following change in policy recommended by the Association Government Affairs Committee:

*ALTA does not oppose financial services affiliation provided that state regulation of insurance is preserved through absolute functional regulation and that adequate consumer safeguards are adopted, either at the federal or state level, or at both levels.*


If federal legislation or regulation recognizes the pre-eminence of state insurance regulation, ALTA under the new policy might not oppose federal legislation or regulation allowing banks to own title insurance agencies or insurers, as long as title insurance companies and agencies also can own banks. In addition, the Association will seek recognition of state real property law for title insurance sales and underwriting, and the necessity of consumer protection in mortgage related transactions.

ALTA has recognized the shift in the battle lines that will require widespread member support on the bank powers issue. Legislation allowing "affiliation" between banks and insurance is expected to draw opposition from banks at the federal and state level if this includes significant state regulatory and consumer protection burdens. As developments continue, ALTA is ready to

offer assistance to regional and state title associations as state legislation takes center stage in the struggle over bank regulation.

ALTA and other insurance trade associations have fought for more than 20 years to keep banks out of the insurance industry. However, banks have gained legal entry through federal court decisions, federal/state regulatory interpretations and state statutes. As this expansion is taking place, there is no effective regulation for insurance powers. Although ALTA successfully challenged bank sale of title insurance in federal court (*ALTA v. Ludwig*) and held the line on bank powers in the 104th Congress, it is clear to the Association leadership that a policy change is necessary to protect the interests of title insurers and agents in a changing marketplace.

Legislation allowing affiliation (ownership of insurance companies by banks and vice versa) is under consideration in the U. S. House of Representatives, and in over 20 states. The other insurance trade groups--agents and underwriters, life and property/casualty--changed their positions last year and now support affiliation. A comparable alignment by ALTA and its regional/state affiliates is needed to maintain state regulation and the integrity of the title insurance product.

Further information is available from ALTA Legislative Counsel Ann vom Eigen in the Washington office of the Association (E-mail is at [service@alta.org](mailto:service@alta.org); or call toll free, 800-787-ALTA). 

*Legislation allowing 'affiliation' between banks and insurance is expected to draw opposition from banks at the federal and state level if this includes significant regulatory and consumer protection burdens*





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## A MESSAGE FROM THE UNDERWRITER CHAIRMAN



**1**996 was a good revenue year in most of the country for insurers and agents. The economy favored us with its Goldilocks scenario: not too hot...not too cold...just about right, and interest rates had a pretty smooth ride. But nobody is resting easy. As it looks now, 1997 will be more of the same. Nobody is resting easy.

Last month, I was asked to respond to a set of questions by a staff writer for *National Real Estate Investor*—one of those annual tidbits about the state of our industry. His final question was the hardest: What do you feel is the single most critical issue facing the title insurance industry, and why?

My response quoted Jimmy Buffet and talked about occupations not being around if the industry couldn't respond to the demands being made of it. What we do is not going to disappear. But who is going to be doing it?

Our industry is at a crossroads, with significant choices. Not only because of technology, but also because of consolidations in the lending and real estate brokerage communities. These customer groups are aggressively looking for ways to participate in our industry and/or develop substitute products because they don't perceive enough value for what we must charge, or we just don't meet their service needs in the first place.

I react to these activities as a wake-up call, not an air raid siren. This increased interest in our business creates enormous opportunities for us to establish stronger ties with our customers in developing technology-based strategic partnerships that demonstrably improve service and reduce costs.

It is high management fashion these days to talk in terms of reinvention, restructuring and reengineering. I think reinvention is the applicable word for our situation. The companies that compete most successfully in 1997 forward already have shifted their strategic course. Is your company one of them? For most of us, the primary challenge is not technological or regulatory, but rather cultural and emotional. Title insurance, by the very nature of its product, bred a lot of managers to be risk averse. Good luck.

The industry must adapt to the forces of change, which are having a significant effect on every partner to the real estate transfer process. I love it. There is a lot of opportunity in this turmoil if you don't stick your head in the sand.

Charles H. Foster, Jr.



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# Title Claims and Electronic Commerce Remember to Ask: 'What If?'

By Albert Rush

**A**round 50 B.C., Heraclitus of Greece said that you can't step twice into the same river. The river changes constantly and so, ventured Heraclitus, does the inner person.

Change has been a recurring theme in these pages and at industry conventions in recent years. The message is loud and clear: Those who do not prepare to participate in "electronic commerce" will be left behind.

With all of this as background, some of us wonder where our claims experience may be headed. Barely 10 years ago, claims resulting from title and settlement operations were considered a serious threat to profitability for the industry as a whole. At the time, actual loss payments were averaging about 9-11 percent of gross revenues annually. Viewed from the standpoint of the life of a policy, it was estimated that claims consumed 12-15 percent of every premium dollar received by title underwriters.

Through increased claims awareness, training and professionalism, industry claims experience has improved significantly in recent years. But now, in light of coming changes, many of us are naturally concerned that claims may increase, our gains may be reversed, and profitability may be threatened once again.

## Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)

Many businesses (although not many title companies) now are using EDI to exchange documents and data with other businesses. EDI is a standard by which computers communicate with each other in formats called "transaction sets."

When these exchanges take place over

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## Will reliance on EDI cause an increase in our claims experience?

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private dedicated telephone lines, they are faster and more secure than mail, fax or Internet transmissions, although they also can be done on the Internet. Over the past few years, EDI standards for the title industry have been designed through joint efforts of ALTA and the Mortgage Bankers Association of America. Everyone expects use of EDI to mushroom in the title and mortgage lending industries in the next few years.

Will reliance on EDI cause an increase in our claims experience? I don't think so.

As more and more lenders, title companies and related service providers imple-

ment EDI, we should see a speeding up of title order processing, but this should not necessarily create an accident-prone environment. Title and settlement service providers traditionally have been judged in terms of turnaround times and ability to handle volumes of business on short notice. We should be able to do just fine with EDI.

On the other hand, where EDI is implemented, claims experience should improve to the extent personnel are no longer pressured to close relying on miscommunicated or misunderstood verbal messages, or information and releases "to come."

## Automated Loan Origination

With the combined capabilities of loan origination software programs and EDI, lenders today have systems available to automate most of the loan origination process.

With a laptop computer, the loan originator can interview a prospect at home, a shopping mall, or any place of business, and within an hour may pre-qualify the borrower, shop for mortgage terms, lock in a rate, and complete a loan application. In some cases, the entire process from application to closing can be completed within 24 hours.

An important feature of these systems is that the borrower's personal and financial data is entered only once, then stored for later uses such as loan underwriting, ordering title work, and document preparation. These systems permit fast and accurate preparation of both standard and custom forms, which are formatted to accommodate government regulations and lender re-



*The author is chairman of the ALTA Claims Administration Committee and is senior vice president and national counsel-claims prevention for First American Title Insurance Company. He received*

*his juris doctorate from the University of Southern California Law Center, and was engaged in the private practice of law in Los Angeles and Santa Ana before joining First American in 1982. He has been a frequent speaker on escrow, title and claims topics across the nation, at meetings of the title industry, escrow and bar associations, and of the mortgage lending community.*



quirements.

While some lenders have been slow to convert to automated systems, others are enthusiastically implementing and forming business strategies around them.

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac have led the way in exploiting this technology by endorsing use of loan origination systems, and Fannie even offers its own system under the "Desktop Originator" brand name.

Noting the efficiencies these systems provide, Fannie and Freddie are urging lenders to reduce loan processing times to five days or less, and Fannie seeks to cut costs to the consumer by an average of \$1,000 per deal.

These developments have greatly changed the mortgage lending business, making it much more competitive and cutting profit margins. As a result, mortgage lenders have become more creative than ever in searching for ways to market their products, reduce overhead, and increase their volume of business.

All of this has ramifications for title companies and our claims experience. Here are some thoughts. First, there has been, and will continue to be, great pressure on title and settlement service providers to process transactions faster and cheaper. "Faster and cheaper" has become a mantra for mortgage lenders. It is the key to their ability to compete and remain profitable, and it is a trend strongly promoted by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

The effects of this trend vary from place to place. In urban areas, where platted subdivisions are common and computerized title plants are in place, there appears to be little or no problem in servicing a lender's order for title insurance in two or three days. Among the reasons many orders do not close within this time frame are delays in obtaining payoff demands from existing lenders, and homeowner or fire insurance.

In other areas, such as small communities or outlying rural areas which typically are not served by a reliable computerized title plant, more time may reasonably need to be taken. Among the factors determining turnaround time in these areas are condition and availability of reliable prior title examinations (sometimes known as a "starter," "base," or "prior), difficulty in interpreting legal descriptions, and the need for a current survey, water test, or other information requiring on-site inspection.

With the passage of time, and it won't be long, we should expect that lenders will demand faster and cheaper service even in rural and outlying areas. As an inducement, they may eliminate requirements involving on-site inspections.

The tougher question is how title and settlement service providers might cut costs without taking shortcuts likely to increase claims. Certainly, the growth of electronic commerce may foster efficiencies which may then justify cost reductions. For now, title companies are responding to cost consciousness in the marketplace by offering cheaper alternative title insurance products which pare down coverages and reallocate risks to the lender.

For example, in California, First American offers a lender's limited coverage policy insuring only vesting information (as shown on the last deed of record purporting to affect property under search), property tax information (as shown by the latest assessment roll), and that no lien or mortgage affects the land other than as shown in the policy.

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*The tougher question is how title and settlement service providers might cut costs without taking shortcuts likely to increase claims.*

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Recently, we issued such a policy for a \$100 premium, covering a home in Berkeley. The vestees of record were two men, Alan and Cornelio, as joint tenants. The lender parted with \$100,000 in exchange for a mortgage signed only by Alan, relying on a grant deed from Cornelio to Alan, on which Cornelio's signature was forged. This risk is not covered by the limited mortgage policy. Alan has relocated to Amsterdam. The loan is non-performing.

Since their mortgage is only enforceable against his one half interest in the property, the lender was alarmed by a rumor that Alan is HIV-positive. If he dies before Cornelio, Alan's interest will automatically pass to Cornelio as the surviving joint tenant, entirely free of the lender's security interest.

A second concern we may have as mortgage lenders trend toward automated loan originations is that contacts between the property owner/borrower and the title company may be further minimized in ways that encourage fraud or permit mistakes and misunderstandings leading to claims.

The present trend envisions two points

of contact with the borrower in the loan origination process: First, when the loan originator takes the loan application and enters data required for the transaction and, second, at or in connection with closing when the settlement officer obtains signatures on mortgage documents. The second step, closing, may be further streamlined or eliminated as lenders may choose to do their own closings in house, or accomplish closings using EDI.

In this scheme of things, it should be clear that the loan originator, making initial contact, should be more than a salesperson. He or she should be well trained to understand mortgage products and the fundamentals of loan underwriting.

Likewise, it's important to us that these individuals understand the fundamentals of title underwriting so they are alert to such risks as impersonation and forgery (particularly between spouses), questions of competency and capacity (which could give rise to claims based on mental incompetency, inability to understand the English language, or illiteracy), the existence of off-record matters (such as problems or claims of adverse possession), and problems arising from property descriptions which involve more than one neatly surveyed and subdivided lot.

In this environment, title companies may want to know something about the practices and professionalism of their lender customers. Likewise, they may be interested to see that settlements continue to be performed by reliable and qualified personnel. In some areas, additional training of settlement officers may be in order to improve understanding of title insurance coverages and underwriting issues.

It may be a good idea, upon receipt of each title order, to routinely mail a letter to the property owner, at the address shown on the local property tax roll, thanking that owner for "selecting" your title company in connection with a pending transaction. Where this procedure is followed, it has prevented some frauds and forgeries.

### **Automated Loan Underwriting**

The last function to be automated in mortgage origination has been loan underwriting, but now it's here. Automated or "electronic" loan underwriting systems employ artificial intelligence to weigh factors traditionally considered by human underwriters. Proponents of automated underwriting systems say they are faster and more objective than humans. Both Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac generally endorse

*continued on page 21*



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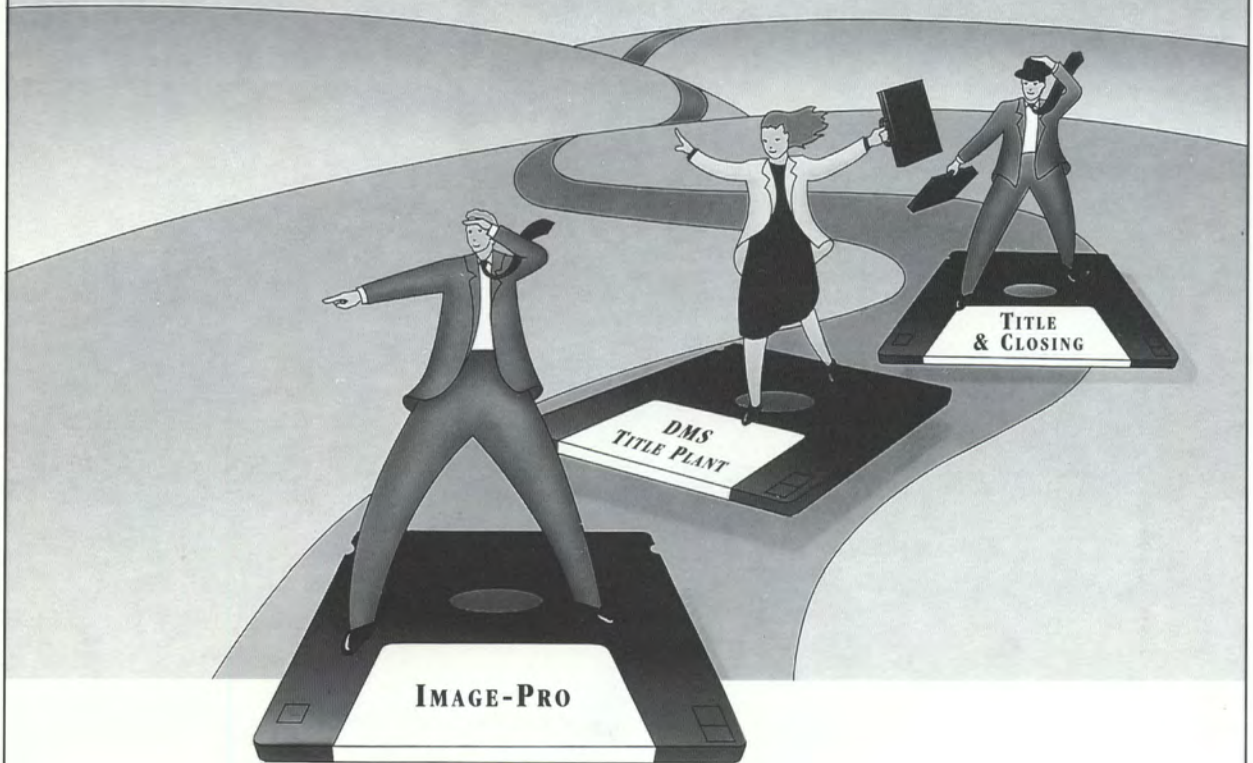
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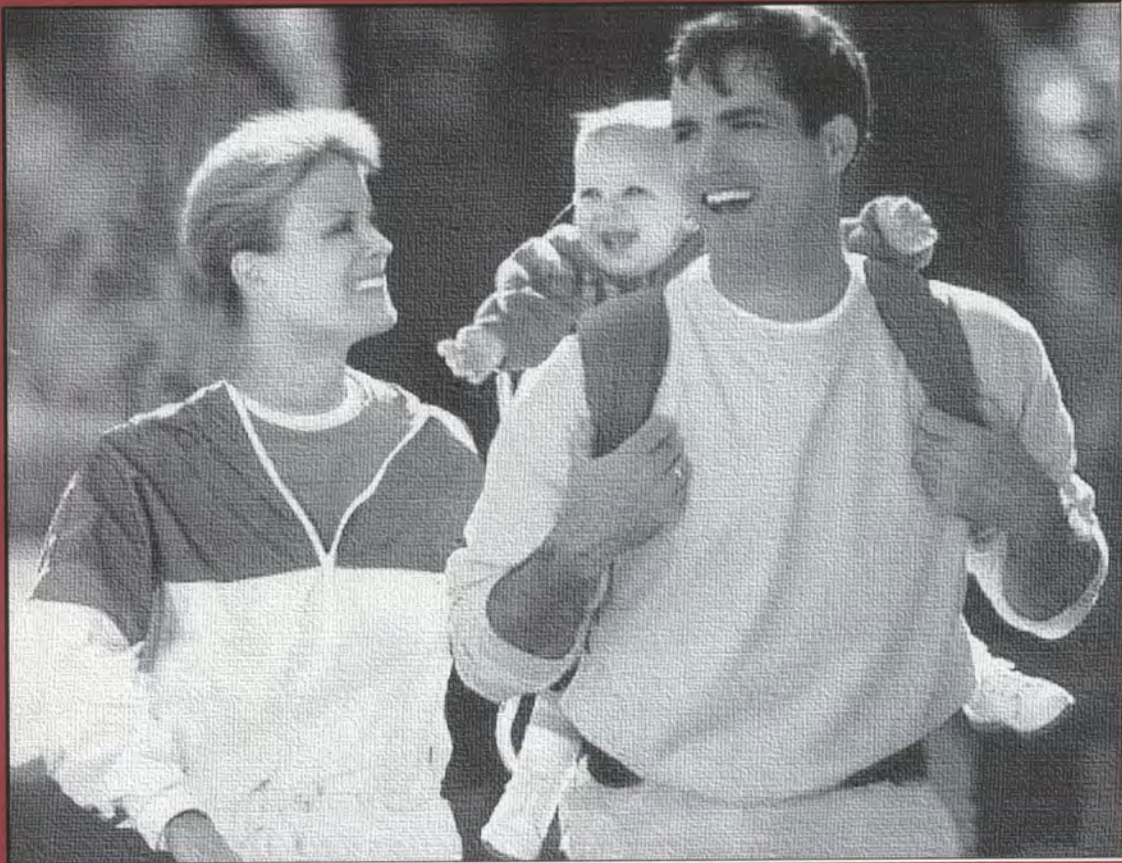
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## NEW PRIORITY MARKET AUDIENCE FOR TITLE INSURANCE?

**A**s lenders and brokers turn increasingly toward bundling residential transaction settlement services in response to competitive pressures, more home buyers as a result are encountering a comprehensive list of closing costs on their settlement sheets—including those for title work.

With growing consumer attention focused on title evidencing and title insurance along with other services linked to closing costs, steadily increasing numbers of buyers can be expected to ask about what they are paying for. All of which sets the stage for the buyer to become much more of a player in title insurance purchase decisions.

Has the buyer already begun to emerge as a new, higher priority market audience for title managers to consider in

some locales? Definitely so, according to what apparently was the majority view among title executives with an interest in the subject who assembled for a discussion during the recent ALTA Annual Convention in Los Angeles.

With an awareness of buyer ascendancy in the market acknowledged, three advertising/marketing professionals then addressed the challenge of effectively reaching this new priority audience through title company advertising. Presenting their views were Randy Farmer, senior vice president, Lawyers Title Insurance Corporation, Richmond, VA; John Bell, executive vice president, The Security Abstract & Title Co., Inc., Wichita, KS, and Peggy Kono, senior vice president and management supervisor for the Great Western Bank account





**ALTA Public Relations Committee Chairman John Bell and Peggy Kono, senior vice president and management supervisor for the Great Western Bank account at Dailey & Associates, Los Angeles advertising agency, discuss the emerging importance of home buyers as a title insurance market audience. (Photograph by Cathi Borner)**

at Dailey & Associates, a leading Los Angeles advertising agency. Farmer and Bell currently are members of the ALTA Public Relations Committee and are a past chairman and present chairman, respectively.

In their remarks, Farmer, Bell and Kono agreed that the title manager developing ad strategy for an audience of home buying consumers faces a communications challenge substantially different from that linked to more traditional title company markets such as lenders, brokers, builders and the like. Projecting a significantly larger consumer advertising budget also was prominently mentioned, with probable emphasis on electronic media to reach the desired numbers of viewers.

### Home Buyer Emphasis Grows

Farmer said the consumer is better informed, more involved and is playing a bigger role in the buying and selling of residential real estate. He observed that more and more consumers are doing their homework before turning to real estate agents, and that marketing communication directed toward home buyers has begun to receive emphasis in a growing number of locales across the country.

The Lawyers Title executive added that electronic marketing communication directed to home buyers has expanded from local residential listings on cable television and broker sponsored buyer education shows to the Internet and its millions of viewers. Since it now is possible to use the web to shop for a home, a mortgage and home owner insurance, he said, title insurance and related services cannot be expected to remain off the screen.

As title managers concentrate more on the buyer audience, those in the title business will be faced with defining demographics (age, sex, income, education, etc.) and psychographics (those sharing a similar interest so a single message can be

effective regardless of demographics) for industry products and services, Farmer declared.

In an example, Farmer said an 11:00 p.m. television spot on the local network news affiliate station might offer an attractive cost per thousand viewers—but have a bottom line cost so high that desired frequency of play cannot be achieved. On the other hand, a cable channel might have higher cost per thousand viewers but be more effective because it permits greater frequency due to lower cost for air time.

The variety of available media makes determining consumer advertising strategy a complex process, according to Farmer. Besides the web and radio, there are broadcast, cable and satellite television. In addition, there are print media including newspapers with home sale classified sections, Sunday real estate sections and special tabloid sections on homes. There are local and regional home related magazines and real estate buyer guides normally distributed free to the public. There is direct mail that allows the targeting of specific zip

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codes and census tracts within zip codes—and includes merge mail with coupon packets. Adding to the list are billboards, bus and taxi cards and special promotional events such as home shows and parades of homes.

Evaluating performance in consumer advertising is difficult but essential, the Lawyers Title executive added. Techniques to be considered include scheduling different ads in the same media under different circumstances to indicate relative effectiveness and, conversely, scheduling the same ad in different media under the same circumstances to assess individual media. Depending on individual title company objectives, measurement can include number of inquiries generated, cost per inquiry, pre-imposed awareness studies and following up on what prompted respondents to contact the title organization.

Farmer also recommended the inclusion of a “call to action” in advertising—such as the offer of free consumer home buying literature by the title company.

### Research Reveals Change

Bell said market research by Security Abstract has revealed dramatic changes for consideration by management in planning the direction of company advertising and promotion. These include a move from managing broker to agent as a primary influence in placing title business after brokers had their agents become independent agents, along with a corresponding upswing in the influence of the seller in helping with title company selection.

At the beginning of a 14-year period, Bell said, a company market survey revealed the managing broker was named as primary selection influence by 67 percent of respondents. By the end of the period, the managing broker was so named by only 5 percent. Over the same period, the independent real estate agent’s primary designation rose from 14 to 60 percent—while the seller climbed from 4 to 17 percent.

In addition, an analysis by Security Abstract disclosed that title orders arising from so-called miscellaneous sources constituted some 16 percent of company business—and that virtually all of these were connected to personal contacts with company employees.

Adding to the matrix of market knowledge, Bell said, is a determination by the company that a great majority of residential transactions in the Wichita market are cross sales as home ownership changes, typically within a five to 10-year period. In

*continued on page 22*



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# Workplace Dynamics Are Dramatic

**T**raditional management techniques will be replaced with leadership skills in successful business operations as the nationwide frequency of employee turnover increases during the remaining years of this century. This involves a conscious effort by people managers to facilitate high performance by all categories of workers—helping individuals reach their potential and then raising that potential.

With younger workers emerging as a major resource in the mid 90s, managers have watched a robust economy underscore the critical nature of a reduced supply of qualified labor. Worker distrust of employers has been exacerbated by widespread corporate downsizing, and is linked as an important human resources characteristic with the typical preference of younger workers for empowerment, flexibility and teamwork as priority items outranking compensation.

All this has dramatically altered the future perspective for those who guide business organizations including title companies.

Despite this scenario, the valued work ethic long associated with preferred employees has not disappeared—only changed—ALTA members attending the recent Annual Convention of the Association were told by Roger Herman, authority on workplace trends and author of *Turbulence! Challenges and Opportunities in the World of Work*.

In the 90s, Herman pointed out, it is not unusual for an employee to say: "I see what you want done. Give me the tools to do it, give me the support I need, and get out of my way. And I'll get it done."

By the turn of the century, average job tenure in this country will drop from the current 4.6 years to the range of 3.5 years, Herman said. This will be driven by the strong desire of younger employees to change as they seek to control their careers.

It will be increasingly incumbent upon managers to initiate specific actions designed to encourage longer job tenure by individual employees, he added. This can be viewed as a double advantage: retaining productive workers for longer periods while lessening the burden connected with discharging those who fail to measure up.

In addition, Herman said the increased frequency in turnover should make it easier to replace highly motivated workers who become bored and leave as the business cycle turns down, with "maintenance" level employees who ideally remain on board until the climate picks up again and

the time arrives to once more seek higher producing individuals.

As the turnover rate increases, Herman said he expects to see more employers to look beyond the cost of a worker to the cost benefit. By the end of this century, he looks for federal legislation mandating fully portable employee benefit packages. Quantity and quality of benefits are expected to become increasingly important as organizations compete for higher calibre workers in this type of environment.

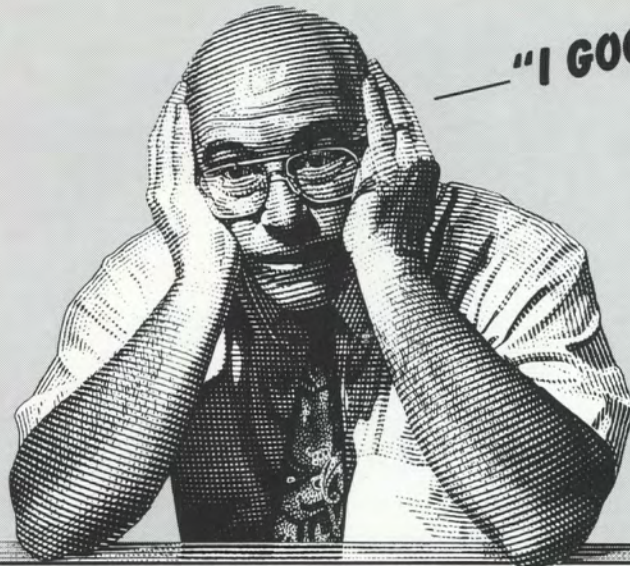
Another development anticipated by

*continued on page 23*



**Herman: Managerial actions will encourage longer job tenure**





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# When Property Records Move to the Net...

By Todd A. Hartle

All title insurance companies and title plant managers should be acutely aware that the Internet is the emerging agent of change for title information access. State and county governments have begun efforts toward uniform property records access by leveraging the public data stored through their operations and migrating it to the Web. What does this shift mean for title plants in an age where in-

agement remains unconvinced regarding the value of Web access to real property data, county clerks and recorders can be expected to pursue Internet technology, regardless of any potential impact on private title plants.

Pressures continue to build for those in public offices, as they face a growing volume of real property documentation emerging from steadily climbing nationwide population figures. They struggle to maintain records for public inspection as required by law with systems that still focus on addressing needs of the 70s. As we move into the next century, county clerks and recorders lack the budgets for implementing technology that would effectively address the challenge, yet are expected to facilitate inspection of public records by providing more efficient service.

In response to these technological changes, Fountainhead Information Systems of Atlanta has moved into the vanguard by creating a system for putting typical plant records on-line efficiently. Since this breakthrough more than a year ago, searching of public records on the Web has been possible from Fulton County, GA, largest county in the Atlanta area. Access includes information relating to deeds, real estate loans, federal tax liens, the general execution docket and lis pendens. Currently housed on line are more than 15 years of data encompassing 14 million records worth of information. Four gigabytes of storage contain the data currently being put to use on the Web.

Placing the Fulton County land record information on line is achieved through Fountainhead's TitleSearch On-Line (tm) application, a unified national infrastructure to facilitate property records access. Extensive searching capabilities allow title professionals and others using Web access to save up to 80 percent in time previously required for a traditional visit to the county courthouse and a "manual" search. The time, energy, and money saved through such a process are exponential.

A title employee can perform extensive

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**A**s an increasing volume of public records migrates to the Web, title managers will encounter an intensified need to demonstrate that their title plant access systems are of major importance to the real estate market.

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formation flow is the driving force of a global economy?

How title executives respond to the technology forces affecting records access will dramatically impact the future management of title plants everywhere. If those in leadership positions view recent Internet innovations as an opportunity to redirect their companies toward enhanced strategies and processes that will make their organizations more effective and competitive, then private management of title information access will continue to be a critical attribute. If, however, title man-



*The author is president and founder of Fountainhead Information Systems, Atlanta, an organization that develops Internet and imaging information systems for the title industry. He is a graduate of Georgia Institute of Technology, and is a 16-year veteran of the computer systems and technology field. Previously, he spent eight years working in the development of document imaging systems for county clerks and recorders throughout the southeast. Fountainhead (telephone 770-980-1322; e-mail thartle@titlesearch.com) is his fifth entrepreneurial technology company.*



research without leaving the company office. Those calling on the capabilities of TitleSearch On-Line (tm) follow these steps for fast, easy access. A step-by-step use outline of the system accompanies this article, along with illustrative graphics.

- Point Web browser to Fountainhead's home page at [www.titlesearch.com](http://www.titlesearch.com)
- Click on the TitleSearch On-Line (tm) lightbulb icon
- Click on the key icon to enter the application service (Graphic A)
- Login with proper username and password
- Choose search query from desired records index (Graphic B)
- Enter search criteria and execute search (Graphic C)
- View resultant hit screen and page forward if necessary (Graphic D)
- Click detail button to view individual index data (Graphic E)
- Click on image button to view document images if available (Graphic F)

### State Web Expansion

The Fountainhead Fulton County Web operation is only the beginning. It is the desire of those involved to support all counties with the most effective recording, filing, indexing and access of real estate instruments. At this writing, the system currently is being expanded to handle information from all of Georgia's 159 counties in anticipation of a statewide deed access project.

Through state legislation, Georgia has initiated a project to develop and implement an automated system to track real property records. Managed by the Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority (GSCCCA), the statewide indexing system will be responsible for accepting electronic data originating from public filings with the clerk of the superior court in each county of the state. This data will be compiled, verified, sorted and made available to the public through the World Wide Web Internet interface.

Individual counties will be responsible for data entry, and regular creation of data files is to be uploaded to a central collection system. Each superior court clerk in the state must record and index such instruments in accordance with the *Minimum Deed Indexing Standards for the State of Georgia* by January 1, 1998. Clerks, however, retain control over each particular implementation of their respective county data collection systems.

Tentatively scheduled for going-on line

January 1, 1999, the system calls for each superior court clerk to be responsible for the creation of a daily data file to be uploaded to a fully functional central collection facility. The central collection facility will allow browsing access to all court houses and the public at the determination of GSCCCA. Future enhancements may include the conversion of historical courthouse records into the central real estate record index, along with the introduction of imaging technology.

The current projects emerging for making records from county clerks available on the Web will no doubt lead to other public records being on the Internet. Public information such as property appraisal/assessment records collected by county tax assessors also will migrate to the Web.

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**E***xtensive searching capabilities allow title professionals and others using Web access to save up to 80 percent in time previously required for a traditional visit to the courthouse and a "manual" search.*

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Fountainhead's TitleSearch On-Line (tm) has the capability to store these records that are made available by government departments or title plants. The system is designed to handle all records related to real estate transfers for the entire nation from any county or state.

The trend toward electronic access of records will likely have implications on the future filings at courthouses. Document imaging, digital signatures, and the increasing security of the Internet will impact the future by making electronic filing a necessity in order to keep up with the explosion of real estate documentation. Subsequently, the forecast is that the entire process of property exchange will take place in the virtual realm—from loan origination to closing.

### Nationwide Benefit Possible

Courthouses and title companies throughout the country can benefit from a system along the lines of what is being implemented by Fountainhead, because the

result is stronger and simplified management of property records. Title plant managers now can also make their data available with Fountainhead's integrated system in its undertaking to construct an exceptional nationwide real estate index.

As an increasing volume of public records migrates to the Web, title managers will encounter an intensified need to demonstrate that their title plant access systems are of major importance to the real estate market. While the thought of putting company jewels on-line may make some executives feel faint, the trend is moving forward in Web site development for property records. Those who lead title operations need to fully realize the great importance of utilizing technologies such as the Internet in strengthening the title industry. Without question, the Web is dramatically changing the form and flow of the environment surrounding the title community—and will continue to do so.

As Web public record systems proliferate, title management must aggressively seek out and analyze corresponding plant management needs in order to implement product redefinition. Success will depend on locating data, understanding its business value, transferring it into the proper format and linking to the right data with correct utilization of technology. The title industry can profit from enhancing systems with Web-enabled database applications.

Although the optimum result will be placing title company plant records on the Web, where title agents and others can freely access as necessary, there will be benefits that more than justify the effort. Among these are reduced communication expense, lower operating cost, and increased revenues—along with such intangibles as image, increased customer satisfaction, convenience, better service and lower prices. *Access to the right information can replace all the other factors of production—reducing the required levels of labor, capital, energy, materials, space, etc., that are needed in title operations.*

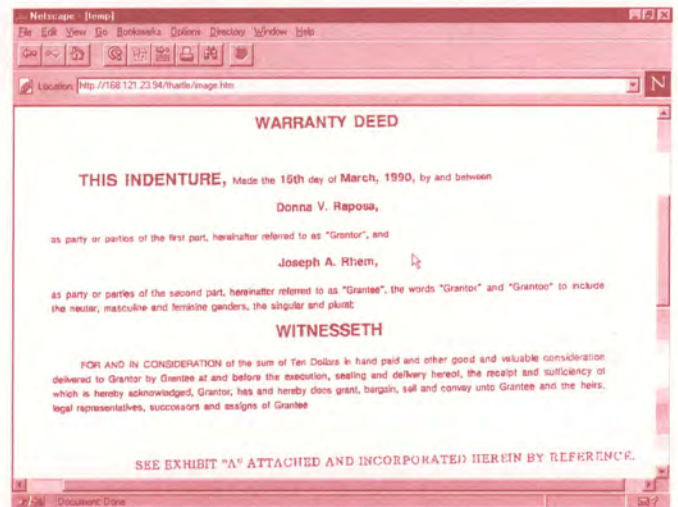
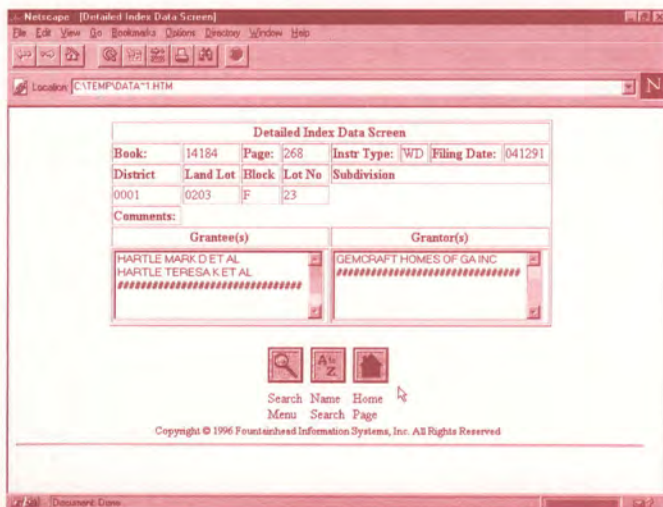
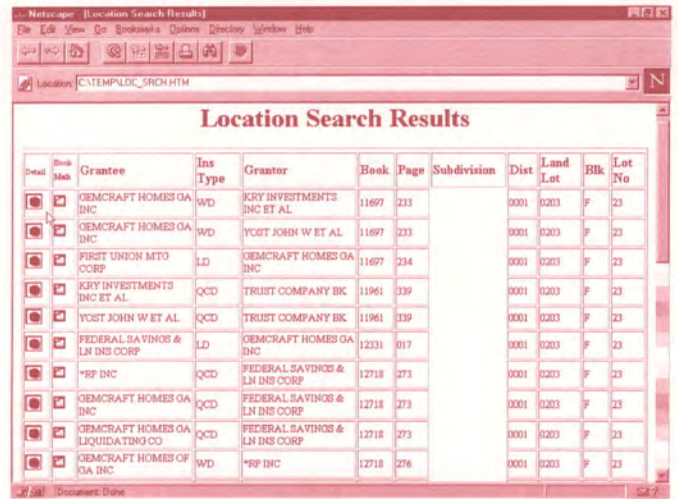
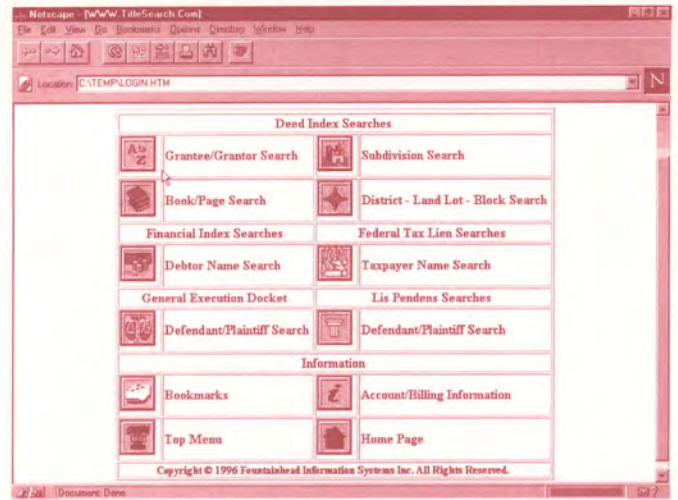
Technology applications can render a reduced exposure to loss, eliminating sources of uncertainty in areas of greatest risk. This could lead to reduced title loss and a corresponding reduction in marketplace pressure for concentration by title companies on loss prevention, suggesting an opportunity for a positive industry response to the demand by secondary mortgage market leaders and others that closing costs be less.

Information accessibility and data in

*continued on page 23*



# Close Up: Property Records Web Access



The TitleSearch On-Line (tm) welcome screen is at top, left; a key icon allows entry into the application service designed for property records access on the Web. At top, right, is the Fulton County, GA, database including information relating to deeds, real estate loans, federal tax liens, the general execution docket, and lis pendens. Extensive query flexibility (middle, left) of the system allows title pro-

professionals to save up to 80 percent in time previously required for a traditional visit to the courthouse. At middle, right, search results are formatted similar to the familiar printouts found at the courthouse. Shown at lower left is a detailed view of information for a particular instrument. Fountainhead's image transport option can make document images available on the Web (lower right).



# Designing Killer Web Sites

By Todd A. Hartle

**C**ontent is king when it comes to a title company's Web site. The combination of content and application creates transactions enabling electronic commerce. Compelling service, however, consist of both information and functionality. Rather than piling on the bells and whistles, Web site creators should look to classic design principles -- Less is more.

Many corporate Web sites are dull and not user friendly. Companies have simply dumped on-line their marketing materials as static documents. These Web sites do not provide the right information or services that the industry demands in a concise and consistent fashion. At best, they look like slide presentations.

To be successful on-line, a title company cannot just take what it has in print and move it to the electronic realm. There is not enough depth or interactivity in print content to overcome the drawbacks of on-line medium. If people are to be expected to put up with turning on a computer to read a screen, they must be rewarded with deep and extremely up-to-date information they can explore at will.

## Differentiate By Design

Most sites on the Web are laden with cumbersome text and top-heavy graphics. But the fundamental traits that make a site work are more elusive. With the introduction of Hyper-Text Markup Language (HTML) extensions, the scripting language used to format Web pages, Web designs are beginning to incorporate icons, tables, tiled images for backgrounds, colored borders around images, page frames, and Java animation applets [small programs that run inside a Web page]. Many sites, however, still appear to be driven by technology rather than design.

The new generation of Web designers are creating sites that add typographic and visual layout to content on the Internet. These site designers carefully specify the position and relationships of all elements on the page, retaining fine control of the layout. The use of tables to control the layout of page elements is a technique that designers must use to obtain the results they want. By pouring text and images inside tables with borders turned off, you can better

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**T***o be successful on-line, a title company cannot just take what it has in print and move it to the electronic realm.*

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control where everything is on your page.

Experienced designers implement principles that make Web sites attractive and easy to navigate. In resource-oriented sites, intensive graphics are distracting. Use graphics sparingly to convey information. Sites should use visual themes to entice and guide, creating a whole essence for surfers from the first menu screen to the exit. Users feel more comfortable if a consistent look and feel are maintained throughout the site. The result is sites that better balance the goals of visual and functional appeal.

Web sites with next-generation designs are sprouting up from netrapreneurs specializing in incorporating both content and functionality into their sites. This group in-

cludes firms such as Fountainhead Information Systems, specialists in Internet database applications, whose credits include Atlanta-based Webzine, Zeigeist and the TitleSearch On-Line™ (www.titlesearch.com) Web-based service technology.

## Foster A Community

For architecture, a navigation system, and design, the job is to bring the content to life and give it a vision for the Web. Designs have to mesh with the content to offer users what they expect to find. Good site designs see beyond the technology and implement architectures that offer visitors an experience fostering a community rather than simply presenting a series of text-filled pages and rotating logos.

Community systems let users communicate, collaborate, and share information in an open, on-line environment. A community system might include a chat server, bulletin board server, and mail server that are scaleable onto multiple systems for increased audience capacity.

Community systems also provide organizations substantial control over the look and feel of the entire environment. The key to differentiate dynamic sites from the early static sites is led by design principles. Instead of broadcasting static content out to the general audience, sites should aim to entice a particular group of people to interact with the content presented -- the land title industry, for example.

Easy-to-use bulletin-board services allow for threaded discussions that link forums on different topics. One such system offering intellectual exchange and social interaction is Fountainhead's Title Board™

*continued on page 23*



such systems as reliable predictors of loan performance.

Although no two systems are alike, automated underwriting systems are of two basic types: some provide a "credit score" or "mortgage score," while others decide to "approve or refer" an application.

A credit score rates the probability a borrower will be able to repay a given loan, considering such variables as number of open loan accounts, number of active documents, past delinquencies, length of credit history and current levels of indebtedness. A mortgage score adds to the equation such considerations as loan-to-value ratio and real estate market conditions. Mortgage scoring systems are being offered by such companies as Mortgage Guaranty Insurance Corp., PMI, GE Capital, Citicorp, TRW/Mortgage Resource Group and United Guaranty Residential Insurance Company.

Lenders can use credit and/or mortgage scores to price loans at point of sale, as well as to identify borrowers whose applications may qualify for streamlined processing and minimal documentation. A high score is a green light for streamlined processing, a lesser score is the yellow light which should cause the application to be given to a human underwriter.

"Approve or refer" systems are offered by Freddie Mac ("Loan Prospector") and Fannie Mae ("Desktop Underwriter"). Like the scoring systems described above, these systems are designed to help loan originators quickly identify which applications may qualify for streamlined processing and minimal documentation.

The acceptance and use of automated underwriting systems is growing fast. In July, 1996, Freddie Mac and the FHA undertook a pilot program using a special version of "Loan Prospector" to underwrite FHA loans. And, originally designed to score only "prime" or "A" loans, a newer version of Freddie's Loan Prospector is now offered for scoring jumbo and "subprime" loans (for low and moderate income borrowers).

Much effort and expense have gone into development of automated underwriting systems. Since they are intended to supplement rather than replace human judgment, there is no reason to believe their growing use will have a negative impact on loan portfolios or title claims experience.

**Electronic Registration Systems (MERS)**

The organization and incorporation of the Mortgage Electronic Registration Sys-



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tems (MERS) is a project spearheaded by the Mortgage Bankers Association of America, with input from the title industry. MERS is designed to operate as an electronic registry of mortgage ownership and servicing rights, nationwide.

As MERS begins operations, whenever a mortgage is originated by a participating lender, it will be automatically assigned to MERS. MERS will give each mortgage lender an identifying number so that no mortgage within the registry will ever be confused with another. During the life of each mortgage, all assignments of ownership or beneficial interest and/or servicing rights will be tracked electronically.

MERS should eventually enable settlement officers to quickly and reliably verify loan ownership and servicing rights, in many cases. Since confusion over such

recordings only by local, state or federal government agencies.

The California Land Title Association has formed a committee to study San Bernardino's pilot program, as well as a similar program begun in Orange County. Fannie Mae has expressed interest in electronically recording mortgage releases, but has not yet done so.

Assuming these pilot programs prove successful, in order for electronic recordings to grow beyond government agencies, some way must be devised to guard against recording of forged documents and false releases. How such issues as authentication and legal authority of signing parties might be handled is uncertain, but the title industry will likely play an important role in research and development of electronic recording systems.

### **Understand and Anticipate**

Several years ago, a tragic accident killed two workers and paralyzed yet another during construction of a 593-foot building in downtown Toronto. When something broke in the mechanism of a construction elevator, counterweights attached to a pulley at the top of the elevator shaft fell, causing the elevator to be hurled upward from the ground until it crashed into the 41st floor.

The elevator was designed so that, in the event of a system failure, gravity brakes would automatically prevent it from falling down. But no one, apparently, considered the possibility the elevator might fall up.

In title claims, the problem more often than not is that an employee or manager has been blindsided. As we see changes in our working environment, we should be careful to understand the new technologies and systems being implemented, and try to anticipate what can go wrong. We should not hesitate to ask: "What if?"

By anticipating risks and finding solutions compatible with customer needs, we will remain profitable, and hopefully attain new levels of customer satisfaction in the coming era of electronic commerce. ➤

### **PRIORITY MARKET**

*continued from page 12*

the past, Security Abstract employees often have closed one end of these cross transactions—with the other end closing at a competitor organization. Positive feedback from consumers involved in these transactions at Security has convinced management that reinforcing the company's name recognition through advertising and pro-

motion is a promising strategy in attempting to land both ends.

Marketing communication plans for Security Abstract now include follow up with individual buyers who have closed at the company, congratulating them on their home ownership, and reminding them that quality closing and title services remain available there. This underscores a determination by management that significant repeat business can be generated through buyers and sellers as well as through real estate agents and lenders, Bell pointed out.

Television advertising participation with local brokers and developers also has proved effective for Security Abstract, Bell commented.

Awareness of creative opportunity can greatly enhance a local title advertising effort, according to the Security Abstract executive. Bell recalled what might be characterized as a gift of nature—a mother duck who returned to the flower bed outside company offices each spring for several years to hatch her young. When the ducklings became old enough for a swim in the river some three blocks away, company employees would leave their desks long enough to go outside and stop traffic so the feathered family was assured a safe journey. After local media repeatedly covered this stroll by the ducks, Security Abstract produced a 30-second name recognition television commercial built around the march to the river. Needless to say, the commercial brought enthusiastic viewer reaction.

### **Ad Agency Assistance Needed**

Both Farmer and Bell strongly recommended that title managers consider retaining an advertising agency before embarking on a home buyer marketing effort. They emphasized that the agency professional(s) selected must have an understanding of the title business, and must develop a comfortable working relationship with the title company.

Farmer said the agency selected should eliminate guesswork in advertising—developing a plan that includes a media mix and budget recommendations. Besides determining the creative message, the agency should be able to conduct research to substantiate that the message is on target. He added that real estate orientation and experience in consumer advertising are important qualifications, and that media analysis, planning capability and knowledge of Internet utilization are other essentials.

Kono recommended that title managers develop four insights in seeking advertising

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**A**s we see changes in our working environment, we should be careful to understand the new technologies and systems being implemented, and try to anticipate what can go wrong.

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matters occasionally results in claims, it may conceivably help our claims experience. By itself, MERS will not speed transactions because it still will be necessary for settlement officers to contact existing lenders for payoff information.

### **Electronic Recording**

With the growth of EDI, it may be just a matter of time until county recording offices are set up to record documents electronically.

In California's San Bernardino County, tax lien and release information has been exchanged electronically between the recorder's office and county and state taxing authorities for more than a year.

The success of this pilot program has resulted in new legislation (effective January 1, 1997) to allow county recorders to accept for recording digitized images of otherwise recordable instruments. Prior law defined a recordable instrument as "a written paper." The new law permits electronic



agency assistance for reaching the home buyer market:

- Doing homework in advance to focus on what resources are needed
- Determining selection criteria
- Determining what the agency needs from the title company to effectively reach the targeted market audience
- Securing quality creative work from the agency on a highly consistent level

Establishing a realistic advertising budget is essential in the early going, Kono added, pointing out that large companies often will do this on a basis of sales or revenue. In doing so, she suggested setting a minimum and maximum for budget size.

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**W**ith growing consumer attention focused on title evidencing and title insurance along with other services linked to closing costs, steadily increasing numbers of buyers can be expected to ask about what they are paying for.

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Kono advised taking a disciplined approach to consumer advertising, which calls for determining a title company's competitive advantage through defining and comparing its strengths and weaknesses. She said this discipline can help define an important characteristic of a company well worth emphasizing for a market audience- something different from what competitors are saying that can provide a basis for a compelling message to drive sales.

Inherent in the structuring of a company's advertising, she said, is determining the single most important action desired on the part of a consumer. If, for example, the objective is generating leads and calls, this will mean a point of concentration in how the creative message is developed. And, if generating calls is desired by the company, appropriate planning should be implemented to assure adequate staff is available to handle them.

If market awareness of a title company

and reinforcing its reputation identity are a priority, planning with the advertising agency can produce an effective approach for keeping the company name in front of home buyers while they are in the market, Kono said.

Clear communication with the agency is needed to keep development of the creative message headed in the desired direction, she added. Sharing all information with the agency- problems, issues, competition, budget constraints, etc.- will facilitate the process. If the available budget will not cover advertising to all of the identified markets, priorities need to be established.

Remembering that a consumer audience cannot be told everything all the time will help in shaping an advertising message that focuses on what makes a company stand out, Kono emphasized. This should incorporate concentration on what is truly beneficial to the consumer.

Keeping in mind that advertising impressions are built over time, and that every message must be consistent, will help in keeping a title company advertising investment at the most productive level, Kono concluded. 🐾

#### **WORKPLACE DYNAMICS**

*continued from page 15*

Herman is the growing frequency of mid-career retirements (sabbaticals) as more employees temporarily leave the work force for pursuits including leisure activity, education and professional/personal growth- then return refreshed and re-energized with a strong desire to resume employment. As people improve in health and life span, many can be expected to continue working well into what formerly were considered their permanent retirement years. For some, there may be no traditional retirement- instead, a series of job changes extending past the eightieth birthday.

Herman said working at home is a growing trend for the future, noting research that shows people work longer and harder there- with greater productivity than in more traditional environments. He added that opportunities in telecommuting, working from home or satellite centers in suburban or exurban locales, are popular with workers because of their money saving and lower stress aspects. Instead of hiring people located near the workplace or transferring them in from out of town, a telecommuting operation can link with those in remote locations. With telecommuting, according to Herman, there is wide flexibility in hours and locations across the country, and even in foreign sites.

Challenging those in leadership positions who seek to extend productive employee service, Herman said, are these five primary reasons for worker turnover:

- *It doesn't feel good around here* (organizational culture, the way they are treated)
- *They wouldn't miss me if I were gone* (there's no need to stay)
- *I don't get the support I need to get my job done* (if they have to continually fight red tape and bureaucracy, it's time to go somewhere else)
- *There's no opportunity for advancement* (many employees don't want to be boss- they want to be better; it's a matter of personal and professional growth)
- *Compensation isn't the main thing* (financial incentives rank relatively low as a reason for changing jobs) 🐾

#### **PROPERTY RECORDS**

*continued from page 18*

tegrity will become increasingly evident around the country as county governments update their record systems. Placing county records and private title plant records on-line furthers the goal of national coverage and accessibility of information. To unite and consolidate information is to safeguard the title preservation system.

The efficient warehousing and accessibility of data now are of critical importance in the management of property records. Technology holds the key to success in efficiently maintaining the vast amount of information required to accurately track land transfers. The Internet, document imaging and database management systems can be fitted together in a distinct way that effectively responds to this great challenge. 🐾

#### **WEB SITES**

*continued from page 21*

(www.titlesearch.com) conference, which uses the Internet to facilitate national communication among the title insurance community over the World Wide Web (WWW). This application is a Web-based conferencing system featuring job listings, resumes, industry classifieds, legislation forums, and technology forums, among others. Communication among title agents, title insurers, banks, county recorders, and the real estate community is enhanced.

#### **Create Extranets**

Web sites normally have a three-stage migration process. During the first stage the Web site is used mostly as a marketing tool;



stage two is where companies start to consider linking legacy applications or data sources to internal or external Webs. In third stage, you will be building applications designed for the Web from the ground up.

Web specific applications will allow people to do is what is called dynamic publishing; the computer makes the page for you. It is a custom page answering your custom request, dynamically created on the fly. The state of technology offers ways to provide more interesting sites with dynamic information and interactively. These dynamic Web sites are neat but they are hard to build. All the apps will run off the server, and these will mostly be custom apps.

Migrating legacy database systems to Web-enabled applications is the imminent future of the fast-tech information highway. These application processes will involve implementing a back-end gateway for setting up simple communications between a

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**S**ites should use visual themes to entice and guide, creating a whole essence for surfers from the first menu screen to the exit.

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Web browser and server. Gateways make it possible for a browser user to initiate and define what information must be passed from a Web-server to an external program. Additionally, this allows users to receive information back in the form of a dynamically created Web page.

A title company gets exponential power and value out of its real property information technology. After companies get connected to the Internet, they realize there is a much larger audience out there. The next realization is that there is a lot of information inside the company (title plants) that people outside the company (title agents, real estate professionals, mortgage bankers, home buyers) want access to - this is called the extranet, the projection of the intranet on to the Internet. A good example is the access Fountainhead provides on the Web with its TitleSearch On-Line™ technology, which allows customers and clients to search title related property data at any given time or place. (Please see the accompanying article.)

### Functional Design Tips

Original content is the most important trait of a great Web site. However, the Web is an interactive, dynamic, and rapidly changing new communications medium that your Web site should reflect. Here are some points to consider when designing your title company Web site.

- Be design driven not technology driven.
- Make it easy for customers to interact with the site.
- Use graphics smartly to reduce transmission time.
- Give customers 24-7 access to information.
- Use tables to enhance page layout.
- Cross-pollinate corporate data and marketing information by creating extranets.
- Make site interactive by using e-mail, creating user groups, and offering dynamic pages.
- Implement a long test cycle.
- Re-evaluate site often by having meetings and reviewing user feedback.
- Keep content fresh and dynamic.

Most of these guidelines are a matter of logic. Well-organized, edited, and timely original content - set in an attractive, interactive, and consistent format - are the makings of great Web sites. Commercial functionality also will include flexible services, Relational Data Base Management System (RDBMS) support and access control.

### Let form follow function

Cost and time are big factors for most title companies starting and/or expanding a Web site. Most sites require development time of at least a month, sometimes six months for more complex systems implementing extranets. But for a title company that plans to stake its business on the Web, consulting an experienced designer could be well worth the investment. When designing your Web site, let form follow function. As the Roman poet Horace stated, "He gains everyone's approval who mixes the pleasant with the useful." 🐉

## Cantrell Succumbs; Began E&O Firm

Services were in Tahlequah, OK, for Joe Cantrell, 77, a well known Oklahoma titleman who later founded what was to be-

come TitlePac, Inc., provider of errors and omissions insurance coverage to the title industry, who died February 3 after an extended illness.

He sold part of TitlePac to a daughter, Gail, and her husband, Mark Pearson, in 1992, selling the remainder of the operation to them some four years later.

Besides Gail Pearson, survivors include his wife, Sue Cantrell, another daughter and a step-daughter, three sons, a sister, and eight grandchildren.

## PLTA Files Suit In 'Gap' Dispute

The Pennsylvania Land Title Association has filed suit against the City of Philadelphia and the commissioner of the department of records there, seeking an order from the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas requiring that real estate deeds, mortgages and other encumbrances be immediately recorded and indexed in an orderly fashion as required by present state law.

No monetary damages are being sought in the "gap" action.

According to PLTA, the cycle of recording and indexing documents and returning them to the filers takes about a year in Philadelphia. The title organization contends that city audits recognized the backlog in violation of recording and indexing laws as far back as 1992.

Incomplete or inaccurate public records make a confident title examination impossible, PLTA pointed out.

## MERS Presents Pricing Proposal

Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems (MERS) has presented ALTA with a pricing proposal delivered by Paul Mullings, chief executive officer of the organization.

Under the proposal, title companies will be able to access MERS through its Web site at an annual fee based on market share for a family of companies, plus a 50 cents per transaction charge. The annual fee would be \$9,000 for firms with more than a 10 percent national market share; \$4,000 for those with a share between 2 and 10 percent; and \$2,000 for those below 2 percent.

No transaction fee would be imposed unless the mortgage being searched is found in the MERS database. Firms not requiring automated access to MERS data would be able to dial a toll free number for voice-based information without charge.



## *Questions to ask your E&O insurance company:*

### 3. How *committed* are you to the title industry?

Large commercial insurers only *dabble* in E&O insurance for title professionals. Let's face it—there aren't that many of us! As a result you're probably not as important to them as all the butchers, bakers and candlestick makers they insure—there are a lot more of them!

At TIAC, we *only* insure title agents and abstracters, so you get the best service, coverage and claims handling there is!

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## NAMES IN THE NEWS



**Cantu**



**Philo**



**Gidney**



**Wangberg**



**Pierce**



**Gilmore**



**Oddo**



**Dufficy**

**Mary Chapman Cantu** has been promoted to president of Houston Title Company, a subsidiary of Old Republic National Title Insurance Company.

**Robert E. Philo**, a past president of the Texas Land Title Association, has been named president and chief executive officer of Southwest Land Title Company, Inc., Fort Worth, a wholly owned subsidiary of Old Republic Title. **Scott Pierce**, a Florida Land Title Association past president, has been promoted to southeastern region manager for Old Republic Title and remains Florida state manager with offices in Tampa.

**Terrell J. Baker** has been named chief financial officer and treasurer for

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**Condict**



**Whitton**



**Christiansen**



**Effner**



**McDermitt**



**Jones**

National Title Insurance Company, Miami.

**Mark D. Vasington**, a West Hartford attorney, has joined Connecticut Attorneys Title Insurance Company, Rocky Hill, CT, as director of member services, a position formerly held by CATIC President **Richard Patterson**.

New regional vice presidents for First American Title Insurance Company include **Dennis J. Gilmore**, Santa Ana, CA (title insurance sales and product delivery systems, major lenders); **Lane Gidney** (Utah); **Don R. Wangberg** (California agencies), and **Joseph J. Oddo** (northern California).

Recently named First American vice presidents at Santa Ana are **James J. Dufficy** (associate national claims counsel) and **Wayne A. Condict** (associate senior underwriter). **Dave Whitton** has been promoted to vice president—Oklahoma state manager, with offices in Oklahoma City, and **John S. Christiansen** has been named president of the Arizona division and manager for that state, with offices in Phoenix.

**Jon R. Effner** has been promoted to vice president for Commonwealth Land Title Insurance Company, Philadelphia; he serves as underwriting

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counsel for eastern Pennsylvania and Delaware. Also promoted to vice president by the company is **John H. McDermitt, Jr.**, who serves as Parsippany, NJ, branch manager.

Chicago Title Insurance Company has named **Robert Narucki** resident vice president, Union, NJ, and the following as assistant vice presidents: **Patricia Brink**, Nashville; **Terry Jones** (remains sales representative), Union, NJ, and **Martha Thill** (remains branch manager), East Brunswick, NJ. **John Kieley** has been named Maryland state manager, Baltimore, where **Walter "Buck" Jones** now is title operations manager. **Tyson Kouros** has been named title operations officer, Chicago.

Newly designated National Business Unit area managers for Chicago Title are **Ralph Bone** (California), **Terry**



**Kieley**



**Bone**



**Welch**



**Petersen**



**Hendrickson**



**Narr**

**Hendrickson** (Chicago, Minneapolis, Detroit), and **William Narr** (Pennsylvania). **Norman Welch** has been named

business development manager, Rockville, MD, and McLean, VA.

Named assistant construction loan officers at Chicago are **Katie Tigner** (also construction escrow specialist) and **Doris Mahoney**.

**Robert Ibler** now is Chicago Title agency manager for Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. **William Burstein** has been named assistant area counsel, Albany, NY, and **Kathleen Kenehan** has been named communications officer and Illinois regional communications manager, Chicago.

**Pete Petersen** has been promoted to vice president and remains Ticor Title Illinois state manager for that Chicago Title subsidiary, with offices in Chicago.

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## Evans Acquires Firm in Manitowoc

Evans Title Companies, Inc., Appleton, WI, has announced the acquisition of First Abstract & Title Co., Inc., of Manitowoc, a 107-year-old firm providing title and real estate informational services to the market area of Manitowoc County.

First Abstract President Merritt Wilcox continues his responsibilities in the Manitowoc operation, and has been named to the Evans Title board of directors.

Evans Title was founded in 1850, and now provides title services to northeast Wisconsin, with full service locations in Appleton, Green Bay, Oshkosh, Waupaca, and Wautoma in addition to Manitowoc, according to Steve Evans, company president.

## Russia, NIS Executives Visit

Title insuring in the United States was a major topic during a recent visit to Commonwealth Land Title Insurance Company's Philadelphia headquarters by a delegation of 25 high level insurance executives from Russia and other New Independent States (NIS) of the former Soviet Union.



## 1997 AFFILIATED ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS

### April

5-8 **Tennessee**, Opryland Hotel, Nashville, TN

24-26 **Oklahoma**, Marriott, Oklahoma City, OK

### May

1-3 **New Mexico**, Inn of the Mountain Gods, Ruidoso, NM

2-4 **Palmetto**, Savannah Marriott, Savannah, GA

4-6 **Iowa**, Best Western, Holiday Lodge, Clear Lake, IA

13-16 **California**, The Ritz-Carlton-Rancho Mirage, Palm Springs, CA

### June

5-7 **Texas**, Renaissance Austin Hotel, Austin, TX

6-8 **Virginia**, The Homestead, Hot Springs, VA

6-9 **New Jersey**, Star of the Seas Cruise-Miami to Bahamas

8-10 **Pennsylvania**, Nemocolin Woodlands Resort, Farmington, PA

12-13 **South Dakota**, (Site to be announced), Watertown, SD

13-14 **Arkansas**, Ramada Inn, Batesville, AR

19-22 **New England**, Wequassett Inn, Chatham-Cape Cod, MA

22-24 **Oregon**, Ashland Hills Inn, Ashland, OR

26-29 **Colorado**, The Keystone Resort, Keystone, CO

### July

10-12 **Illinois**, French Lick Resort & Spa, French Lick, IN

17-19 **Utah**, Sun Valley Lodge, Sun Valley, ID

20-22 **Michigan**, Grand Traverse Resort, Traverse City, MI

### August

7-9 **Montana**, Marina Cay Resort, Big

Fork, MT

14-16 **Idaho**, Shore Lodge, McCall, ID

14-16 **North Carolina**, Williamsburg Lodge, Williamsburg, VA

17-20 **New York**, The Hershey Hotel, Hershey, PA

20-23 **Wyoming**, The Chutes Best Western, Douglas, WY

21-23 **Indiana**, Radisson At Keystone Crossing, Indianapolis, IN

21-23 **Kansas**, Topeka West Holidome, Topeka, KS

21-23 **Minnesota**, Radisson Arrowwood Resort, Alexandria, MN

### September

4-6 **Missouri**, Holiday Inn Hotel & Convention Center, Joplin, MO

4-7 **Maryland**, Princess Royale, Ocean City, MD

7-9 **Ohio**, Holiday Inn, French Quarter, Toledo, OH

10-12 **Wisconsin**, The Regency Suites, Green Bay, WI

11-13 **Dixie**, Grand Hotel, Point Clear, AL

11-13 **North Dakota**, International Inn, Minot, ND

24-27 **Washington**, (to be held at Seattle Westin during ALTA Annual Convention)

### October

8-10 **Nebraska**, Interstate Holiday Inn, Grand Island, NE

### November

5-7 **Arizona**, (Site to be announced), Prescott, AZ

5-8 **Florida**, Ponce de Leon Resort, St. Augustine, FL

### December

4-5 **Louisiana**, (Site to be announced), New Orleans, LA

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## 1997 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

*(For the latest updates on ALTA meeting information, visit the Association Home Page at <http://www.alta.org>)*

### March

17 **ALTA Land Title Institute/New Jersey Land Title Association Regional Seminar**, Sheraton Woodbridge Place, Iselin, NJ

### April

14-16 **ALTA Mid-Year Convention**, Hyatt Regency Cerromar Beach, San Juan, PR

### May

5 **ALTA Land Title Institute/Illinois Land Title Association Regional Seminar**, Lisle-Naperville Hilton, Lisle, IL

18-20 **Second Annual Legal Symposium/Title Counsel Meeting**, Omni Royal Orleans, New Orleans

19-21 **Committee on Internal Auditing**, Marriott's Reach Resort, Key West, FL

### September

24-27 **ALTA Annual Convention**, Westin Seattle Hotel, Seattle

## Word Integration Added by SoftPro

Microsoft Word integration has been added, in addition to other enhancements, in two new programs recently announced by SoftPro Corporation. They are ProForm 5.0 (closing and title insurance) and ProTrax 2.0 (order tracking and management).

## Hannaford Saluted At 125-Year Mark

Family traditions extending through four generations of quality title work were saluted in local newspaper coverage of the 125th anniversary of Hannaford Abstract and Title Company, Marion, KS.

The article traces the beginning of the abstracter-agency organization back to 1871.

## Monroe Acquires Abstract Concerns

Monroe Title Insurance Corporation and Central New York Abstract Corporation have announced an agreement in principle concerning Monroe Title's acquisition of the other named organization. The transaction is subject to contingencies including approval from shareholders and the New York State Insurance Department.

In addition, Monroe Title has an-

nounced an agreement with Tompkins and Watkins Abstract Corporation calling for a merger of their operations servicing Tompkins County. The new venture has been named Monroe-Tompkins-Watkins Agency, LLC, and is headquartered in Ithaca. This transaction also is subject to contingencies including state regulator approval.

With headquarters in Rochester, Monroe has 19 full service and a network of agents and examining counsel throughout the state.

Central New York Abstract is based in Utica, with other offices in Oneida, Herkimer, Madison, Oswego and Cayuga counties.

## TITLE NEWS ADVERTISERS

ACS Systems, Inc.	..... page 9
Chicago Title and Trust Family of Companies	..... cover 3
Corporate Development Services	..... page 28
Genesis	..... cover 2
HDEP International	..... page 29
North American Title Organization	..... page 26
Ohio Bar Title	..... page 27
RBJ Computer	..... page 6
SMS Real Estate Information Services	..... page 10
SoftPro Corporation	..... page 21
Title Agents of America	..... page 16
Title Industry Assurance Company	..... page 25
Title Pac, Inc.	..... page 13
Title SCAN Systems	..... page 14



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