

TITLENews

JUNE 2020

AMERICAN LAND TITLE ASSOCIATION

Digital Closings Evolve





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**DON'T MISS THIS MONTH'S
DIGITAL ISSUE OF**

TITLENews

The digital edition of **TITLENews** includes a webinar recording that details guidance issued by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to help facilitate closings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Watch this recording to hear from leadership from the Government Sponsored Entities and learn how these changes will affect closings.

Go to alta.org
to get your copy of
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TITLENews

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Your Title Is Protection

WITH THE MASSIVE UNCERTAINTY COVID-19 CONTINUES TO CAUSE,

there's a struggle to maintain some normalcy while working from home, serving customers while social distancing. In the midst of all this uncertainty, however, one thing's certain: Our industry has truly stepped up..

The truth is, ALTA members and the title insurance industry as a whole have always cared deeply about the communities in which we live and work. There are more than 120,000 title professionals across the country, representing every county in the United States. We know you take pride in protecting your customers by ensuring that their homes are theirs when they make one of the biggest financial decisions of their lives.

Throughout the pandemic, ALTA members across the country have been delivering for people and organizations in their local communities. From making masks and purchasing e-readers for children to donating money to local restaurants and helping the homeless, the response to ALTA's #GoodDeeds campaign has been inspirational.

In addition to the countless ways in which ALTA members are donating and volunteering, you have also come up with innovative and safe ways to continue to make the American dream come true. From drive-through closings to RON and even facilitating a closing for a COVID-19 survivor, your dedication to customers is allowing families to close on new homes or take advantage of record low interest rates by refinancing their mortgages.

Your volunteerism and innovation have inspired us to create a video that showcases some of this selfless work. It is important that people outside of our industry know how integral and woven you are into your community. Our members are not only title insurance professionals, but also parents, grandparents, coaches, members of the PTA and volunteers, and much more. Our hope is that you will share this video widely and even post your own #GoodDeeds story so that we can continue to highlight all the ways our members are making a difference. You can access the video on ALTA's website at alta.org.

Thank you so much for your leadership and the inspiration you have provided during these times. Because of your encouraging stories, we will emerge from this even stronger than before.

With June being National Homeownership Month, we will continue to highlight the essential role you play in your community and protecting property rights.

I hope that you and your families stay safe and healthy.



JEREMY YOHE

ALTA vice president of communications

Chris Morton Joins ALTA Team as SVP of Public Affairs

ALTA recently appointed Chris Morton as senior vice president of public affairs.

In this role, Morton will lead ALTA's policy development, political engagement and lobbying strategy, while also serving on the Executive Team. He will work closely with senior leaders across the association and industry who engage in coalitions, campaigns and strategic communications to promote and enhance the title industry's role in protecting consumers in the efficient and secure transfer of real estate.

"I am tremendously excited to join the stellar team at ALTA and contribute all that I can to elevate the interests of our members, and the property owners they serve, with policymakers in Washington and across the states," Morton said. "I've been awestruck by the passion and commitment everyone has for the critical role this industry plays in protecting property rights and providing peace of mind for American consumers in the closing process. ALTA members' spirit of service is inspiring, particularly at this time of national challenge, and I look



forward to coming onboard."

Morton previously served as executive vice president of government affairs and business strategy at the Association for Advanced Life Underwriting, where he spent 10 years, and led a team that achieved numerous advocacy wins on behalf of the life insurance profession and industry. He has had an influential role in major legislative undertakings over the years such as the Dodd-Frank Act, The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act and The SECURE Act, among others. He also brings experience in senior roles at Fannie Mae and the Federal Housing Finance Board.

"Chris is a seasoned professional with over 25 years of experience in the financial services and public affairs arena," said Diane Tomb, ALTA's chief executive officer. "His experience championing strategic initiatives, creating strong partnerships and forging collaborative approaches will enhance ALTA's policy and public affairs efforts. Chris has demonstrated success in numerous legislative and regulatory leadership roles, and we are excited to have him join the ALTA family."

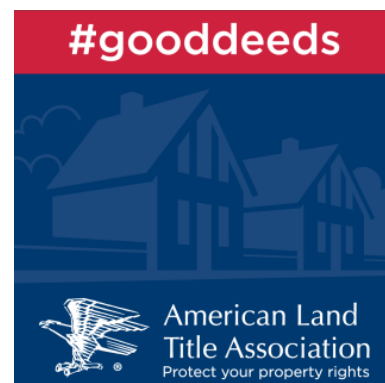
Morton's career includes additional work at the national level for members of Congress, for cabinet officials, and in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors.

Morton received a master's degree in public policy from the University of Chicago and graduated with honors from Northwestern University where he received his B.A. in political science. A native of Chicago, he is the proud father of two daughters, and lives in the Maryland suburbs outside of D.C., along with his wife, whom he luckily met on Capitol Hill 25 years ago.

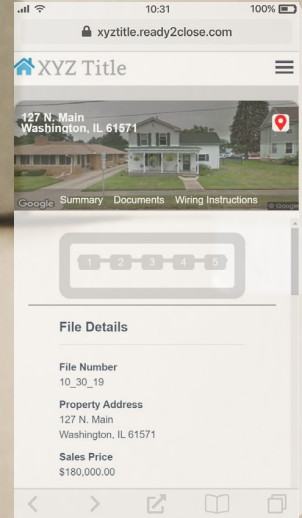
Share Your #GoodDeeds

We would like to highlight all the great volunteerism that is happening across our industry. Whether it's giving back to your community or creative ways you've modified processes to get deals closed, we want to hear your stories. Here are three ways you can share your story with us:

1. Email your story to communications@alta.org.
2. Post your story in the comments section at blog.alta.org.
3. Share your story on Facebook or Instagram, use #GoodDeeds and tag ALTA using @ALTAOnline.



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ALTA Is Your COVID-19 Resource

ALTA is your one-stop-shop for information about the COVID-19 crisis. From tracking recording office closures around the country to following state emergency notarization orders and guidance, ALTA collects and produces information to help your operation navigate the pandemic.

In addition, you'll also find information and an eligibility overview about the Paycheck Protection plan, including how to apply and costs that the program covers.

You'll notice a new section of this resource is titled Operation Healthy Office. While the COVID-19 health crisis persists, the country is starting to shift from survival mode to thinking about what's next and how people will return safely to their workplaces. ALTA has developed and collected various



resources to help title and settlement professionals develop a plan to ensure their employees and customers are safe.

To access this information, go to alta.org/coronavirus.

Membership by the Numbers

ALTA is the title insurance and settlement services industry resource for advocacy, education, communications, networking and policy standards. Here's a look at some membership numbers from the past month.

- New Members: 56
- New Associate Members: 8
- New Attorney Members: 17
- Total Members: 6,043
- State With Most New Members: Florida with 7

For a list of the latest new and associate members, as well as real estate attorneys who recently joined, go to alta.org/new-members.

ALTA 2020 TIPAC Donors

The Title Industry Political Action Committee (TIPAC) is ALTA's voluntary, non-partisan political action committee (PAC). TIPAC raises money to help elect and re-elect candidates to Congress who understand and support the issues affecting the title industry. So far in 2020, TIPAC has received \$149,600 from 150 donors. In addition, \$122,500 from 20 companies has been pledged to the TIPAC Education Fund. Check out who has supported the industry at alta.org/tipac.



NEWS TO SHARE?

If you have information you'd like us to consider for TITLE News, send company announcements to communications@alta.org.

Check Out Safe Escrow

According to the March 2020 *Voice of the Title Agent Special Report*, cyberthreats are the #1 concern for title agents as they look to the next 12 months.

The Resources You Need When it Counts

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Types of Digital Closings Evolve

*Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac
Issue Guidance to Allow for
Flexibility at Closing*

How GSE Guidance Updates
Impact the Title Industry



IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac earlier this year modified their Seller Guides and provided guidance on several policy areas to support mortgage originations. The changes affected various items including the acceptance of remote online notarization (RON) and remote ink notarization (RIN), as well as limited powers of attorney. The modifications were made to allow for flexibility in getting transactions completed without increasing credit risk.

.....

Fannie and Freddie previously had electronic notarization guidance that limited the use of RON.

RON is the authentication of a signature for an electronic record by a notary using audio-visual technology where the

- documents are being signed electronically
- document is tamper-sealed electronically and
- the notarial seal is being applied electronically

The new RON requirements for both of the government sponsored entities (GSEs) went into effect immediately. The requirements between Fannie and Freddie have slight differences, but both require the system used for the remote notarization to meet the following minimum standards:

- At least two-factor identity authentication, including using a government-issued photo ID that has a signature, credential analysis and identity-proofing
- Tamper-sealed notarized documents and system security sufficient to (A) prevent interference with the authenticity, integrity and security of the notarial ceremony or corruption or loss of the recording of the same, and (B) protect the communication technology, electronic record and backup record from unauthorized use
- The remote online notary must keep a secure electronic journal of the notarial act including evidence of identity of the principal (a video and audio conference can be the basis for satisfactory evidence of identification) and maintain a backup of the electronic record
- recording of the notarial ceremony with storage for the minimum period required by applicable laws or if no period is specified in the applicable law, for seven years

Additionally, the title insurance policy must not take any exception for the remotely notarized loan and the county recorder in the state and county where the

property is located must accept the remotely notarized document for recording. Lenders must maintain (or have access to) the recording of the notarial ceremony for the life of the loan, may not require a borrower to use RON and must have other notary options for borrowers available. The GSEs do not require a particular vendor.





































“We felt it was very important to ensure lenders and title underwriters could look at this and the standards were the same,” said Brooke Adams, associate general counsel at Fannie Mae. “Standards became more important as we saw states with different requirements. We wanted to create an averaged approach, so we looked at the SECURE ACT standards and ALTA/MBA model RON bill. We also wanted to balance authentication and privacy, and what borrowers need and access to technology.”

Lenders may sell loans closed with RON to the GSEs in all states, including the District of Columbia, except California, Maine, Mississippi, Rhode Island, and West Virginia. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac also said loans closed with RON can include either wet ink-signed promissory notes or electronically signed notes. Sellers can deliver loans with electronically signed Notes only if they are approved to deliver eMortgages. In addition, the GSEs do not require lenders to maintain a copy of the notarial ceremony. However, lenders must be able to obtain a copy of the notarial ceremony, upon request by the GSEs, for the life of the loan.

To date, 24 states have passed RON legislation. In May, Missouri became the latest state to pass RON legislation.

According to the government sponsored entities, these types of transactions are not considered RON:

- Emergency Video Notarization, Remote Ink Signed Notarization, etc. (items that have been approved temporarily by state executive or emergency orders)

NOTARIZATION TYPES AND TERMINOLOGY							American Land Title Association	
alta.org/digitalclosings		Protect your property rights						
Notarization Type	Definition	Authorization Type	Document Type	Multi-Factor Authentication (Credential Analysis & KBA)	Recorded and Retained AV Record	eNote Capability	In Person or Remote	
 Remote Online Notary (RON)	Remote online notarization of electronic documents with use of multi-factor authentication.	Permanent State Statute or Temporary Notarization Executive Order or Legislation						
 Paper Remote Online Notarization (PRON)	Remote online notarization of paper documents (delivered via mail, courier, etc.) with use of multi-factor authentication.	Permanent State Statute (RULONA 2018) or Temporary Notarization Executive Order or Legislation						
 Remote Ink Notarization (RIN)	Remote notarization of paper documents via audio-video communication platform (Skype, Facetime, etc.).	Temporary Notarization Executive Order or Legislation	 (some electronic document solutions may exist)		Based on GSE and State Requirements			
 Traditional Wet Ink Notarization (TWIN)*	In person notarization of paper documents.	Permanent State Statute						
 In Person Electronic Notarization (IPEN)*	In person notarization of electronic documents.	Permanent State Statute						
* Not a touchless transaction. In person contact required.			LEGEND  electronic  paper  yes  no  remote  in-person					

- Where the notary uses Facetime, Skype or similar technology to watch someone sign paper documents that are mailed, picked up, etc.
- Keep in mind – RULONA considers a Paper Remote Online Notarization where the notary uses multi-factor authentication, but the person wet-signs paper documents that are mailed, picked up, etc. This is a different process, more like the wet signing but the notary uses technology to witness the signing.

Birth of RIN

Due to disruption related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac also issued temporary guidelines for getting documents signed remotely to help get mortgage transactions closed.

Both GSEs allow the use of services such as Zoom, Skype or FaceTime to help facilitate what would otherwise be a traditional, in-person, paper-based closing. Many state governors and other state bodies have issued temporary executive orders or authorizations allowing for the use of real-time audio-video technology to satisfy the physical presence requirements under applicable law for notarial acts.

In general, the orders permit the use of audio-video

technologies to help facilitate real estate transactions.

According to the GSEs, this process requires that:

- The notary to be licensed in the state is comfortable notarizing documents signed through such process.
- It is consistent with applicable state law.
- The title insurance policy does not include any caveats/restrictions.

“Since these are not RONS, they don’t have to meet the technical minimum standards,” said Jim Newell, managing associate general counsel for Freddie Mac.

RINs are different from RONS in one major way. With RON, the notarial documents are signed and tamper-sealed electronically while with RIN, the notarial seal is applied electronically. Fannie Mae encourages the use of RON, but if not available, to then consider RIN in jurisdictions that recognize the availability of such notarization methods, Adams said.

Fannie Mae said minimum standards should be implemented when facilitating notarization using RIN:

- Review, via two-way audio-video technology, of a government-issued photo ID that has a signature and capture of such photo ID via a photocopy or other electronic image.
- System measures to (A) prevent interference with the authenticity, integrity and security of the portions

of the notarial ceremony that are conducted via the audio-video technology, and (B) protect the electronic record and backup record from unauthorized use.

- The notary performing the RIN should keep a backup of the electronic record.
- Recording of the portion of the notarial ceremony conducted via the audio-video technology with storage for the minimum period required by applicable laws or if no period is specified in the applicable law, for seven years.
- The lender should maintain (or cause to be maintained) the recording of the portions of the notarial ceremony conducted via the audio-video technology for the life of the loan.

"It's important to note that these are best practices not required minimum standards," Adams said.

New York RIN

While 35 states have issued various executive or emergency orders during the pandemic to allow for various types of digital closings with lesser standards than RON, a bill was introduced in New York in May that would codify RIN. Senate Bill 8317 would allow a notarization to be completed using audio-video technology if the following conditions are met:

- The person seeking the notary services, if not personally known to the notary public, shall present valid photo identification to the notary public during the audio-video conference.
- The audio-video conference shall allow for direct interaction between the person receiving notary services and the notary public.
- The person receiving notary services shall affirmatively represent that he or she is physically situated in the state.
- The person receiving notary services shall transmit by fax or electronic means a legible copy of the document signed during the audio-video conference directly to the notary public on the same date the audio-video conference occurs.
- The notary public shall notarize the transmitted copy of the document signed during the audio-video conference and transmit it back to the person receiving notary services.

Powers of Attorney

The GSEs also are allowing temporary requirements affording the use of powers of attorney (POA) to execute loan and closing documents. The GSEs updated their guidance to allow for POAs for loans with application dates on or before June 30, 2020. The POA may be used to execute any of the initial loan and closing documents.

"Powers of attorney are not a high-tech tool like the ones with RON. They are an old-school one," said John D. Burley, associate general counsel at Fannie Mae. "Both Fannie and Freddie announced to lenders the expanded use POA during this time of social distancing."

According to both GSEs, the principal can delegate the following as a designated "attorney" through a POA:

- an individual employed by the title insurer underwriting the title insurance policy.
- an individual employed by the title agency issuing the title insurance policy for the mortgage and closing the transaction but only if the title insurer has issued a closing protection letter relating to the transaction (or similar contractual indemnity) for such policy issuing agent.

What about notarization:

The GSEs require that POAs:

- must be notarized for all purchase deals; some refinances will not have to be notarized unless required by applicable law, e.g., to record it with the security instrument.
- if the POA is required to be recorded, notarization may be done by RON in the states listed in the RON guidance.
- if POA does not need to be recorded, notarization by RON may be used in all states.

"Probably most significant for closing agents, in all permitted used of powers of attorney for borrowers, there must be a confirmation that the borrower understands the key terms of the loan," Burley said.

This must happen after the borrower receives the Closing Disclosure, but before the closing. For Fannie Mae, if the title company employee is the attorney-in-fact, the existing requirement for recorded, online interaction session with the borrower applies.

Many borrowers may never have used a POA before and may not understand that the closing could occur without their final involvement. The seller or settlement agent should give an overview of how the POA is used to sign on behalf of the borrower and review the final terms of the mortgage loan to ensure they understand them, according to John Valdivielso, associate general counsel for Freddie Mac.

The acknowledgment from the borrower should memorialize that the borrower understood the content of the discussion. It does not need to be signed, made under oath or notarized. Valdivielso said it may be made in writing or recorded from a phone call or video conference. If in writing, the acknowledgment should be kept in the mortgage file and if recorded, stored in a medium that it may be provided to GSE upon request. ■



Remote Online Notarization: Everything You Need to Know

To be prepared to adopt RON technology, title agents need to start learning what their role in an electronic closing transaction will look like. We want you to be prepared to answer questions on the topic from your customers, and know how to adopt the technology within your own office. Download our RON e-books for everything you need to know about RON.

Download our RON (Part 1) e-book to learn all the basics of RON, including:

- Updates on states that have passed RON legislation
- Digital technology terms and definitions
- The different types of closings - traditional and digital
- The ways RON can benefit you and your business
- How remote notaries identify signers

Download RON Part 1

Download our RON (Part 2) e-book for a how-to guide on how to use RON, along with a list of current RON providers. You'll learn:

- Where to access information on your state's RON requirements and regulations
- Key requirements for how a RON transaction is conducted
- Which vendors currently offer RON services and how to contact them
- Questions you should ask a RON provider before choosing to use their service
- How to prepare your team to begin conducting RON closings

Download RON Part 2

Why Can't I Just Slap an E-signature on a PDF Note?

There Are Many Rules With Creation and Enforcement

By Steve Gottheim



WITH THE INDUSTRY RAMPING UP THEIR USE OF REMOTE ONLINE NOTARIZATION (RON), emergency video notarization and remote ink-signed notarization for security instruments, the natural question is when will we see new legal authority to make it easier to electronically sign mortgage notes? The answer is not likely anytime soon.

Digital transactions got a big boost in the early 2000s with the passage of the federal Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act (ESIGN) and the state Uniform Electronic Transactions Act (UETA). UETA has been passed in 48 states, as well as Washington, D.C. and the U.S. Virgin Islands (New York and Illinois have non-conforming electronic transactions laws). These two laws adopt a simple legal principle that electronic signatures and records should be accorded the same legal status as ink signature and paper records.

These laws also allow a basic requirement for what constitutes a valid electronic signature. E-Sign defines an electronic signature as, “an electronic sound, symbol, or process, attached to or logically associated with a contract or other record and executed or adopted by a person with the intent to sign the record.” It leaves it up to businesses to set higher business requirements concerning security and certainty of the signature.

While both UETA and the E-Sign are fairly broad, they both exclude some transactions from their scope, including transactions under most of the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) other than Article 2 and 2A. Promissory notes (the legal term for a mortgage note) are creatures of the UCC. Most promissory notes used in the mortgage space are intended to fall under the legal scheme of negotiable instruments, which is governed by Article 3 of the UCC. This contrasts with mortgages, deeds of trust or liens which are creatures of real property law. Thus, mortgages can follow the basic ESIGN or UETA framework while notes are not covered.

What Makes Promissory Notes Special?

Under 3-104 of the UCC, a negotiable instrument is defined as “an unconditional promise or order to pay a fixed amount of money, with or without interest or other charges described in the promise or order, if it: (1) is payable to bearer or to order at the time it is issued or first comes into possession of a holder; (2) is payable on demand or at a definite time; and (3) does not state any other undertaking or instruction by the person promising or ordering payment to do any act in addition to the payment of money, but the promise or order may contain (i) an undertaking or power to give, maintain, or protect collateral to secure payment, (ii) an authorization or power to the

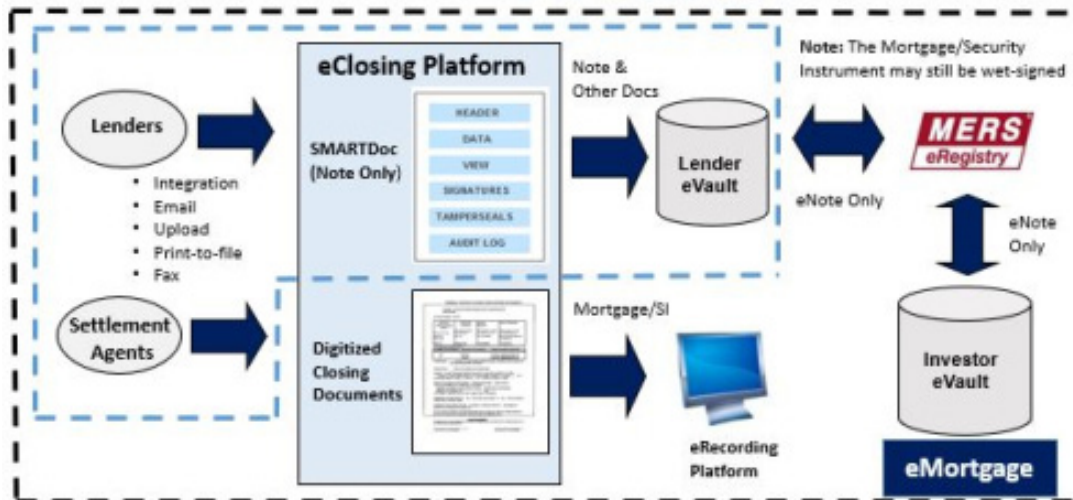
holder to confess judgment or realize on or dispose of collateral, or (iii) a waiver of the benefit of any law intended for the advantage or protection of an obligor.” Other types of negotiable instruments can be cashier’s checks, bearer bonds and traveler’s checks.

There is a host of rules that goes along with the creation and enforcement of a note and liability for irregularities in the process. In addition, there are many rights granted to people who qualify as holders, holders in due course and persons entitled to enforce a note. Because paper promissory notes are meant to be “negotiable instruments,” having “possession” of the “original” signed note is legally significant. To simplify things, possession is 9/10th of the law when it comes to who can enforce a note.

With notes, possession of an original note does not work the same way. Imagine



Because paper promissory notes are meant to be “negotiable instruments,” having “possession” of the “original” signed note is legally significant. To simplify things, possession is 9/10th of the law when it comes to who can enforce a note.



someone applies a simple digital signature to a PDF document. Then they email that file to 30 people. Which one is the original? How do we determine which recipient has the right to enforce the note?

How Is an eNote Created?

Given this problem about possession of the original note, UETA and E-SIGN created a special category for negotiable instruments called transferable records. To simplify matters, people seeking to create an eNote must first establish a control system that houses an authoritative copy of the digital document. If they do this, the eNote qualifies as a “transferable record.” Transferable records can be transferred and assigned like negotiable instruments by transferring rights to control the record in the system. Under these rules, a person with “control” of the transferable record has the same legal rights as a person who has physical possession of a traditional paper note.

This requires a complex system for creating authoritative records and controls that correlate to the basic concepts of holders, persons entitled to enforce and possession in the law of paper notes. Under this framework a system must:

- Securely maintain and label a single authoritative copy of each eNote.
- Identify the person with exclusive control of the authoritative copy.
- Create a chain of control marking transfers of control of the authoritative copy.
- Track and label non-authoritative copies of each eNote.

To execute this process, the industry developed “electronic vaults” of authoritative copies of eNotes and related consumer documents.

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac have a series of requirements that loan originators must go through to be able to sell eNotes to those government sponsored entities (GSEs). This includes using the Uniform Fannie Mae/Freddie Mac form of eNote, creating an audit trail to link a specific borrower to their electronic signature, using tamper-evident technology and encryption of the signature and document, use of an authorized eVault and registering the note with MERS.

STEVE GOTTHEIM is ALTA’s senior counsel. He can be reached at steve@alta.org.



ALTA Registry Connects Lenders With RON-capable Closing Companies

Title and Settlement Agencies Encouraged to Update or Create Listing

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of mortgages are being closed online in order to comply with federal and state social distancing guidelines.

To help meet this need, ALTA recently updated the ALTA Title & Settlement Agent Registry (ALTA Registry). The Registry now identifies title and settlement companies that can perform RON closings. This will help mortgage companies identify closing companies that offer this increasingly in-demand service, which allows homeowners to review, sign and notarize documents online to complete mortgage transactions.

Company Name



Company Information

ALTA ID	1234567	Website	www.thaddeustitle.com
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“More and more mortgage closings are being conducted online, and remote notaries are playing a key role in the process,” said Dianne Tomb, ALTA’s chief executive officer. “Companies that can offer RON services have become even more valuable in light of the need for social distancing created by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The ALTA Registry gives mortgage lenders an extra layer of confirmation that they’re working with the correct title agent, settlement company or real estate attorney. Every title agent office location is identified by a unique ALTA ID, allowing quick verification. Each entry is confirmed by title insurance underwriters.

Jack Rattikin, co-chair of ALTA’s Registry Committee and president of Fort Worth, Texas-based Rattikin Title Co., encourages title and settlement agents to update their listing in the ALTA Registry so they can get a special icon in their company record and let lenders know they are RON ready.

“Using the ALTA Registry, mortgage lenders can increase accuracy, reduce production expenses, combat fraud and improve compliance,” said Rattikin, who also serves on ALTA’s Board of Governors and chairs the Abstracters and Title Insurance Agents Executive Section.

Eddie Oddo, co-chair of the ALTA Registry and vice president of Corporate Business Solutions for First American Title Insurance Company said the Registry Committee agreed that a RON capability icon would be self-confirmed by the record owner.

“The RON Icon would denote that a closing company had the ability to perform RON closings, was engaged with one or more GSE-approved vendors for use in performing RON closings and complied with underwriter guidelines and applicable laws and regulations,” Oddo said. “The introduction of the RON Icon helps the industry adjust to new closing methods that are becoming available and aiding in business continuity.”

Registration in the ALTA Registry is free and membership in ALTA isn’t required. Currently, more than 8,000 title agents, settlement companies and real estate attorneys appear in the database. Closing companies that offer RON will be designated

with a small icon, making them easy to identify in the ALTA Registry, which is also fully searchable. Title and settlement companies can apply for or update a listing at alta.org/registry.

Refinancing orders have skyrocketed as individuals search for lower monthly mortgage payments. There are 44.7 million homeowners with equity available to tap via cash-out refinancing. An average of \$138,000 is available in useable equity. Loans offer immediate financial relief to families and ultimately benefit the economy. A recent report highlighted that Americans can save up to \$277 per month when they refinance. Providing RON can help consumers close these transactions safely and securely.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the way many companies conduct business in a time of social distancing and stay-at-home orders,” said Greg Kosin, president of Greater Illinois Title Company Group of Companies. “The GIT Group of Companies has been a leader in providing safe and secure options to move away from in-person requirements traditionally part of the real estate closing process. The ALTA Registry is a great utility to help connect lenders with title companies that offer this service.”

**ALTA**
REGISTRY

Get Your Free ALTA Registry Listing

ALTA membership does not automatically create your listing in the ALTA Registry. Currently, more than 8,000 of your competitors’ locations are already confirmed in the database. To update your listing or to create one, go to alta.org/registry.

CFPB Relaxes TRID Rule in Wake of COVID-19

Consumers Can Waive Certain Waiting Periods

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) on April 29 took steps to make it easier for consumers with urgent financial needs to obtain access to mortgage credit in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To help, the bureau issued an interpretive rule clarifying that consumers can exercise their rights to modify or waive certain required waiting periods under the TILA-RESPA Integrated Disclosure Rule (TRID) and Regulation Z rescission rules. The rule goes into effect when published in the Federal Register.

“The steps we are taking will help consumers facing financial emergencies obtain access to mortgage credit faster,” said CFPB Director Kathleen Kraninger. “The pandemic is resulting in consumers facing various challenges, and our temporary and targeted solutions are intended to ensure that consumers receive the credit they need in a timely manner.”

In the interpretive rule, the CFPB said it understands the pandemic could create temporary business disruptions and challenges for covered businesses involved in the origination process, including settlement agents.

The CFPB said if a consumer determines that his or her need to obtain funds due to the COVID-19 pandemic (1) necessitates consummating the credit transaction before the end of the TRID Rule waiting periods or (2) must be met before the end of the Regulation Z Rescission Rules waiting period, then the consumer has a bona fide personal financial emergency that would permit the consumer to utilize the modification and waiver provisions, subject to the applicable procedures set forth in the TRID Rule and Regulation Z Rescission Rules.



FaceTime vs. RON: Knowing the difference

Remote online notarization (RON) leverages audio/visual (A/V) communication technology to notarize documents in a virtual environment online. Recently, in the face of COVID-19 quarantine mandates, it has become the lifeline of real estate closings ... but not all A/V programs are compliant with relevant laws and guidelines.

While many are flocking to webcam programs like FaceTime, Skype, and Zoom to meet virtually with family, friends, and colleagues during the COVID-19 crisis, these tools do not meet the minimum technology standards established by the Mortgage Industry Standards Maintenance Organization (MISMO) and the Revised Uniform Law on Notarial Acts (RULONA), and codified by state legislation.

"Not all platforms are RON, and not all platforms are created equal," said Danielle Kaiser, NTP, Vice President and Eastern Region Underwriting Counsel for **North American Title Insurance Company (NATIC)**. "Those platforms do not ensure that consumer data-privacy and information-security laws and regulations are satisfied. Simply put, they lack the security and safety we would want for our customers."



SIMPLE. DONE RIGHT.

Here's a side-by-side comparison of popular webcam programs and the minimum RON technology standards established for the title insurance industry:

Requirement / Standard	FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, Etc.	Remote Online Notarization (RON)
Ability of notary and signers to communicate in real time via A/V technology	✓	✓
Ability of notary and signers to view and electronically sign a single set of documents		✓
Credential analysis and identity-proving*		✓
Secure video recording of the transaction stored in the notarial journal		✓
Audit trail of notarial actions completed in the RON transaction		✓
End-to-end encryption		✓
Tamper-evident technology to prevent changes being made to the record		✓

*Knowledge-based authentication questions, examination of government-issued identification, biometric technology, etc.



**For more on RON in the current landscape:
View NATIC/States Title's white paper [HERE](#).**

Under TRID, creditors generally must deliver or place in the mail the Loan Estimate to consumers no later than seven business days before consummation. Consumers must receive the Closing Disclosure no later than three business days before consummation.

The rule allows consumers to waive the waiting periods if they meet the criteria for a bona fide personal emergency. The CFPB said in the interpretive rule that if borrowers attest in a signed statement that their financial situation necessitates a faster closing due to the pandemic can have their waiting periods waived.

In the rule, the CFPB also concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic is a “changed circumstance” for purposes of certain TRID Rule provisions, allowing creditors to use revised estimates reflecting changes in settlement charges for purposes of determining good faith.

TRID requires creditors to estimate and disclose in good faith on the Loan Estimate the costs that consumers will incur in connection with their mortgage transaction. For purposes of determining good faith under the TRID Rule, creditors may use revised estimates of such costs in a limited number of situations pursuant to Regulation Z. “Changed circumstances” is one of these situations that could affect settlement charges.

TRID specifies that changed circumstances include “an extraordinary event beyond the control of any interested party,” with the commentary to the TRID Rule clarifying that a “war or natural disaster” is an example of such an extraordinary event. The CFPB concluded the COVID-19 pandemic is an extraordinary event that permits creditors to provide consumers with revised estimates reflecting changes in settlement charges.

“Accordingly, for purposes of determining good faith, creditors may use revised estimates of settlement charges that consumers would incur in connection with the mortgage transaction if the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the estimate of such settlement charges,” the bureau stated in the interpretive rule.

CFPB Seeks Input on Federal Consumer Financial Protection Law

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) issued a request for information (RFI) to assist with recommendations on harmonizing, modernizing and updating the federal consumer financial laws.

The CFPB’s Taskforce on Federal Consumer Financial Law seeks input from the public to help identify areas of consumer protection on which it should focus its research and analysis during the balance of its one-year appointment.

The RFI seeks comments and other information on the following topics:

- expanding access to consumer financial products and services
- protection and use of consumer data
- regulations the CFPB writes and enforces
- federal and state coordination
- improving the market for consumer financial products and services

The comment period for the RFI closes 60 days after the date of its publication in the Federal Register.

ALTA’s Data Privacy Executive Committee is reviewing the RFI. ALTA plans to submit comments. Earlier this year, ALTA released data privacy principles that recommend the development of a single, national standard to help protect private consumer information uniformly and consistently while maintaining an efficient homebuying and selling experience.

Key aspects of the principles include exemptions for entities already subject to the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, personal information that is already publicly available and within business-to-business relationships. In addition, the principles say data privacy laws should recognize the need for businesses to share personal information needed to complete a transaction.

Consideration also should be given to the impact on small business, with respect to the cost of compliance relative to the risk of consumer harm, ALTA said. Other aspects of the standards discuss data breach notifications, a safe harbor and the right to cure.

Two questions in the CFPB’s RFI address key aspects of ALTA’s principles. Specifically, the bureau asks:

- Both the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) and its implementing Regulation V and the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act and its implementing Regulation P contain important protections of consumers’ personal information. Are these protections sufficient? Why or why not? If not sufficient, what further protections should the bureau or Congress consider?
- Most states have enacted laws that afford consumers certain protections in the event of a data breach. There is considerable variation among these laws, including the triggering events for coverage by the law and the requirements and remedies relating to a breach. Would federal legislation, regulation, or guidance addressing data breaches be desirable? Why or why not? Would it be desirable to have a uniform national standard for data breach obligations? Why or why not?



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Report Shows Title Industry to Remain Stable Despite COVID-19 Headwinds

Pandemic Affects Underwriters' Q1 Financial Results



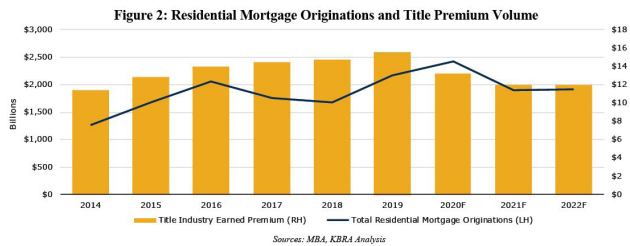
DESPITE THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, Kroll Bond Rating Agency (KBRA) reports the overall financial strength of the U.S. title insurance sector in 2020 remains stable. The ratings firm does believe some of the independent title insurers with elevated equity holdings and lack of scale will be tested. Multi-state writers with market share leadership positions should fare better than companies with limited geographies and operations.

“With record levels of surplus entering 2020, KBRA believes the sector remains reasonably positioned to weather macroeconomic headwinds this year,” KBRA said in its report. “Our near-term expectations are that operating results will be dampened but remain strong enough to maintain financial strength consistent with current rating levels.”

KBRA believes the expected surge in mortgage refinancing should offset investment declines, leading to the sector’s ninth consecutive year of net income. As a result of COVID-19, KBRA

has lowered its 2020 premium projection to around \$13 billion from the previous estimate of \$15 billion.

The projected jump in refinancing is driven by the interest rate environment as well as by homeowners looking to lower monthly expenses given the economic environment. Title insurance premium revenues are directly connected to the volume of mortgage originations. Although total originations are forecast to be flat, KBRA anticipates a sharp premium decline to reflect the higher proportion of refinanced title insurance premiums, which



are typically 15-50 percent lower than for new home purchases. A decline in large commercial premiums will also be significant, KBRA noted.

All four of the publicly traded underwriters reported strong first-quarter earnings and started adjusting as COVID-19 hit in March. Here's a recap of each underwriter's Q1 results.

Fidelity

Fidelity National Financial reported that its title segment generated adjusted pre-tax income of \$279 million during the first quarter of 2020. This compared to \$172 million in adjusted pre-tax income during the same period a year ago.

"While our first quarter volumes started strong and our initial outlook for the full year robust, the environment has rapidly changed with the spread of COVID-19 which has impacted how we work, live and socialize," said Bill Foley II, chairman of Fidelity National Financial. "The important work our company performs to facilitate residential and commercial real estate settlements and closings is designated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as part of the 'essential critical infrastructure workforce.' Our first priority during these challenging times has been the safety and health of our customers and our more than 25,000 employees spread across the U.S., Canada and India."

Foley said that more than 80 percent of Fidelity's employees are working remotely.

"This is a testament to not only the operational capabilities of our team but also the significant investments that we have made in technology which positions FNF to succeed during such a trying time," he added.

During Q1 of 2020, Fidelity opened 682,000 direct orders. This compares to 438,000 direct orders the company opened during Q1 2019. The spike was driven by a 170 percent increase in opened refinance orders versus the first quarter of 2019. Meanwhile, Fidelity closed 377,000 direct orders during the latest quarter. This was up from 263,000 closed orders during Q1 in 2018.

"While it is hard to forecast the duration and impact of the pandemic on the residential and commercial real estate markets, our team has a long history and deep experience operating through challenging markets," said Randy Quirk, Fidelity's chief executive officer. "We are leveraging our investments in technology and utilizing online resources as we mobilize our teams to close orders. Real estate closings for the most part require physical signing of certain documents, and we are making accommodations in our office environment, while adhering to the social distancing guidelines and limiting physical contact as we work to protect our employees and customers."

Given the spread of the pandemic and the broad shelter-in-

place orders issued by state governments, Fidelity reported a decline in refinance and purchase orders toward the end of March. Following the stay-at-home orders, Quirk said open order count decreased from about 3,500 purchase orders per day to about 2,500 per day. He added that the drop off has bottomed out. Following the order count decreases at the end of March, Fidelity reduced staff in its field operations by 18 percent and cut corporate staffing by 11 percent.

Fidelity paid \$58 million in claims during the first quarter of 2020 compared to \$45 million in claims paid during the same quarter in 2019.

First American

First American Financial Corp. reported that its title insurance and services segment generated \$73.0 million in pre-tax income during the first quarter of 2020. This is down from \$142.0 million in pre-tax income during the same period a year ago.

Dennis Gilmore, chief executive officer at First American Financial, said the company quickly enacted its business continuity plan in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The majority of First American's workforce is now working remotely. For those still working in offices, Gilmore said the company takes extra precautions and follows guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Our first priority during the coronavirus pandemic has been to keep our employees and their families safe," he added. "Our second priority has been to maintain service levels to our customers. Expansion of the use of our innovative technologies that leverage our deep data assets, combined with the tireless dedication of our employees, has enabled us to successfully meet that challenge."

Gilmore said First American experienced a minor disruption to its operation when the stay-at-home orders were first announced, but those issues were quickly resolved.

"These stay-at-home orders have come at a time when refinance volumes are surging, amplifying the strain on the industry," he said.

First American's direct operations opened 354,400 orders during Q1 of 2020. This is up from 227,800 opened orders during Q1 of 2019. Meanwhile, the company closed 202,700 direct title orders during first-quarter 2020, compared to 150,900 closed direct orders during the same period in 2019. Gilmore reported that First American's purchase business started 2020 strong, until mid-March when orders fell sharply. West Coast markets declined about 50 percent while others in the Midwest fell about 35 percent.

"The good news is, although orders have fallen severely, they appear to have stabilized. It appears we've reached a floor," Gilmore said.

Refinances comprised 53 percent of First American's closed residential orders during the latest quarter. First American's average revenue per direct title order declined to \$2,315 due to the shift in the order mix to lower-premium residential refinance transactions.

During the latest quarter, First American paid \$55.0 million in claims. This is up from \$36.2 million in claims paid during the first quarter of 2019.

Gilmore said the pandemic will accelerate adoption of a digital title and closing process. During the first quarter, First American

closed on its acquisition of DocuTech. The purchase advances First American's ability to provide end-to-end digital mortgage and settlement services.

"Recent events have validated that our strategic path to digitally transform our business is the right one, and we will emerge from this crisis in an even stronger leadership position," he added.

Old Republic

Old Republic International Corp. reported that its title insurance segment generated \$43.3 million in pre-tax income during the first quarter of 2020. This is up from \$20.5 million in pre-tax income during the same period a year ago.

Overall, the company's consolidated results were driven by greater profitability in Old Republic's title insurance segment.

During an earnings call, Old Republic International CEO and President Craig Smiddy said about 80 percent of the company's title insurance associates were working remotely. Smiddy recognized the remote workers and also the essential employees still working in offices, "all of whom are working to ensure that our services and capabilities for our customers, our agents and brokers continue uninterrupted."

"The impact on U.S. economic activity from the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated governmental responses occurred in the final weeks of the first quarter," Smiddy said. "Therefore, there was minimal effect on Old Republic's first quarter (results)."

Old Republic paid \$21.5 million in claims during Q1 of 2020 versus \$14.4 million in claims paid during Q1 of 2019.

Carolyn Monroe, president of Old Republic's title insurance group, said the company ended the first quarter with some of the highest open order counts in its history. In addition, all-time, first-quarter highs were set in terms of both direct and independent agency revenue and operating profitability. For the first quarter, total premium and fee revenue was \$628.1 million, which was an increase of nearly 24 percent over the first quarter of 2019.

"While these have really been challenging times, the employees in the title division have embraced this challenge and are working through the chaos in order to continue business and serve our customers," Monroe said. "Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, residential and commercial sales and refinances continue to fund and transactions need to close. Amidst this, we are ever mindful of the safety and well-being of our employees and customers. Access into our offices is generally restricted to employees only, which has really caused us to be very creative in carrying out our business."

Monroe said Old Republic's direct operations and agents have conducted drive-through closings, set up tents outside of offices and provided single-use pens for signing documents in order to meet social distancing requirements. In addition, the COVID-19 crisis has led to a variety of emergency state orders allowing for online notarization.

Based on these orders, Monroe said Old Republic's title technology company, Pavaso, which was originally designed for electronic closings, adjusted its technology to allow agents to continue conducting closings through a secure platform.

"This platform provides an essential notary function that allows for the entire notarization of documents to be completed remotely," she said. "Between the ingenuity of our offices and agents and the supportive technology like Pavaso, we have been able to keep pace in our current environment."

Stewart

Stewart Information Services Corp. reported that its title insurance segment generated pre-tax income of \$14.8 million during the first quarter of 2020. This compared to a pre-tax loss of \$400,000 million during the same period a year ago.

Like other companies, Stewart enacted its business continuity plan in early March to ensure it could continue to underwrite and close real estate transactions. By the second week of March, Stewart reported that 70 percent of its 5,500 employees were working remotely.

"While I am pleased with our performance this quarter, as Stewart delivered one of its strongest first quarter performances in its history, the greater measure of our accomplishment is what has been done since the middle of March to support our customers, employees and the real estate markets," said Fred Eppinger, Stewart's chief executive officer. "We have been working tirelessly to protect the health and safety of our employees and customers, while rapidly and creatively using all available tools to continue providing leadership in the operations of real estate markets, including helping people purchase homes and refinance mortgages. We will continue to carefully monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our industry and economy as we provide our customers with the necessary services that are called for in its wake. I remain very optimistic that with our exceptional associates, customer-centric philosophy and solid balance sheet, Stewart will emerge from this challenging period as a strong, premier provider in title services."

During Q1 of 2020, Stewart opened 122,708 direct orders. This compares to 82,620 direct orders the company opened during Q1 2019. Meanwhile, Stewart closed 69,533 direct orders during the latest quarter. This was up from 51,061 closed orders during Q1 in 2018.

Stewart paid \$18.6 million in claims during the latest quarter. This is up slightly from \$15.7 million in claims paid during the first quarter of 2019.

Eppinger said Stewart's digital capabilities, including remote online notarization (RON), electronic signature platforms, virtual underwriting and mobile earnest money transfer tools, continue to help the company get transactions closed.

"Our team has worked tirelessly to keep our customers and coworkers safe while creatively finding ways to close transactions using a range of tools at their disposal in very uncertain and challenging conditions," he added. "We do not know how the situation will ultimately unfold, but our priority remains the health and safety of our employees and customers. From a business standpoint, we continue to close transactions on a daily basis as we work through the pipeline of business we built in the first quarter, as well as a new business that continues to come in albeit at a reduced volume."



In uncertain times, comfort comes from knowing some things will not change. It is important to have those you can rely on, through good times and bad. Old Republic Title has been doing business this way - the right way - for more than a century. Our commitment will not waver. We're doing all we can to support the health and well-being of our employees, our customers, and our communities; providing our agents the digital tools and resources needed to serve their customers now and well into the future.

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Suspicious Business Emails Increase, Survey Shows

U.S. small businesses report an increase in suspicious emails over the past year, and employees are taking the bait as they fall for phishing schemes and transfer tens of thousands of dollars in company funds into fraudulent accounts, a cyber survey by HSB shows.

“Whether it’s a phishing scheme, fraud or malware, most cyber-attacks start with an email,” said Timothy Zeilman, vice president for HSB, which is a multi-line specialty insurer. “Even companies that have information security training and fairly savvy employees fall victim to these deceptions.”

Over half of business executives (58 percent) polled by Zogby Analytics for HSB, said suspicious emails had increased in the past year.

More than a third (37 percent) of the organizations received an email from someone pretending to be a senior manager or vendor requesting payments.

Almost half of employees receiving those emails (47 percent) responded by transferring company funds, resulting in losses most often in the \$50,000 to \$100,000 range (37 percent) and rarely less than \$10,000 (only 11 percent).

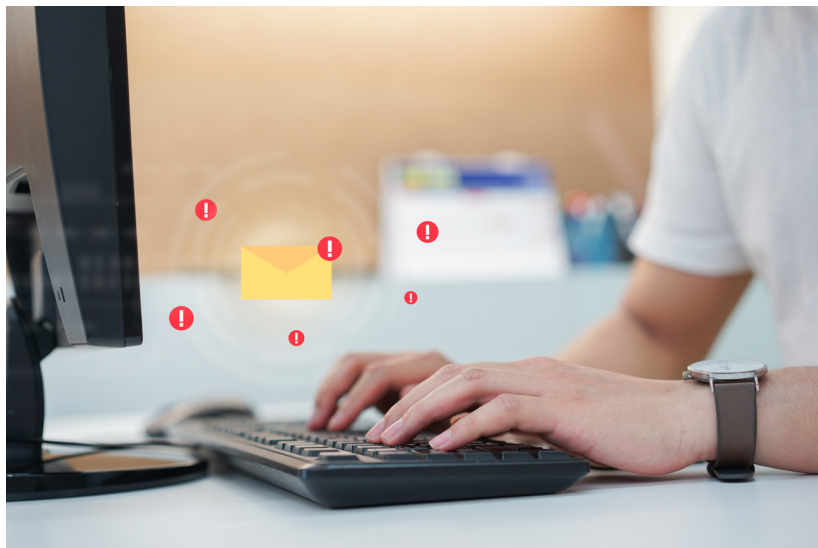
The scam is convincing because cyber thieves in many cases gain access to business email accounts and assume the identities of company managers, a tactic known as business email compromise (BEC).

With millions of Americans working from home since the outbreak of COVID-19, business email schemes could become an even bigger threat, Zeilman said.

“It’s more important than ever to pay attention to safe cyber security practices and make sure you verify requests for payments,” he said. “Don’t rely on email alone—call the person

and confirm the payment is legitimate before releasing any funds.”

These BEC scams often lead to wire transfer fraud. According to the FBI, there were 11,677 victims in 2019 with \$221 million in losses due to wire transfer fraud. This compares to 11,300 reported victims and \$150 million in losses in 2018.



“The title and settlement industry has improved its digital hygiene and implemented many procedures to combat this fraud,” said Diane Tomb, ALTA’s chief executive officer. “But no matter how much money we spend, criminals will continue to target consumers and try to take advantage of them during a crisis. This is why we must continue to educate people about

how they can protect their money when purchasing a home or refinancing a mortgage.”

ALTA also recommends calling a known number instead of emailing to verify wiring instructions. It’s uncommon for title companies to change wiring instructions and payment information by email.

To raise awareness and educate consumers, ALTA launched the Coalition to Stop Real Estate Wire Fraud (stopwirefraud.org). In 2019, the coalition ran a digital advertising campaign placing online ads in nine markets. The campaign delivered more than 22 million ad impressions to potential homebuyers.

ALTA has developed many tools and resources to raise awareness and provide tools to protect your operation. To access the resources, go to alta.org/wirefraud. In addition, the ALTA Registry (alta.org/registry) can serve as an effective countermeasure to wire fraud. Make sure your company is confirmed.

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FinCEN Renews Geographic Targeting Orders

In May, the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) renewed its Geographic Targeting Orders (GTOs) requiring U.S. title insurance companies to identify the natural persons behind shell companies used in all-cash purchases of residential real estate.

These orders are effective through Nov. 5, 2020. The renewed GTOs are identical to the November 2019 GTOs. The purchase amount threshold remains \$300,000 for each covered metropolitan area. According to FinCEN, the GTOs continue to provide valuable data on the purchase of residential real estate by persons possibly involved in various illicit enterprises. Reissuing the GTOs further assists tracking illicit funds and other criminal or illicit activity, as well as inform FinCEN's future regulatory efforts in this sector, the agency said in a release.

The renewed GTOs cover certain counties within the following major U.S. metropolitan areas: Boston; Chicago; Dallas-Fort Worth; Honolulu; Las Vegas; Los Angeles; Miami; New York City; San Antonio; San Diego; San Francisco; and Seattle.

FinCEN also applauded the continued assistance and cooperation of the title insurance companies and ALTA in protecting the real estate markets from abuse by illicit actors.

To access tools to help members comply with the orders, go to alta.org/fincen.

Stewart Title Partners with SIGNiX to Expand RON Services

Stewart Title has entered into an agreement to offer SIGNiX digital signature products to its internal notaries and Stewart Trusted Provider network.

This will allow agents of Stewart Title

to offer electronic and remote online notarization (RON) services, extending their ability to perform those services directly, in addition to using other approved third-party service providers.

SIGNiX offers a platform for e-notaries to accompany in-person e-notary products and also has RON capabilities.

"As more and more states pass RON legislation, it's important we offer our associates and agents a suite of reliable and proven digital solutions," said Scott Gillen, senior vice president of national agents for Stewart. "SIGNiX's electronic notarization platform will allow our issuing offices to add electronic notarization capabilities, as well as provide an additional resource for agents or escrow officers looking to perform remote online notarizations."

Orange Coast Title Develops App to Protect Wire Transfers

Orange Coast Title Company has developed a new application aimed at increasing the security of wire transfers and reducing the chance of consumer funds being stolen by criminals.

Called ClosingWires, the application provides safe communication regarding wire and banking information. Customers only need a smartphone to use the application. For customers who do not have a smartphone or choose not to use Closing Wires, Orange Coast Title will add extra security measures to verify wire information. This may cause delays, the company said in a release.

"Orange Coast Title has always required extensive, mandatory training for all of its title and escrow personnel, and has implemented many safeguards to ward off possible threats," said John Marconi, founder of Orange Coast Title. "This year, the company took a major step to ensure safe, reliable communication between buyer, borrower, seller and escrow. We encourage our customers to use ClosingWires for wire instructions

rather than relying on an email system that can be vulnerable."

TitleOne Continues Expansion in Idaho

Idaho-based TitleOne recently acquired Payette County Title and Escrow LLC, which operates as both Payette County Title and Escrow and Washington County Title and Escrow in those respective counties. The acquisition gives TitleOne a presence in 18 of Idaho's 44 counties, representing more than 80 percent of the state's population. TitleOne is a subsidiary of Realogy Title Group. Both companies will operate as TitleOne. Financial terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

"With deep roots in their communities, these businesses have established a reputation for guiding clients with professionalism, efficiency and integrity, which aligns perfectly with our commitment to providing outstanding service to real estate professionals and consumers," said Jason Vickrey, president of TitleOne. "Following our expansion into Washington state, these acquisitions further strengthen TitleOne's presence in the Northwest."

Joel Scrivner, who served as vice president of Payette County Title and Escrow, has been appointed vice president of western Idaho for TitleOne and will manage operations in both counties. Washington County Title and Escrow was founded in 1912 as O.M. Henry Title and Trust, changing its name to Washington County Title Company in 1921. Based in Weiser, it serves all of Washington County.

"This opportunity to join forces with TitleOne will deliver tremendous benefits to both our customers and employees," Scrivner said. "Our companies share an approach focused on providing superior service, and while being part of a larger team has advantages, even more important are the industry-leading technologies and solutions that we'll be able to offer."



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WFG Appoints National Escrow Advisor



Natalie Koonce

WFG National Title Insurance Co. has named Natalie Koonce as vice president and national escrow advisor. Koonce, who most recently served as president of the Colorado division of North American Title of Colorado, will provide guidance to her division's escrow managers and staff regarding best practices as well as company escrow policies and procedures applicable to escrow operations across the country. She will also monitor regulatory

and legislative changes, review and implement best practices in the settlement services industry and make recommendations to executive management regarding settlement services.

Punctual Abstract Promotes Chief Technology Officer

Punctual Abstract announced the promotion of Nick Sagona to chief technology officer. In this new leadership position, Sagona oversees the company's technologically advanced systems that allow the firm to deliver a fully examined title product that integrates with most of the industry's title closing platforms. Sagona also is the chief software engineer of Punctual Abstract's proprietary workflow software. He has worked with Punctual Abstract for eight years.

North American Title Co. Announces Several Appointments

- Chad Hansen was named vice president and regional underwriting counsel for Colorado, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Wyoming and Idaho. He will provide underwriting support to NATIC agents throughout those states and beyond with his broad local and national experience. Most recently, Hansen served as vice president and national underwriter at a publicly traded title insurer.
- Kelly Love was hired as vice president and regional underwriting counsel for Texas, Louisiana and Alabama. She will provide underwriting support to NATIC agents in those states. Prior to joining

NATIC, Love worked as in-house counsel for various independent Texas title agents managing a wide range of issues, including commercial and residential closings, farm and ranch conveyances, title examinations, escrow procedures, risk management, regulatory compliance, claims processing and agency operations.

- Justin Tanner joined NATIC as vice president and regional underwriting counsel for North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Mississippi. He will work with NATIC agents throughout those states providing underwriting support as well as training and education. Before joining NATIC, Tanner held positions as underwriting counsel at both national and regional underwriters.
- Ryan Sabel joined NATIC as state agency manager for Texas. He will work to support independent title agents in his state. Before joining NATIC, Sabel held the role of vice president of sales at a national title company where he focused on growing the lender, commercial, residential and iBuyer verticals.

String Expands Client Offering With Key Promotions

String Real Estate Information Services announced it has promoted Gokul Krishnan to director of operations, Prakash Rajagopalan to senior vice president of finance, Kris Gurumoorthy to vice president of title operations and Bhaskar Reddy to vice president of training and quality.

Krishnan will expand the String India centers to increase productivity, scalability and employee engagement. Krishnan has been with the company since its founding in 2004.

Rajagopalan will continue oversight of String's finance and administration to ensure appropriate valuation and research of future acquisitions. He has been with the firm since 2013.

Gurumoorthy will continue overseeing legacy title operations and managing process service delivery with a specific focus on seamless execution and client satisfaction. Gurumoorthy has been with String since its founding in 2004.

Reddy will head the training and quality departments across all three of String's offshore locations. He will also support function teams in the secondary title operations and coordinate String's automation initiatives. Reddy has also been with the String since its founding in 2004.

HERE TO HELP YOU NAVIGATE OBSTACLES

In times of uncertainty, you need a partner who cares about the success of your agency and makes sure you have the tools and resources needed to keep your transactions moving. With Stewart as your underwriter you have that.

During this COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic, our agency team's top priority is helping our agency partners navigate this challenging time. We have solutions and resources in place to help you conduct business with as little disruption as possible, including:

- Bulletins, educational resources and training
- Technology partnerships and discounts
- Financial services
- Marketing resources
- Guidance from agency leadership

Rely on us to help you navigate through COVID-19.
Visit stewart.com/alta202 for information on how we can help.

The Stewart logo, featuring the word "stewart" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, set against a solid red square background.

Figuring It Out, Together

WHILE THE COVID-19 HEALTH CRISIS PERSISTS, people across the country are finally beginning to think about what's next and how people will return safely to offices. This process, however, is taking place gradually and non-uniformly across the country.

The landscape can be confusing enough for ALTA members. Keeping track of what is required will be quite the endeavor. For multi-state operations, it can get unwieldy trying to stay abreast of all the different state requirements. Even for businesses that operate in a couple of counties, there can be different protocols such as rules for face masks.

To help its members, ALTA created a webpage called Operation Healthy Office. Here you'll find various resources to help you develop a plan. Among the resources are several infographics including the top tips to protect your employees' health, how to reduce transmission of the virus among employees and how to maintain a healthy operation.

On the page, you'll also find a resource from the Chamber of Commerce that details state-by-state business guidelines, timelines and other reopening information for employers.

As the economy starts to reopen, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said employers should plan to respond in a flexible way to varying levels of disease transmission and be prepared to refine their business response plans as needed. Meanwhile, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has provided direction, consistent with workplace protections and rules, that can help employers implement strategies to navigate the impact of COVID-19 in the workplace. The EEOC enforces workplace anti-discrimination laws including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act, administering requirements for reasonable accommodation and rules about medical examinations and inquiries.

In May, I moderated a webinar for ALTA that focused on issues title and settlement companies should be thinking about when and if they fully staff offices. Craig Haskins of Knight Barry Title Group, along with two expert attorneys from Ballard Spahr, joined me in the conversation. From monitoring and compliance to liability and operations changes, there are many angles to think about.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the workplace is rapidly evolving. There's no one way to attack this. Some businesses may require face masks. Others may not. Some may implement daily temperature screenings. And some businesses may take a hybrid approach when sending staff back to the office, working in staggered shifts or continuing to have people work remotely. Utilize ALTA's resources at alta.org/coronavirus and consult the CDC website and your local health officials to ensure you have the most up-to-date information and guidance.

One thing is for sure, we're all trying to figure this out.



MARY O'DONNELL
ALTA president

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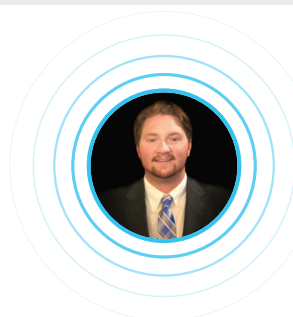
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