

JUNE 2021

# TITLE News

AMERICAN LAND TITLE ASSOCIATION

the Time  
for Title  
Standards  
Is Now



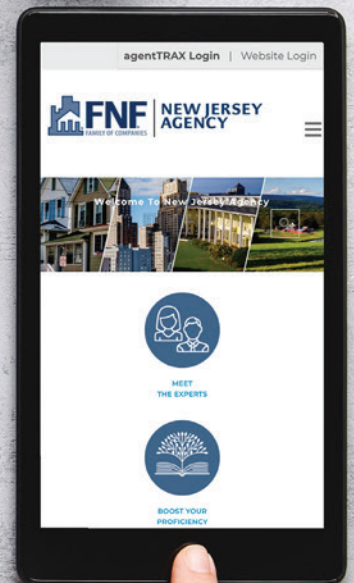




nationalagency.fnf.com

# FRESH Vibes. FRESH New Look.

We are proud to re-launch our local agency websites to better serve our title agents and real estate attorneys. We want to make accessing education, our underwriting team, training, news and events easier than ever! We'll be rolling out more sites throughout the summer so watch for updates in your area.







# iN This Issue

VOLUME 100 | NUMBER 6 | JUNE 2021

## COVER STORY

**10** The Time for Title Standards Is Now  
Input Needed from Title Community as More Transactions Conducted Digitally

## FEATURES

**14** AI in Title: The Future Is Now  
Automation Has Come a Long Way in the Settlement Process

**18** Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Through Corporate Social Justice  
Companies Must Remain Committed During Transformational Journey

**22** Good Marketable and (Elder) Abuse Free Title  
The Problem, a Case Study and Concrete Steps Title Companies Can Take

## DEPARTMENTS

**5** Publisher's Desk  
**6** ALTA News  
**30** Industry Update  
**36** Movers & Shakers  
**38** Closing Comment

**28** Gratitude Returned  
Those Helped by ALTA Good Deeds Foundation Give Thanks



DON'T MISS THIS MONTH'S  
DIGITAL ISSUE OF

# TITLENews

The digital edition of **TITLENews** includes a webinar recording that discusses the benefits of developing a diverse and inclusive workplace, including performance, retention and financial growth. Industry experts share ways title and settlement companies can maximize their inclusion efforts.

Go to [alta.org](http://alta.org)  
to get your copy of  
*Digital TitleNews Today.*



*TitleNews* is published monthly by the American Land Title Association. United States and Canadian subscription rates are \$100 a year for members and \$300 a year for nonmembers. For subscription information, call 800-787-ALTA.

Send address changes to *TitleNews*, American Land Title Association, 1800 M Street, Suite 300 S, Washington, D.C. 20036-5828.

Anyone is invited to contribute articles, reports and photographs concerning issues of the title industry. The Association, however, reserves the right to edit all material submitted. Editorials and articles are not statements of Association policy and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editor or the Association.

Reprints: Apply to the editor for permission to reprint any part of the magazine. Articles reprinted with permission must carry the following credit line: "Reprinted from *TitleNews*, the monthly magazine of the American Land Title Association."

©2021 American Land Title Association

Members Call Toll Free: 800-787-ALTA  
Members Fax Toll Free: 888-FAX-ALTA  
Visit ALTA Home Page: [alta.org](http://alta.org)  
Email Feedback to: [service@alta.org](mailto:service@alta.org)

# TITLENews

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE **AMERICAN LAND TITLE ASSOCIATION**

PUBLISHER + EDITOR IN CHIEF  
**Jeremy Yohe**

DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL AND PRINT MEDIA  
**Shawn Sullivan**

## ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

PRESIDENT  
**Bill Burding NTP**  
Orange Coast Title Family of  
Companies  
Santa Ana, Calif.

PRESIDENT-ELECT  
**Daniel M. Wold**  
Old Republic National Title  
Insurance Co.  
Minneapolis, Minn.

TREASURER  
**David Townsend MTP, NTP**  
Agents National Title Insurance Co.  
Columbia, Mo.

CHAIR, FINANCE COMMITTEE  
**Richard H. Welshons**  
DCA Title  
Hastings, Minn.

CHAIR, TITLE INSURANCE UNDERWRITERS  
SECTION  
**Don Kennedy**  
First American Title Insurance Co.  
Santa Ana, Calif.

BOARD REPRESENTATIVES,  
TITLE INSURANCE UNDERWRITERS  
SECTION

**Robert J. Wineman**  
FNF Family of Companies  
Livonia, Mich.

**Tara Smith**  
Stewart Title Guaranty Co.  
Houston, Texas

CHAIR, ABSTRACTERS AND TITLE  
INSURANCE AGENTS SECTION

**Jack Rattikin III**  
Rattikin Title Co.  
Fort Worth, Texas

BOARD REPRESENTATIVES, ABSTRACTERS  
AND TITLE AGENTS SECTION

**Maureen Pfaff WTP, NTP**  
Olympic Peninsula Title Co.  
Port Angeles, Wash.

**Quinn H. Stufflebeam**  
Title Financial Corp.  
Blackfoot, Idaho

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

**Mary O'Donnell**  
Westcor Land Title  
Insurance Co.  
Maitland, Fla.

## ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE STAFF

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
**Diane Tomb**

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER  
**Cornelia Horner CMP**

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT  
OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
**Chris Morton**

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT  
AND CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER  
**Kelly Romeo CAE**

SENIOR DIRECTOR  
OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

**Elizabeth Blosser**

GENERAL COUNSEL

**Steve Gottheim**

VICE PRESIDENT OF COMMUNICATIONS

**Jeremy Yohe**



## Go Ahead, I'm Listening ...

### WE'VE ALL PROBABLY EXPERIENCED A SCENARIO LIKE THIS.



**JEREMY YOHE**

ALTA vice president of communications

You're having a conversation about something and later that day you're bombarded by online ads for the product. You don't really want a life-sized stuffed unicorn, but you happened to mention one while talking to your five-year-old and now your social media feeds and search results are full of ads for giant plush monstrosities.

Last year, PCMag surveyed 2,075 U.S. consumers about their smart devices and media consumption preferences. The survey found privacy was the top concern. A majority—68%—of respondents said they believe smart home devices listen to you when you aren't aware and share the data with the companies behind the products: Amazon, Apple, Google, and even Facebook.

It's been reported Amazon employs people to listen to what's said near Alexa-enabled Echo devices. The workers transcribe, annotate and enter anything learned into Alexa's underlying software. Amazon says this happens only with a small percentage of recordings to "improve the customer experience." Riiight.

If you want to take control of your privacy and keep your conversations out of marketing databases, there are ways to keep your smart devices from listening. However, in another move billed as a "new way to stay connected," Amazon launched its Sidewalk service, which keeps your Echo, Ring and other Amazon devices online, even if your internet service provider goes out. Devices are automatically enrolled in the program unless you opt out.

With Sidewalk, Amazon smart-home gear interconnects to create a series of mini mesh networks, meaning your devices can relay information to other components further away from your router and even stay online when your Wi-Fi goes down. To do this, Amazon uses Bluetooth and unused slices of the wireless spectrum, with Ring cameras and Echo speakers acting as the main bridges to keep everything connected.

The controversial part of Amazon Sidewalk is the way it shares some of your internet bandwidth with your neighbors, creating a wider network of devices that can operate independently. If your internet goes down, your Ring camera can connect to the internet next door to keep sending you alerts, assuming both of you are set up with Sidewalk. On the flip side, if your neighbor's internet goes down, their smart devices can temporarily connect to your router and the Sidewalk network you've created.

Data privacy may not directly impact your operation, but it's definitely a national and local issue. In February, Virginia became the second state to enact major privacy legislation. Fortunately, it includes the ALTA-supported exemption for data governed by the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act. Other states are considering their own data privacy bills, and Congress is doing the same at the national level.

ALTA has developed suggested state legislative language for data privacy and will continue to monitor developments. In the meantime, let me know if you find a good deal on a stuffed unicorn.

## | Join ALTA's New Online Community

Communities are more important than ever in all aspects of our lives. That's one of the reasons why ALTA launched a new online community called [ALTA Connection](#) to provide a venue for ALTA members to share information and build and expand their networks.

ALTA hopes participants will share what's happening in their communities. Let's celebrate victories and troubleshoot challenges.

Some of the online communities that have already been created include:

- Technology
- Commercial Network
- Consumer Marketing
- ALTA Registry
- Large Agents
- Small Agents and Abstracters
- Next Gen
- Title Counsel



### ■ Women in Title

You can join conversations in communities like these. There are also resources available in the library and participants can also contribute their own content.

Join ALTA Connection at [community.alta.org/home](https://community.alta.org/home).

## | Check Out ALTA Insights Podcast



The ALTA Insights Podcast, hosted by ALTA CEO Diane Tomb, is designed to keep you connected to industry leaders and informed about the latest trends while you're on the go.

In the first podcast, Tomb is joined by Bill Burding, who is the association's 2021 president as well as general counsel for Orange Coast Title Company. The two discuss the impact of the health pandemic on the real estate market, COVID-19 vaccinations, and the importance of telling your story and advocating for your industry.

In the latest podcast, Tomb talks with Kelly Romeo, ALTA's senior vice president and chief information officer. The discussion focuses on cybersecurity issues that keep chief information officers up at night, as well as the continued threat of wire transfer fraud and efforts by ALTA and title professionals to raise awareness and protect money involved in real estate transactions.

Access the podcasts at [alta.org/podcasts](https://alta.org/podcasts).

# Tap Into The Power of Connection:

*Closing Market makes life easier. We don't have to remember multiple sets of credentials and links or continually go to other websites. All the integrations we need for a file are right in our RamQuest solution. With Closing Market we save a tremendous amount of time and we're not doing things the hard way anymore.*

Sheila Keleman  
RamQuest Customer  
RamQuest Administrator, Security Title Insurance Agency, LLC



When it comes to navigating a continually changing business environment, the right technology is critical. Communication, connection, and quick and easy access to resources are more important than ever. Closing Market's network of integrated providers puts all the services that you need right at your fingertips to ensure a profitable, efficient operation.

**Discover invaluable customer and operational insight:  
[RamQuest.com/podcast](https://RamQuest.com/podcast)**





## Elevate Your Staff with ALTA's New Learning Center

From beginners to experts, everyone on your staff can benefit from ALTA's new Elevate Learning Center. Sponsored by Qualia, Elevate includes six online courses:

- **Nuts and Bolts of the Land Title Industry** was designed to be part of employee onboarding.
- **Title 101** provides instruction on the basic principles of the title insurance industry.
- **Title 201** offers more advanced instruction.
- Understanding Commercial Transactions equips you with commercial transaction concepts.
- **Escrow Accounting Procedures** teaches a model system of managerial practices.
- **Ethics in the Title Industry** addresses title-related ethical issues.



The courses include materials such as videos, reading materials, quizzes and/or a resource guide as well as a certificate of completion. An ALTA membership provides discounts on these courses, and CE/CLE credits are offered for some of the classes in certain states. Study at your own pace and in your own place!

Learn more at [elevate.alta.org](https://elevate.alta.org).

## ALTA Members Saved \$800K on UPS Shipping in 2020

Thanks to a member discount program, ALTA member companies saved more than \$814,000 in shipping through UPS in 2020.

The UPS has enhanced its ground service to provide more flexibility and delivery speed. Through a partnership with ALTA, member companies can save up to:

- **50%** off domestic next day/deferred
  - **30%** off ground commercial/residential
  - **50%** off international exports and **40%** off imports
  - **Up to 50%** off on additional services
  - Plus, UPS Smart Pickup service is **free**
- Enroll today and start saving at <https://bit.ly/2SCJ07V>.

## 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: 52
- New Associate Members: 6
- New Attorney Members: 32
- State with the most new members: Florida
- Total Members: 5,643



### NEWS TO SHARE?

If you have information you'd like

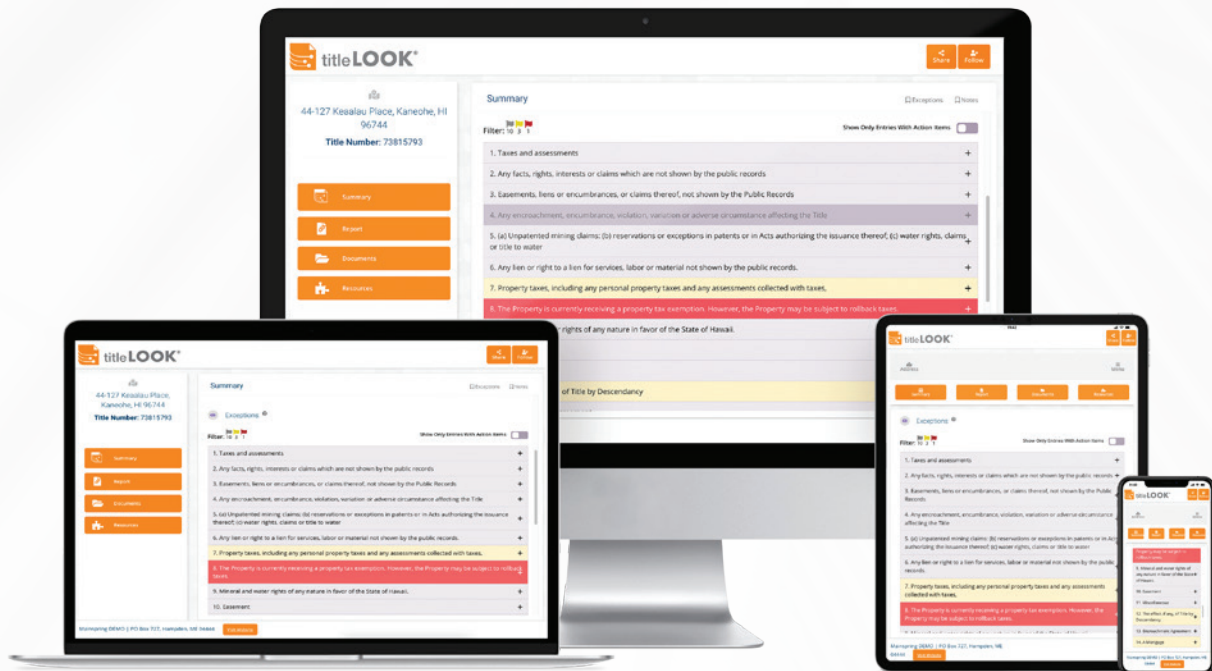
us to consider for TiTLE News, send company announcements to [communications@alta.org](mailto:communications@alta.org).

## ALTA 2021 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 2021, TIPAC has received \$xxx from xxx donors. In addition, \$xxx from xxx companies has been pledged to the TIPAC Education Fund. Check out who has supported the industry at [alta.org/tipac](https://alta.org/tipac).



# titleLOOK®



## THE NEW **STANDARD** IN DIGITAL TITLE



### **REVIEW**

Automatically create  
your title review  
summary



### **HYPERLINK**

Hyperlink your prelims  
and commitments  
in seconds



### **PUBLISH**

Deliver a web-based  
report that looks  
great on any device

# the Time for Title Standards Is Now

*Input Needed from  
Title Community as  
More Transactions  
Conducted Digitally*





**OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS,** the hurdles to creating digital property transactions have been overcome with increasing speed. Between the rising adoption of the Mortgage Industry Standards Maintenance Organization (MISMO) SMART Docs and eNotes to remote online notarizations (RON), today's housing industry finds itself standing on the precipice of a truly digital future.

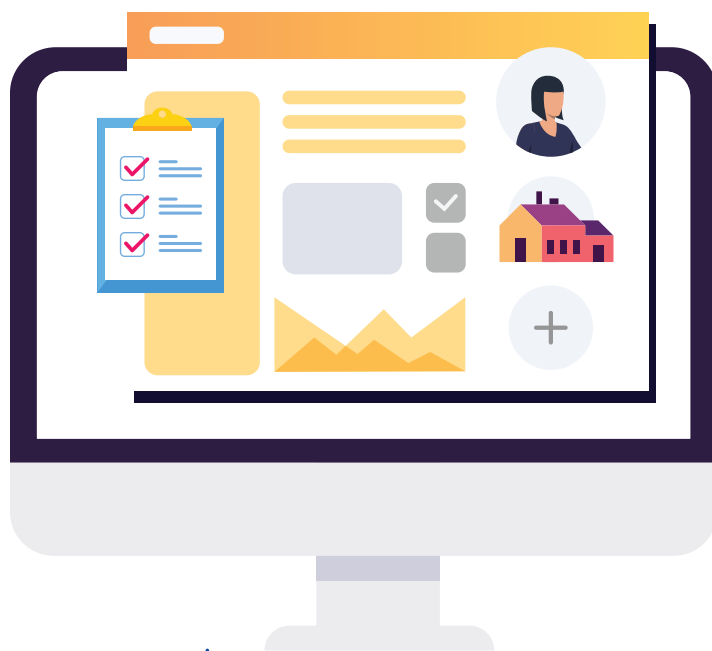
Title professionals have helped drive this digital wave with the implementation of technology at various steps of the transaction, from title policy production to post-closing tasks. The automation of processes helps drive efficiency by expediting the exchange of data.

The accurate exchange of information in a digital environment requires the presence of data

standards. Title companies are utilizing automated workflows and advanced application programming interfaces (APIs) to integrate with various partners.

While data standards are commonplace in other housing segments—such as real estate, mortgages and appraisals—there is no data standard in the title industry. But there has never been a better time to change this situation than now.





*One of the most obvious benefits of having common title data standards would be the ability for a lender to type in the borrower's name and property address only once at the beginning of the loan process.*

## Understanding the Challenges

Despite progress on this front, many title companies still manually input title data, increasing the probability of errors and adding to loan production costs. Low-tech processes also create friction in the secondary market, where investors must use manual checklists on large loan portfolios that all have different title data elements.

For example, title insurers and lenders each have their own production platforms. But because these platforms are not easily integrated with each other, orders for title commitments and insurance policies are often received manually. Typically, a title processor will key in an order, only to send information back to the lender that must be retyped into the lender's origination system. Besides creating a production burden, this amplifies the risk of critical information being mistyped, which creates additional delays.

Underneath this scenario is the ongoing pressure on lenders to lower costs and remain compliant. While consumers are demanding an easier, more transparent mortgage process, regulators and investors are demanding mortgage lenders embrace sound underwriting protocols. The development of title data standards would help achieve both goals of improving transparency and managing expenses.

## How to Change the Picture

Almost everybody aware of this situation agrees it's important that lenders, title companies and software vendors all speak the same language. In addition to streamlining real estate transactions, lowering costs, and reducing errors, data standards would also make integrations between title companies and software providers much easier, since software vendors now spend weeks or longer mapping out integrations between different underwriters.

For example, one of the most obvious benefits of having common title data standards would be the ability for a lender to type in the borrower's name and property address only once at the beginning of the loan process. As the loan goes through origination and underwriting, common data standards would enable this information to be exchanged seamlessly through all the different systems used in the creation of a mortgage—including the title production platform—without the need to retype it.

The presence of title standards would also encourage more innovation in the title space. Instead of being constrained by the disparate, siloed legacy systems and software, all parties involved in the transaction could speak the same language. By streamlining the exchange of data, the title standards

could accelerate processes, lower costs and deliver better, more enjoyable customer experiences.

Ultimately, title data standards will push digital property transactions closer to reality as well, which would make the process of buying and selling real estate faster and easier for all parties. As entire industries have transitioned to working remotely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has never been a greater incentive to go fully digital. But as long as there is a human somewhere retyping information that could have been exchanged electronically, the ability to conduct real estate transactions entirely online remains elusive.

Only through the creation of data standards shared by all segments of the housing industry will this barrier be removed. But how do we get things started?

## The Power of Collaboration

By most accounts, the entity best positioned to get things moving is MISMO. For the past 20 years, MISMO has established a successful track record of standards development touching every facet of the housing economy. Today, MISMO standards are accepted and deployed by almost every entity involved in the U.S. mortgage industry, including lenders, appraisers, title companies, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and the Federal Housing Administration and Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

One of the key reasons behind MISMO's success is the unique, collaborative environments it has created, where experts from across the housing spectrum are able to address the industry's most pressing challenges in an open, transparent manner. Today, MISMO operates more than two dozen Communities of Practice and Development Work Groups that have created standards for everything from digital mortgages to remote online notarizations, mobile communications, commercial rent roll data, and much more.

These workgroups have been extraordinarily effective at not only assisting industry participants in communicating more effectively, but also helping to solve critical business challenges and create greater opportunities for innovation. For example, MISMO, ALTA and the Mortgage Bankers Association (MBA) collaborated to develop a standard template for closing instructions. Introduced in 2020, these uniform closing instructions have brought consistency to how lenders communicate this critical information to their closing partners and prevent the data from being misinterpreted. In 2019, MISMO released a set

of standards for adopting and implementing remote online notarizations (RON) that multiple U.S. states have since adopted when drafting new laws legalizing remote notarizations in property transactions. MISMO's RON standards support model legislation that was developed by ALTA and the MBA.

In recent years, MISMO has also expanded its vision of data standards beyond XML by embracing new and emerging data formats. This included creating a version of MISMO standards in JSON format, a lighter data language that is increasingly being adopted throughout the mortgage industry. MISMO also has longstanding partnerships with ALTA and the Property Records Industry Association (PRIA), placing the organization in perfect position to take the lead in creating title data standards.

Amid the growing demand for the industry to conduct more business digitally, it makes sense for title insurers and title software vendors to become more involved in the creation of industry standards. The platform and resources already exist. MISMO already has the Title and Closing Community of Practice, which is responsible for developing data standards and providing guidance for using them. There is always

*As demand grows to conduct business digitally, it makes sense for title insurers and title software vendors, to become more involved in the creation of industry standards.*

room for new voices and perspectives at MISMO as well. Otherwise, title professionals may end up allowing mortgage companies and LOS vendors to make important decisions about title standards. To prevent this from happening, it may be incumbent upon other industry participants, such as mortgage companies and LOS vendors, to give their title partners a gentle push.

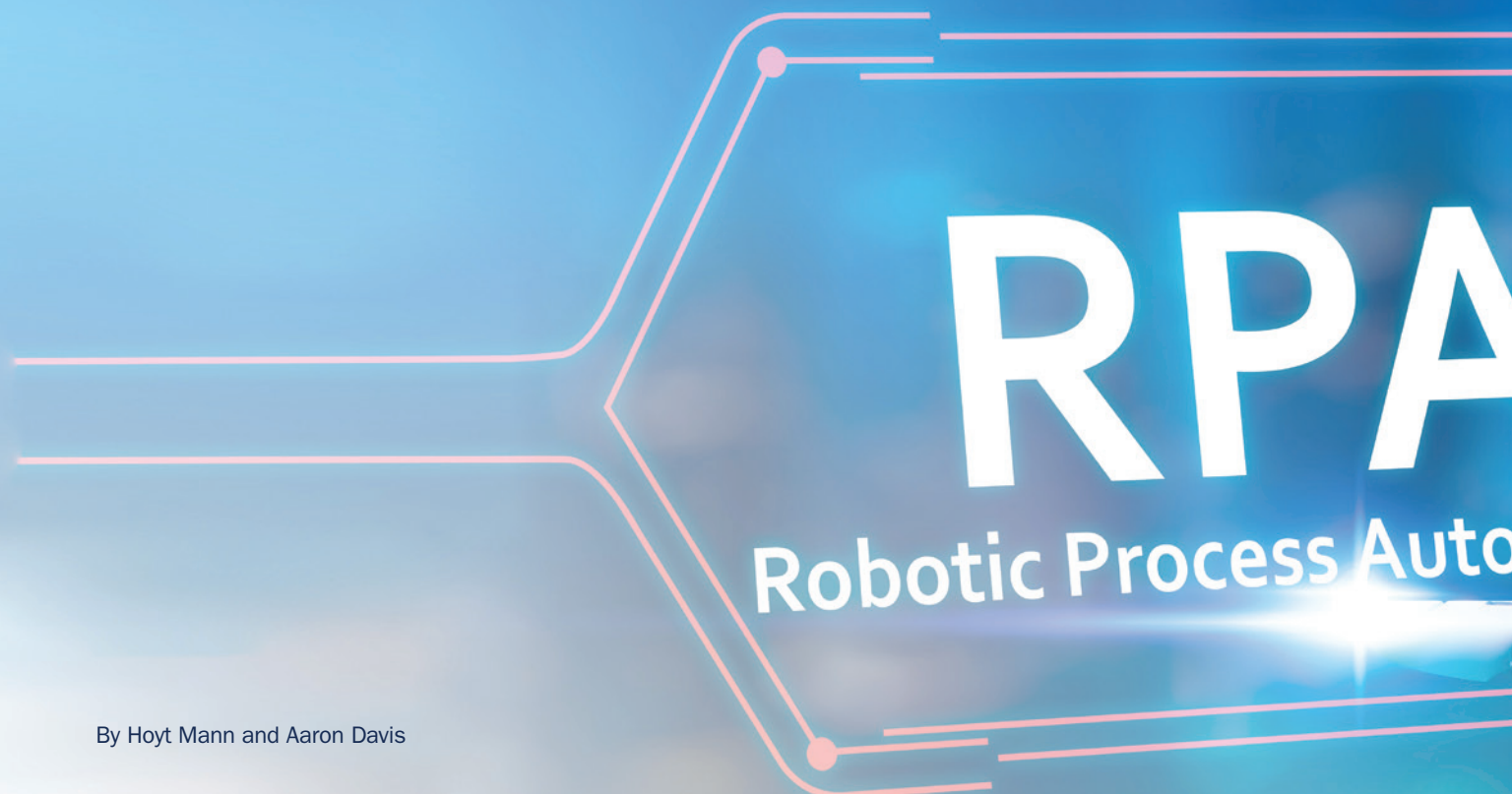
Additional support is needed from the title industry. The ideal situation is for title insurers, settlement service providers and title software providers to bring their voice to the standards-setting conversation. The sooner everyone is at the table, the sooner one of the last remaining barriers to digital transactions will fall.

Title professionals who want to get involved in the development of title standards, should contact Paul Martin at [pmartin@alta.org](mailto:pmartin@alta.org), or visit [collaborate.mismo.org/home](https://collaborate.mismo.org/home) and become a member of the Title and Closing Community of Practice or contact [info@mismo.org](mailto:info@mismo.org). ■



# AI in Title: The Future Is Now

Automation has come a long way in the settlement process. But new AI approaches may finally tackle some of the oldest and most stubborn chokepoints plaguing agents, underwriters, Realtors and consumers.



RPA  
Robotic Process Auto

By Hoyt Mann and Aaron Davis

**THE TITLE INDUSTRY IS RIPE (AND HAS LONG BEEN) FOR NEW SOLUTIONS** to age-old challenges. It's no secret that the settlement process, regulated on a state-by-state basis and subject to varying lender or underwriter requirements, is not unlike the original Frankenstein's monster: bolted together pieces and parts. It's a process replete with numerous manual tasks or redundant actions. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to find someone within the industry to say the settlement process, as it stands, is a shining example of efficiency.

Agents and underwriters alike have long sought ways to streamline their workflows, and although we have made encouraging process in recent years, there's more to be done. Much of the progress made has come in the form of automation. So the tasks or processes most easily adaptable to simple automation—usually in areas involving simple, one or two step processes, like document preparation, data input, data retrieval and the like—have gotten the most attention first.

Information





We've already seen great automated solutions helping agents with several of the simple functions in production; elements of closing such as remote online notarization technology and some limited communication functions.

One type of automation tech we're starting to see more often is Robotic Process Automation (RPA), which is sometimes confused with AI. RPA can be used to repeat multi-step processes. However, unlike AI, RPA's performance depends entirely on how it's programmed. While AI can "learn" from some mistakes, RPA will repeat mistakes (garbage in; garbage out). Nonetheless, it's extremely useful in automating more complex actions.

And yet, the traditional settlement process, from title through post-closing, also requires numerous, multiple-outcome processes that aren't as easy to automate. Order intake or data retrieval from consumers come to mind. It's the elements involving human beings that can be the most resistant to streamlining. For example, consider the chokepoints in the typical title agency workflow that require communication or collaboration among parties (buyer, seller, real estate agent, closer, loan officer), with all of the complexities and complications that arise. We still have yet to see as much progress in streamlining there. Look at, for instance, the wide variety of ways a simple sales contract comes into a title agency, from handwritten to PDF; coming in via fax, courier or even by hand. All of that needs to be processed into the same system, and it's the title agency's job to decipher those agreements.

While there have been, for example, multiple efforts to forge a "communication portal" where all parties can come together to exchange information or documents, too many have ended up only creating another silo and, yet another, stand-alone solution that doesn't integrate itself into the global workflow well enough to stop being a chokepoint.

The age-old approach to speeding things up for a more efficient close, so far, has been to "staff up" with more humans to handle those tasks. Simultaneously, tasks requiring collaboration and good communication, even if redundant or simple, have also tended to be managed by humans using ill-fitting tools like email or telephone. It's here where we see, even today, some of the greatest opportunities for error, delay or even fraud. The common but obvious complaint about data or information getting lost in a flurry of emails or voice mails is very valid. And yet, many agents still rely on their team members to do "whatever it takes" (emails, texts, calls) to share the status of the transaction with the buyer's real estate agent. It's humans, rather than tech, that are usually charged with figuring out how to prepare closing documents like the CD from piecemeal closing instructions; or determine tax proration from county to county. We've heard that a title agent's job is to stand at the bottom of a mountain; watch a snowball become an avalanche on the way down and then catch the contents and plug them into the closing process. Every real estate agent deals with a title agent differently. Every agent transmits documents and data differently. So, finding a technology that allows agents to catch every bit of that avalanche can be a challenge.

Until now, most owners and title agents have had little recourse but to stare down the inefficiencies, shrug their shoulders and say, "It's the way we've always done it."

However, the emergence of new AI technology developed just for the complicated title process may be one of the most promising developments we've seen in the ongoing quest for modernization in quite some time. AI naturally lends itself to multi-step processes that require fairly complex decisions from point to point. Already, we've seen it put to use effectively for processes requiring the parsing and extraction of select data, then routing it to one of a number of options. It's also becoming an important means of taking manual tasks that require some judgment (e.g. "stare and compare") and making them more efficient.

But perhaps the greatest potential use for AI will come in the simplest—yet most difficult to attack—challenges: interparty communication. Just think of how many times and how many ways a traditional title staff needs to hop on the phone or send an email (or three) to, say, get a copy of a driver's license; or gather information from a loan officer or real estate agent; or explain to the borrower, two or three times, that a closing will really happen on the scheduled day. We're already seeing new AI-based technology that allows title agents to communicate with interested parties and clients without requiring two missed calls, three voice mails and an email to exchange one simple bit of information.

It's the flexibility of AI and its ability to make multi-faceted decisions that may allow us to finally use fewer human resources to handle otherwise simple and redundant tasks made complex solely because they involve human-to-human interaction. Now, it's also time for title agents and owners to take a hard look at their own workflow processes. Any technological upgrade starts—and ends—with strategy and leadership. Examine your production process as objectively as you can. Where are the biggest wastes of time and money? Never mind that there may not yet be a precise, comprehensive tool to solve it end-to-end yet. Are there solutions that tackle part of those tasks? Can you negotiate customized integrations or other modifications from your technology partners that better integrate your workflow? It's one thing to employ technology to save time and cost. But too often, the result of a poorly planned or ill-fitting tech deployment is front-line workers working from two monitors, with five open browsers or programs, glancing at a couple of apps on their phones or tablets continuously—until they need to get back on the phone or send an email.

Technology developers are always looking to provide better answers to decades-old questions. With AI, we can see new possibilities. But the people developing new solutions also need to hear from the real experts on workflow and chokepoints—title agents and professionals—to perhaps finally take us another step closer to a true end-to-end settlement technology. Let them know where the process needs to be improved. Finally, the future is here for the title industry. Let's meet it half-way.

**HOYT MANN** is president and co-founder of Alanna.ai. He can be reached at [hmann@alanna.ai](mailto:hmann@alanna.ai). **AARON DAVIS** is CEO of Florida Agency Network and Network Transaction Solutions. He can be reached at [aaron@amd-1.com](mailto:aaron@amd-1.com).



# Agent Advantage & Notarize

FLEXIBLE RON SERVICE OPTIONS



With real estate settlements going digital, First American Title and Notarize are working together to ensure you have the right service option to meet your RON needs.

## **OPTION 1** Agent Advantage Services

### Flexible Platform Options

We work with a variety of top RON signing platforms, so Agents don't need to sign up and pay for multiple accounts. Our team of RON professionals can place your order with the platform that best fits the need of each individual transaction.

### Signer Readiness and Support

In preparation of signing, our Agent Advantage support team will work with each party to make sure they understand the RON process and confirm they have the technical tools required for each platform.

### Customer Service Coordinators

Our team of highly experienced Customer Service Coordinators communicate with all involved parties, regardless of location or time zone, ensuring a properly organized transaction. Includes coordinating signing schedule for all parties, and providing post-closing transaction support, as needed.

Contact the Agent Advantage RON Services team for more information: [AgencyRON@firstam.com](mailto:AgencyRON@firstam.com)

\*In most active RON states.

First American Title Insurance Company makes no express or implied warranty respecting the information presented and assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions. First American, the eagle logo, First American Title, and firstam.com are registered trademarks or trademarks of First American Financial Corporation and/or its affiliates.

## **OPTION 2** Notarize

### Flexible Notary Options

Work directly with the Notarize team to place orders and facilitate transactions using their professional, on-demand notaries\* or your own in-house notary team.

#### Bring Your Own Notary

Your notaries manage the transaction and signing using the Notarize platform

#### Notary On Demand

Leverage the Notarize notary network to manage your signing.

First American policy-issuing agents can take advantage of specially negotiated rates to create a Notarize account.

Learn more: [notarize.com/firstamerican](https://notarize.com/firstamerican)



**First American Title™**

[www.firstam.com/agentadvantage](https://www.firstam.com/agentadvantage)

©2021 First American Financial Corporation and/or its affiliates. All rights reserved. NYSE: FAF







# Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Through Corporate Social Justice

## Companies Must Remain Committed During Transformational Journey

By Damon Carter

The ongoing protests against unjust policing of Blacks and Hispanics in various communities, along with the numerous acts of violence impacting the LGBTQ and Asian-Pacific Islander communities, continue to bring increased awareness to the cumulative impacts of systemic racism in our society. Consequently, both large and small companies across the United States must play an active role in driving transformational shifts in their respective workplace cultures, which will collectively help dismantle systemic racism in our society. Therefore, business leaders must learn to fully embrace diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) in a holistic and sustainable way through the implementation of corporate social justice initiatives.

According to a recent *Harvard Business Review* article, “Corporate Social Justice is a framework regulated by the trust between a company and its employees, customers, shareholders, and the broader community it touches, with the goal of explicitly doing good by all of them.”

Effectively applying this strategic approach over time can be a key differentiator for business leaders as it relates to successfully advancing DE&I strategy in an impactful way for their respective organizations. Therefore, all leaders committed to driving meaningful changes must execute some key strategic actions.

### Step 1: Lead With Purpose and Conviction

Leaders must consider initially taking the following steps as they start their own unique journey to successfully cultivating a fair, equitable and just workplace culture for people of color, including:

- **Acknowledge the problem exists:** It’s impossible to effectively address a problem without first acknowledging the problem exists. Given today’s prevailing social justice issues, silence from companies could be easily interpreted by employees as indifference or acceptance of the status quo. Instead, business leaders must first acknowledge systemic racism exists in society and clearly communicate their desire to be a part of the solution moving forward.
- **Reflect and discuss:** Business leaders should create a safe space for their respective leadership teams to collectively reflect and confidentially discuss to what extent implicit biases have negatively affected the company’s workplace culture.
- **Make a genuine commitment to being better:** Business leaders must make a firm commitment to mitigating the negative impacts of all forms of social injustice in the workplace for people of color and cultivate a workplace culture that consistently promotes equality for all.

Furthermore, business leaders must actively lead with conviction

by reimagining a workplace culture that consistently demonstrates equality, equity and justice for all employees, at all times.

### Step 2: Build Genuine Connections

Business leaders must work to thoroughly understand the specific elements of the existing workplace culture that have contributed to the present state of inequality for all marginalized groups of employees. This includes obtaining a clear understanding of key diversity metrics to begin identifying areas of strength across the organization as well as opportunities for improvement. Furthermore, obtaining a deep understanding of the current state of the work environment requires leaders to thoughtfully engage, listen and learn from all employees adversely impacted by disparate treatment in the workplace. Leaders should take the following actions to do so:

- **Develop an informed perspective:** Before engaging employees to discuss how to establish a fair and equitable workplace culture, business leaders should conduct their own preliminary research to better understand the unique experiences of people of color. Proactively educating themselves about key aspects of people of color in the workplace will go a long way toward building personal credibility with all marginalized groups and will have a profound impact on business leaders’ ability to make genuine connections. Several examples include concepts such as unconscious bias, white privilege, microaggressions and code switching.
- **Listen to understand:** Business leaders must be open to having challenging conversations with people of color regarding their experiences at work. Most importantly, leaders must reassure people of color that their perspectives matter to the organization and that their feedback will directly influence the fostering of a fair and equitable work environment. Additionally, leaders should remember to express gratitude to all participants for their vulnerability and commit to following up regarding next steps in the process.
- **Create a “speak-up culture”:** Business leaders must employ various inclusive leadership practices to cultivate a workplace environment where all employees feel valued and respected on a daily basis. According to research conducted by the Center for Talent Innovation, key characteristics of a “speak-up culture” include the following:
  - Ensure that everyone gets heard.
  - Make it safe to propose novel ideas.
  - Give actionable feedback.
  - Take advice and implement feedback.
  - Empower decision making among team members.

# WORKING REMOTELY? BUSINESS BUSIER THAN EVER? HAVE SOFTWARE TO SUPPORT BOTH?

**SoftPro Hosted gives you...**

- ✓ The ability to work remotely.
- ✓ No need for expensive hardware.
- ✓ Low upfront cost.
- ✓ Low monthly costs.
- ✓ Unlimited monthly transactions.
- ✓ Secure data backup.
- ✓ Automation & commercial closing capabilities.
- ✓ Easy and fast onboarding.
- ✓ Full training for your team.

**Learn more about SoftPro Hosted:  
Visit [info.softprocorp.com/softpro-hosted](https://info.softprocorp.com/softpro-hosted)**

- Share credit for team success.

Furthermore, leaders must be committed to establishing genuine connections over time, rooted in mutual respect and trust, with any employees who have historically been made to feel ignored and disconnected. According to Michael Slepian, associate professor of leadership and ethics at Columbia Business School, “Learning about individuals’ unique strengths and unique experiences, and showing recognition for these, is what leads employees to feel valued and respected. ... This is what enables going beyond surface-level inclusion in favor of real, individual-based inclusion.”

### Step 3: Take Deliberate Strategic Actions

Next, business leaders must thoughtfully apply targeted strategic actions that will begin to actively address prevailing inequalities for people of color in the workplace. Ideally, leaders should utilize familiar management practices, with proven tools and resources, to effectively develop and implement an effective DE&I strategy. Additionally, leaders must create a comprehensive action plan to improve the organization’s current state by identifying specific diverse talent strategies that target each stage of the employee life cycle. Several examples include:

- **Recruitment:** Build strategic partnerships with a variety of diverse professional organizations to regularly source and hire people of color with desired skill sets.
- **Development:** Create targeted professional development strategies for people of color and encourage networking opportunities, both internally and externally.
- **Advancement:** Ensure people of color are included in annual succession planning efforts.
- **Retention:** Institute exit interviews, stay interviews and/or focus group sessions.

### Step 4: Activate New Community Engagements

Lastly, companies must partner with other companies and not-for-profit organizations to help address relevant social justice initiatives in their local community. In a recent *Harvard Business Review* article, Paul Argenti, professor of corporate communication at the Tuck School of Business, proposes that organizations should first consider the following questions:

1. Does the issue align with your company’s strategy?
2. Can you meaningfully influence the issue?
3. Will your constituencies agree with speaking out?

It is important for the leadership team to communicate the overall purpose of the social justice initiatives to all employees and clearly explain how they align with the company’s core values. They should also invite employees to get actively involved in supporting the new community engagement and directly work with the board of directors to strategically support it, as well. Furthermore, establishing strategic partnerships with other companies and community organizations helps create new learning opportunities for employees and increases exposure to diverse perspectives.

#### CATIC’s Commitment to Corporate Social Justice

In June 2020, Connecticut Attorneys Title Insurance Company

(CATIC) publicly demonstrated support for those working to change society for the better and condemned all forms of social injustice due to systemic racism. Additionally, CATIC committed to doing its part to help build better communities through fair and equitable treatment for all. Subsequently, the senior leadership team began developing a dynamic corporate social justice initiative to start actively addressing various housing disparities historically experienced by people of color. The senior leadership team committed to taking the following initial strategic actions:

- Aligned the goals and objectives of the new corporate social justice reform strategy with the company’s strategic business plan to keep it a top priority.
- Openly communicated to all employees the company’s commitment to advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in a meaningful way in the future.
- Launched an employee-led project team to focus on improving the historically low percentage of minority home ownership across the country, which includes establishing new strategic partnerships with various community organizations and key stakeholders in the homebuying ecosystem.
- Obtained full commitment from the board of directors to activate a new committee dedicated to advancing diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives for both the board and the company.
- Expanded the scope of the CATIC Foundation, the company’s philanthropic organization, to strategically support social justice initiatives through socially responsible investments and charitable donations to not-for-profit organizations committed to improving fair housing standards.
- Committed to creating new learning opportunities regarding diversity, equity and inclusion for employees and agents through the CATIC Academy, the company’s new learning and development platform.

### Starting Your Journey

Every company needs to determine how to best proceed with cultivating a fair and equitable workplace culture in their own way. It starts by taking one deliberate step at a time. Leaders must also acknowledge that taking such actions will be daunting, intimidating and controversial, at times, for various reasons. Therefore, it is imperative for leaders to embrace the idea of “being comfortable with being uncomfortable” because that is where real breakthroughs occur along this transformational journey. Successfully doing so will require a bold commitment by leaders to always being their authentic selves at work and in their local communities. As Langston Hughes once said, “I have discovered in life that there are ways of getting almost anywhere you want to go, if you really want to go.”



**DAMON CARTER**, who has over 20 years of diverse HR experience across multiple industries, is senior vice president and chief human resources officer for CATIC. He serves on the board of directors and is also president of the CATIC Foundation. Carter can be reached at [dcarter@catic.com](mailto:dcarter@catic.com) or via LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/in/damonacarter](https://www.linkedin.com/in/damonacarter).



# Good Marketable and **(Elder)** Abuse Free Title

The Problem, a Case Study and  
Concrete Steps Title Companies Can Take



**T**he UN General Assembly designated June 15 as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. New initiatives will enable title professionals to go a step beyond awareness/to prevention. We will discuss the scope of the problem, a renowned case and tools that can be applied to protect seniors and their real estate.

## What Is Elder Financial Exploitation?

We often rely on labels, sometimes without a shared understanding of their meaning. Let's make sure we're on the same page when referencing elder financial exploitation. An elder, as we're using the term, is an adult 60 years or older, and elder financial exploitation is the illegal or improper use of an elderly adult's money, property or other resources.

## How Common is Elder Financial Exploitation?

Each year, as many as one in 10 Americans aged 60 and older falls prey to elder financial exploitation. With about 57 million Americans aged 60 and older, up to 5.7 million seniors are victimized annually.

## It Can Happen to Anyone: The Brooke Astor Story

In one notable case, wealthy socialite, philanthropist and writer Brooke Astor was victimized by her son, Anthony Marshall. Brooke's plight underscores the fact that approximately 60% of elder financial exploitation is perpetrated by a family member.

Fortunately, Astor's story has a hero and a happy ending. Professor Philip Marshall intervened to protect his grandmother. Wanting to do more, Philip Marshall subsequently embarked on a mission, creating the Beyond Brooke awareness campaign to help others fight elder financial exploitation. Philip Marshall notes that Astor's abuse began and ended with real estate. Anthony Marshall transferred an estate in Maine to himself, then promptly transferred the estate again, this time to his wife.

## Big Data

Philip Marshall introduces big data as a shield against elder abuse.

The following will underscore big data's potential. Recently, a senior testified that she had been hospitalized six times during the preceding six-month period. Incredibly, the victim (a recovering alcoholic) was initially injured after her abuser took her to a bar. Moreover, the senior testified that her cognition had declined precipitously, reaching the point where she needed help with tasks such as managing mail.

Despite such acknowledgment in open court, the senior's testimony was not discovered until after the disposition of a multi-million-dollar property she oversaw in a fiduciary capacity. The application of big data could have brought the testimony to light, ensuring appropriate vetting for cognition and related issues prior to conveyance. What actually transpired was the transfer of a valuable property, with no consideration for the senior's exposure to undue influence or cognition.

## Perpetrators Impact Seniors, Their Families and the Community

In many cases of elder abuse, the senior may be acting in a fiduciary capacity for a family office and/or trust. When predators strike, they may not only be stealing from the senior, but also from shareholders, family members, beneficiaries and others.

Perpetrators can be vicious. In one instance, the perpetrator stole so much his mother was unable to satisfy her federal and state tax obligations. As a result, the senior became a debtor to the IRS and the state of California.

When a large estate is depleted by financial exploitation charities, museums, nonprofits and other civic-minded institutions can be deprived of endowments and other bequests. For example, Astor had promised to give one of her favorite paintings, "Flags, Fifth Avenue" by Childe Hassam, to the New York City Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA). Instead, Anthony Marshall sold the painting for \$10 million, seizing a \$2 million commission for himself. The painting was quickly flipped, with the final price reaching up to \$25 million.

Perpetrators are often not concerned with optimizing proceeds from divestitures. Instead, they may be singularly focused with what finds its way into their pockets—their ill-gotten gains. In Anthony Marshall's case, his solitary concern was the "commission," not his mother Brooke's wishes, and not maximizing proceeds from the sale. As a result, Astor was deprived of her right to bequeath "Flags, Fifth Avenue" to the MMA. Moreover, Astor's charities were deprived of \$17 million, the \$2 million commission and the \$15 million Anthony Marshall left on the table by selling at a steep discount to fair market value.



## The New State of Title Automation

# TitleIQ™ ENTERPRISE

### Nationwide. Search & Examination. Integrated.

TitleIQ Enterprise™ delivers an entirely new automated way to efficiently produce title reports and commitments while reducing costs and complexities.

Powered by the industry's largest title database, TitleIQ Enterprise provides unified title search and examination nationwide through a single platform directly into your closing system – improving operational efficiency, quality and productivity.

### Single Source for Nationwide Title Search & Examination

The New State of Title Automation, TitleIQ Enterprise:

- Centralized Order Management
- Unified Title Search Workflows & Nationwide Coverage
- Advanced Technologies & Automation Efficiencies
- Single Examination Workbench & Verification
- Electronic Title Report & Commitment Delivery
- Direct Title Production System Integration

Move your title business forward  
today with TitleIQ Enterprise

🌐 [DataTraceTitle.com/TitleIQEnterpriseALTA](https://DataTraceTitle.com/TitleIQEnterpriseALTA)

📞 800.221.2056

- 📊 545+ Title Plants
- 🇺🇸 Nationwide Recorded Property Data
- 📄 7 Billion Document Images
- 🏆 Trusted Title Production Expertise

*Meet evolving  
market conditions  
& client demand  
across all  
transaction types  
& geographies*

## Perpetrators Are Greedy, Making Repeated Grabs for Cash

In Astor's case, Anthony Marshall utilized various means of diverting resources away from their rightful owner. Real estate is rife with opportunities for such diversion. For example, one set of perpetrators established a sham management company, subsequently diverting rental revenue and sales proceeds away from the owner and its shareholders. The perpetrators adopted a dual strategy, wrongfully diverting income, while charging personal expenses to the elder-managed company. One of the perpetrators put his girlfriend on the payroll and paid for her plastic surgery, continuing to steal to subsidize his child support obligations once the relationship soured. At the same time, legitimate business expenses such as insurance premiums were ignored. This came to light when a building burnt down, with no insurance available to rebuild.

With the substantial equity in senior-owned properties, real estate is a prime target for elder financial exploitation. Philip Marshall emphasizes the importance of prevention. As title professionals know, it is much more difficult to unravel an exploitative transaction than it is to head off the transaction. Litigation is time consuming, costly and uncertain. Lawsuits rarely make the elder, beneficiaries, shareholders or heirs whole.

Philip Marshall believes that, "if we're complacent we're complicit." Moreover, he feels strongly that we have a collective responsibility to stop the exploitation. Through the application of various tools, title companies are uniquely positioned to do just that.

## Concrete Steps Title Companies Can Take

So far, we've learned about the scale of the problem and how it impacted one prominent family. Let's turn our attention to steps title companies can take to thwart this pernicious scourge. With this in mind, I'd like to introduce Dr. Mark Lachs (MD, MPH) and Dr. Peter Lichtenberg, prominent experts in elder financial exploitation.

Lachs's credentials include his position as distinguished professor of medicine at the Weill Cornell Medical College, co-chief of geriatrics and palliative medicine and the director of geriatrics for the New York Presbyterian Health Care System.

Now would be a good time to consider an issue of overriding importance:

Should real estate be transferred by seniors without first ascertaining cognition?

Lachs posits that: "Fifty years from now we'll look back, shocked that real estate transactions were undertaken without measuring cognition."

At one point in time 8-year-olds worked 16-hour days in factories. Today, that is inconceivable. Lachs believes people will look back, incredulous that real estate was transferred without first ascertaining the transferor's cognition. He is a strong proponent of elder rights and therefore adopts a nuanced, contextual and respectful approach—mindful of the autonomy of elders.

## One Size Does Not Fit All

According to experts, the degree of testing should mirror the level of cognition required to appreciate the transaction being contemplated. So, for example, one level of cognition is needed to recognize that if you don't have your appendix removed, you could die in hours. An entirely different level of cognition is needed to grapple with decisions about stage IV lung cancer with a variety of treatment options, varying likelihood of metastasis and disparate side effects. Similarly, the sale of a single-family home does not require the same level of cognition as that needed to appreciate the implications in the divestiture of an investment property with varying obligations to shareholders, trust beneficiaries and charitable institutions.

## Benchmarking Cognition Against Other Conditions We Test For

The prevalence of cognitive impairment in 85-year-olds is as high as 50%.

Yet, people this age are generally not screened before they enter into listing agreements, sign offers or execute deeds. In sharp contrast, we screen for diseases in cohorts/populations with a 5% incidence. Today, a senior can generally sign away her most valuable asset without any safeguards; equity carefully stewarded over a lifetime can be forfeited with the stroke of a pen.

For many elders, the ramifications of a financial setback can be as profound as they are irreversible. There just isn't enough time to rebuild the equity, with potentially devastating consequences to quality of life. Society can also suffer, with increased pressure on resources such as Medicaid.

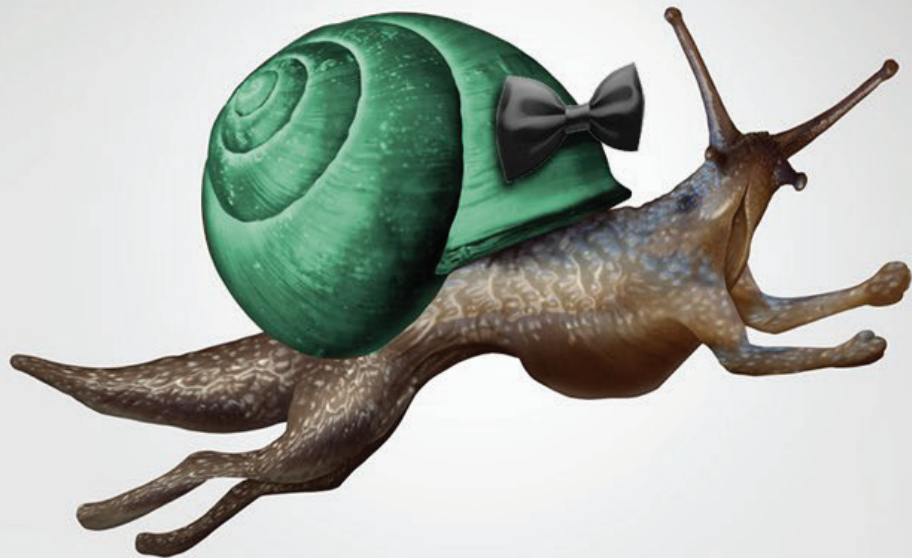
In one instance, the exploited senior withdrew approximately \$400,000 from retirement accounts, yet didn't have enough left to pay taxes on the withdrawals or to have an attorney represent her in litigation with the IRS. Ironically, her abuser, the perpetrator, stole enough to fund a lavish lifestyle,



# BETTER MARKETING

Better Results.

Bowe Digital can help with our custom marketing work for businesses of any size or shape.



## Contact us today to unlock:

- 45 minutes brainstorming sessions
- 10-20% off custom social media or email marketing content
- free logo redesign
- free **facebook** boosts for one month

Your business is worth more.  
Learn more at [bowedigital.com/standout](http://bowedigital.com/standout).

**BOWEDIGITAL**

including a Mercedes G class vehicle valued at \$157,000.

## Balancing Protective Measures and Autonomy

Of course, we must strike the correct balance between protective measures and autonomy. As Lachs emphasizes, we want to treat the person and not their age. People have the right to make their own decisions, including bad decisions.

## And Now Comes ... IDA?

With this in mind, Lachs is developing an assessment tool that can be used by non-physicians. The goal is to produce a basic screening, an initial determination that something just isn't right. Doctors screen for cancer before it metastasizes. Similarly, Lachs believes we will be screening for declines in cognition, with the goal of diagnosing before exploitation.

Results of the screening will aid in determining whether a more extensive examination is warranted. The tool is called the Interview for Decisional Abilities (IDA). This is being used by some Adult Protective Services (APS) workers to evaluate their clients' cognitive abilities. Lachs anticipates that the test instrument will be used by groups such as those in social and financial services, as well as others.

## The Eponymous Lichtenberg Assessments

Dr. Peter Lichtenberg joins Lachs as one of our cognition sherpas. Lichtenberg's credentials include serving as the director of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute, founding director of the Wayne State University Lifespan Alliance and a distinguished university service professor of psychology.

Lichtenberg is nationally recognized, with a particular expertise in the intersection of cognitive capacity and financial exploitation.

## Assessment/Screening Tools

Lichtenberg has led the development of various screening and assessment tools to evaluate financial decisions by older adults. These include the 2015 Lichtenberg Financial Decision Making Rating Scale and the Lichtenberg Financial Decision Screening Scale.

Both tools are easily administered and provide front-line professionals with the means to evaluate the decision-making capabilities of adults aged 60 and over. In addition, each tool assesses susceptibility to abuse.

## Who Administers the Assessment?

Lichtenberg believes that an independent person administering a test could be a strong positive for producing objective results. On the other hand, Lichtenberg suggests that an ethical professional who knows the examinee also brings a lot of value to the screening.

Of course, the surrounding circumstances can impact determination of who performs the screening. There are situations where an interested party should not administer the assessment. Real estate agents, lawyers, lenders and title companies are all interested parties. The inherent conflict of interest, as well as possible allegations of bias, carry the potential to undermine the results.

Lichtenberg balances the protection of seniors with the right of capable older adults to remain financially autonomous.

## Undue Influence

Unfortunately, older adults can retain their cognitive skills yet remain vulnerable to financial exploitation. For example, many seniors are subject to the undue influence of abusers because they may be dependent on them for physical assistance or emotional support.

Undue influence is the loss of free will by the adult. As Lichtenberg points out, we all influence each other, and that's OK. However, it isn't acceptable when abusers prioritize their wants and needs over the senior's free will. With enough access, an abuser can break down an older adult—even a resilient senior with a high level of cognition. Lichtenberg's tests attempt to uncover undue influence, if it present.

## Conclusion

Title and settlement companies are embedded at critical junctures: when property is purchased, financed and sold. These events are also when a senior's real estate-based wealth may be in the greatest jeopardy. Title companies can work in conjunction with lending and real estate professionals, and others, to help prevent seniors' real estate equity from being wrongfully diverted. The introduction of new tools may be coupled with a deeper bench of advocates to protect and preserve elder equity.

**RANDALL AIRST** is the CEO of Exceedant, which serves a diverse community of stakeholders concerned with complex real estate structures addressing issues ranging from ground leases to air rights. He can be reached through [inquiry@exceedant.com](mailto:inquiry@exceedant.com).

# Gratitude Returned

## Those Helped by ALTA Good Deeds Foundation Give Thanks

As president of TitleSouth LLC in Alabama, Amye von Seebach knows 2020 proved to be a very successful year from a business standpoint for the title industry. However, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the homeless much differently.

"We were fortunate to be in an industry that did not suffer economically during the last year. I know the homeless population has had an extremely hard year," she said.

Von Seebach became overjoyed when she learned that Be a Blessing Birmingham would receive a \$5,000 grant from the ALTA Good Deeds Foundation.

"This is wonderful news. The Foundation chose an excellent and worthy cause to support," said von Seebach, who nominated the organization for a grant. "I appreciate all ALTA does to help our communities."

TitleSouth's parent company, RealtySouth, provided a 50% match, so Be a Blessing, which provides support to the homeless in the greater Birmingham area, received a total of \$9,000.

"There is virtually no overhead with this organization," von Seebach said. "Every dollar will be spent to benefit people who are in desperate need. I am thrilled they were chosen."



provides charitable grants to 501(c)(3) organizations supported by ALTA members. Grants are awarded to local organizations through a competitive application process completed by an ALTA member, highlighting how the member is furthering Our Values through charitable efforts.

"I am incredibly proud of the efforts of our ALTA members who work to support these charities as well as those who donated so much to the Foundation," said ALTA CEO Diane Tomb, Foundation Board member. "Title insurance professionals work daily to protect homebuyers and every community across the country, so it's no surprise to see them lifting others in times of need. Good deeds are woven into the fabric of who they are. I am excited to see the growth of the Foundation in 2021."

Upon learning her organization would receive one of the \$6,000 grants, Erich Mische, executive director of Spare Key in St. Paul, Minn., immediately thanked Barbara Rodriguez, president of Network Title Inc.

Rodriguez nominated Spare Key, which assists families in crisis with critically ill or seriously injured family members.

"I always love receiving emails like this!" Mische said in response to Spare Key receiving a grant. "Barb's leadership in your industry, as well as her philanthropic support, is outstanding. We are so pleased to work with her and her team at Network Title. Please share with those with the ALTA Good Deeds Foundation our gratitude, as well."

Tammy Strickland wasn't surprised that so many organizations that received a grant embraced homeownership and ending homelessness. The Foundation grant reached a little closer to home, however, as one of her cousins, Traci Strickland, serves as executive director of Kanawha Valley Collective in Charleston, W.Va. The network is



AMERICAN LAND TITLE ASSOCIATION



Be a Blessing was one of 21 organizations that received grants totaling \$125,000 that the ALTA Good Deeds Foundation awarded in March. The Foundation





dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness.

"I wanted to express my gratitude to you for choosing Kanawha Valley Collective as one of the 2021 Good Deeds grant recipients," said Strickland, who is vice president of digital Transformation for Fidelity National Financial. "Kanawha Valley Collective's team works tirelessly to help individuals move from homeless to housed. The grant money will continue their mission and buy a few toasters."

The donation to Burlington Recreation Center in Burlington, N.C., nearly moved Paula Bachmaier to tears. The money will help support recreational and educational activities and opportunities for the youth in her community.



"I could seriously cry," said Bachmaier, senior vice president of North Dakota Guaranty & Title Co. "You have no idea. Thanks, from the bottom of my heart."

The grant will help For Caring Cupboard in Pasadena, Md., serve its community and feed those in need.

"We recently partnered with the Red Cross to join their Disaster

Response Team," said Chuck Yocum, president of Caring Cupboard. "This grant will allow us to fully prepare to provide that assistance."

Tess Brady Heribacka, a member account advisor for Attorneys Title Fund Services in Florida, thanked the Foundation for supporting Operation America Standing In Support (OASIS) and the military. OASIS provides moral support to those in the military with themed packages and card-writing campaigns.

"There are no words to express



the jubilation and appreciation as a recipient of the ALTA Good Deeds Foundation grant. Thank you for your support to our military and OASIS," she said. "We cannot continue our mission of sending care packages to our troops serving on the global war on terror or provide ROTC scholarships without the support from organizations such as yours. There are no words. It is both an honor and privilege to be selected as a grant recipient. Please know we are humbled and proud to be chosen for this commemorative award."

Brad Steele, executive director of The Literacy Center, also was grateful for the grant, saying the group appreciated support of their students with the life-changing investment in their program.

"We promise to steward this gift well and to use those monies to help our students make a difference in their families, workplaces and the community," Steele said.

Glen Stout, state agency manager for North American Title Insurance Co., said it was "outstanding news" when he learned Ronald McDonald House of Cleveland received a grant.

"Ronald McDonald House does such amazing work by providing a home away from home for sick children and their families," Stout said.

"The \$6,000 grant will go a long way to funding this charity and supporting RMH's mission to enhance the healthcare experiences through comfort and supportive services. I am so grateful to be a part of this industry and the American Land Title Association."



## Continue the Good Deeds

The ALTA Good Deeds Foundation will award a second round of grants later in 2021. You can help the industry continue to give back and help our communities by donating at [altagooddeeds.org](http://altagooddeeds.org).



## Report: Home Price Appreciation Drives Increase in Closing Costs for Purchases

The national average closing costs for a single-family property were \$3,470 excluding taxes in 2020, according to a report from ClosingCorp.

Despite a significant jump in home prices, the average closing costs, excluding taxes, increased only 3.9% year over year. Average closing costs for a single-family property including taxes were \$6,087. This represented a 5.9% increase compared to 2019.

Purchase originations topped \$1.4 trillion, while the average home price increased by nearly 10%. The average U.S. home price increased by roughly \$30,000 last year, but the year-over-year difference in the average purchase closing costs was only \$339 including taxes and \$131 excluding taxes, according to Bob Jennings, chief executive officer of ClosingCorp.

"The U.S. mortgage industry handled this significant increase in volume, and an even larger spike in refinances, seamlessly, and did it working remotely for three quarters of the year," Jennings said. "Considering the high dollar amount and complexity of the average purchase transaction, our industry continues to demonstrate an impressive level of cost control."

Jennings attributed much of the cost control to the increased use of technology by both lenders and settlement services providers, which enabled the industry to scale up

capacity while holding the line on closing costs.

The 2020 report shows the states with the highest average closing costs, including taxes, were the District of Columbia (\$29,329), Delaware (\$17,727), New York (\$13,261), Maryland (\$11,709) and Washington (\$11,513). The states with the lowest closing costs, including taxes, were: Missouri (\$1,571), Indiana (\$2,100), Kentucky (\$2,229), Iowa (\$2,272) and South Dakota (\$2,276).

The states with the highest average closing costs, excluding taxes, were: the District of Columbia (\$6,250), Hawaii (\$5,599), New York (\$5,571), California (\$5,366) and Illinois (\$4,893). The states with the lowest closing costs, excluding taxes, were Missouri (\$1,571), Iowa (\$2,020), South Dakota (\$2,023), Arkansas (\$2,053) and Kentucky (\$2,069).

Closing fees for 2.9 million single-family home purchases in 2020, were analyzed. ClosingCorp cost calculations include lender's title policy, owner's title policy, appraisal, settlement, recording fees, land surveys and transfer tax. ClosingCorp uses home price data from CoreLogic to estimate closing costs for an average home at the state, core-based statistical area (CBSA) and county levels. ClosingCorp uses ranges, rather than single values, to more accurately capture fees associated with the real transactions.

---

### Proliant Settlement Systems Continues Expansion in Michigan

Proliant Settlement Systems LLC recently expanded in Michigan with the addition of Great Northern Title Insurance Agency. For Neville Nofar, owner of Great Northern Title, becoming a Proliant franchisee was a natural way to complement his suite of businesses that also comprises Great Northern Tax and Great Northern Insurance Agency.

"We take service and relationships very seriously," Nofar said. "At the onset of a business, the upfront costs are exorbitant and that's why a lot of businesses fail. The Proliant model allows the franchisee to have a fighting chance to be successful in the industry because

they have streamlined the process of becoming a title agent. With their model, we can do everything with a small footprint and still be viable."

Proliant's franchisee model provides entrepreneurs an opportunity to set up their own title company by providing an IT infrastructure, back-office support and training.

"As an insurance professional, it made perfect sense to consider adding a title agency to Neville's portfolio of companies," said Michael Telford, executive vice president of Proliant Settlement Systems. "Neville and the Great Northern Brand is an all-inclusive insurance agency that is committed to customer service and retention. Proliant's business and IT infrastructure simplifies becoming a title agent and ensures our franchisees' success."

---

### CNL Strategic Capital Acquires Majority Stake in Michigan-based ATA National Title Group

Newly formed Florida-based holding company CNL Strategic Capital acquired a majority stake in ATA National Title Group LLC, its subsidiaries and affiliated companies, including Talon Title Agency.

Dave Trott, chairman of ATA National Title Group, said that all existing equity members of ATA and Talon will also participate as owners of the holding company. The management team of ATA and Talon will remain unchanged, according to the press release. Trott served two terms in the U.S. House of Representatives.



# Agency Services

With Old Republic Title, it's **ez**.

Old Republic Title's "ez" services provide our title agents with exclusive access to the tools they need to run their businesses electronically.



[oldrepublictitle.com/title-agents/agency-services](http://oldrepublictitle.com/title-agents/agency-services)



ATA has over 400 employees and 60 offices in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. In addition to ATA, the company's brands include Attorneys Title Agency, GMT Title Agency, Greco Title Agency, Midstate Title Agency, Seaver Title Agency and Talon Title Agency. According to ATA, the company completes more than 50,000 transactions per year.

"ATA's success as a premier leader in the title services industry has been achieved by our focus on world-class service and value creation opportunities," said William Robinson Jr., ATA's CEO. "Our partnership with CNL Strategic Capital and LLSC provides our firm the resources to continue being a market-leading title services provider. I look forward to our collaboration contributing meaningfully to the continued growth of our business."

---

## Stewart Expands Presence in New Mexico

Stewart Title recently acquired Santa Fe, N.M.-based Prima Title LLC.

"As we continue to execute on our strategy of building out and strengthening our local markets, the addition of the Prima team in Santa Fe makes us the leader in the local market," said Ryan Swed, group senior vice president for Stewart Title. "They have built strong real estate relationships, are known for excellent service, and I couldn't be more excited to add their industry experience and talent to the Stewart family in New Mexico."

Stewart has made several acquisitions in the past several months. In March, it purchased A.S.K. Services. In September, Stewart acquired Yukon Title Co. in Alaska. That deal followed the purchase of 57 title offices in Arizona, Colorado and Nevada from ET Investments. Also last year, Stewart acquired Pro Teck Valuation Intelligence and NotaryCam.

Stewart captured 14.4% of the title insurance market in New Mexico in 2020, according to ALTA market share data.

"For years, we have dedicated

ourselves to providing Santa Fe with the highest caliber of title and closing services, building a solid reputation in the market and an employee culture of ownership that fits with Stewart's vision," said J. Michael Hyatt, general counsel for Prima Title. "By joining Stewart, our employees and customers will greatly benefit from the security of Stewart's financial strength and the growth opportunities a solid national company can provide."

---

## Community Title Network Buys Colony Title Group

Community Title Network LLC (CTN) recently acquired Colony Title Group Ltd., a title agency headquartered in Columbia, Md. This is the fourth acquisition for CTN, which serves the Mid-Atlantic region.

Colony Title Group founder and President Edwin "Tee" Tillman will remain with the company and serve in his current role as leader of the branch operations. Tillman founded the agency in 1995.

"We are extremely excited to have Tee and his team join Community Title Network," said Michael Ridgway, president of CTN. "Tee is one of the most respected title attorneys in the entire Baltimore-Washington market. He and his team have a sterling reputation in both the commercial and residential markets for providing superior service and being great problem solvers. The reason their agency has become the leading title agency in the region lies with their people and their dedication to their customers."

---

## Patten Title Company Acquires Celebrity Title

Patten Title Co. has expanded its presence in Houston with the acquisition of Celebrity Title Co.

"We are excited to welcome the Celebrity Title team to the Patten family," said Eric Fontanot, president of Patten

Title Company. "The combination of our best-in-class systems with Celebrity's team of seasoned title professionals will elevate the customer experience to new levels. With the addition of its offices to our existing locations, we are now capable of bringing our unique blend of technology and personalized service to customers throughout the Houston area."

The addition of offices in the key markets of Sugar Land and Katy provides an opportunity to build on the legacy that Celebrity Title has built over the years. Besides the Katy and Sugar Land locations, Patten will merge the Celebrity Title Cypress location with its existing Cypress office. Patten Title now operates five office locations in Houston, two in Austin and one in Dallas.

"I am very excited for Celebrity Title to join Patten Title, who can provide employees with superior systems and operational support," said Joe Rothchild, founder of Celebrity Title. "These resources, coupled with our excellent customer service, will take our company to the next level."

---

## Knight Barry Title Keeps Growing in Florida

Wisconsin-based Knight Barry Title (KBT) has expanded its presence in Florida with the acquisition of MLS Title in Fort Myers.

Knight Barry Title now has 12 offices in Florida. MLS Title opened in 2004. Susan Malach joined the company the following year before becoming the owner in 2007.

"We love being part of this beautiful area and look forward to strengthening relationships with many Fort Myers Realtors and lenders," said Craig Haskins, Knight Barry Title's chief operating officer. "Bringing Susan's great team on board serves two purposes for us, more convenience for our already loyal local customers and the opportunity to keep building the KBT brand."

Malach will stay with the company during the transition period before retiring. She chose Knight Barry Title to take





# Hands Full? TrustLink Can Help.

**TrustLink personalized services offer you a more efficient mode of operation and more time for customer interactions.**

Daily 3-way Reconciliation | Unclaimed Property Service | 1099 and W-9 Service  
Compliance | Ease of Use | Staff Working for You

**Contact us today for more information!**  
800.767.7833 | [trustlink.sales@firstam.com](mailto:trustlink.sales@firstam.com)

**TrustLink™**  
The Premier Trust Accounting Service

care of her staff and customers because she was impressed with the company's independence and commitment to its customers and team members.

"It's important for me to know that my staff, who I adore, and my customers are going to be well taken care of, even long after I leave," she said. "This company is my baby, but I've been doing it for over 20 years. I love it, but I'm ready for a change."

KBT has more than 80 offices in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Florida, Texas and Michigan.

---

## Notarize Secures \$130M in Funding to Fuel Growth of Digital Transaction

Notarize announced \$130 million in Series D funding led by fintech-focused VC firm Canapi Ventures.

Also participating in the round included Alphabet's independent growth fund CapitalG, Citi Ventures, Wells Fargo, True Bridge Partners and existing investors Camber Creek, Ludlow Ventures, NAR's Second Century Ventures and Fifth Wall Ventures. Notarize, which has raised \$213 million in funding, will use the capital to expand operations to meet demand for the company's digital notarization and identity verification technology.

The company reported it has experienced an 800% growth in volume in its real estate sector. Amid a massive increase in transactions, Notarize has also inked new partnerships with companies including Adobe, TIAA, Dropbox, Redfin, Zillow Group, First American Financial, Transamerica, Stripe and JD Power & Associates.

"In 2020, the world rushed to digitize," said Pat Kinsel, founder and CEO of Notarize. "Online commerce ballooned, and businesses in almost every industry needed to transition to digital basically overnight so they could continue uninterrupted. With the support of our investors, we look forward to helping

more people and businesses bridge digital divides to keep lives moving forward in a post-pandemic world."

---

## Spruce Launches Automated Underwriting Model

Spruce recently launched a new underwriting model aimed at providing a fully underwritten title commitment in minutes.

According to a release, Spruce said the automated search pulls from a combination of proprietary data science, machine learning, and private and public data sources. Complementing existing underwriting standards, Spruce said its approach can reduce multiple-day searches to a few minutes, resulting in lower operational costs.

"The technological capabilities we've built at Spruce are fundamentally changing the way we process real estate transactions for the better," said Patrick Burns, CEO and co-founder of Spruce. "The demand for an automated, sophisticated and predictable clear-to-close process is greater than ever as more companies are trying to give homeowners and investors a genuinely fairer deal."

The automated underwriting model was launched in Colorado and Arizona and in conjunction with Spruce's partnership with American Digital Title Insurance Company.

---

## 10 Companies Now MISMO RON-certified

Black Knight and Stavvy became the latest companies to successfully complete the MISMO Remote Online Notarization (RON) certification.

There are now 10 providers that have received the certification. Black Knight and Stavvy join eNotaryLog, Hercules Holding, Nexsys, Notarize, NotaryCam, Pvaso, Signix and Snapdocs.

"Since announcing the MISMO RON certification program last April, we've seen significant interest from companies

that want to demonstrate that their technology solutions meet the common set of industry standards needed to achieve this designation," said Seth Appleton, president of MISMO. "This offers mortgage industry participants assurance that their MISMO RON-certified provider has adopted industry best practices and helps facilitate RON-enabled digital mortgage closings."

---

## Owner of Fake Title Company in Michigan Pleads Guilty to Fraud Scheme to Fuel Gambling Habit

A Michigan real estate broker and investor pleaded guilty to defrauding investors to fund his gambling habit with the Michigan Lottery.

According to the U.S. Attorney's Office, Viktor Gjonaj entered a guilty plea to one count of wire fraud. Court documents show that in June 2016, Gjonaj believed he had discovered a guaranteed way to win huge jackpots in the Michigan Lottery Daily 3 and 4 games. In 2017, Gjonaj began losing more money than he won and more money than he could afford to lose. Rather than ending his gambling, Gjonaj devised a scheme to trick individuals into giving him money by falsely promising them he would invest it in lucrative real estate deals.

In order to make the deals look legitimate, Gjonaj created a fake title company, Title Plus Title Services. He instructed the investors to wire money into the bank account of the fake company. Gjonaj described the fraudulent real estate deals in great detail and encouraged investors to continue giving him money by disbursing payments to them that he falsely claimed were profits on their "investment." By early 2019, Gjonaj was betting over \$1 million a week on Michigan Lottery games using money obtained from victims. In August 2019, Gjonaj's fraud scheme unraveled, resulting in over \$19 million in losses to victims.

## Avanze Tech Labs Unveils Technology to Automate Post-closing Process

Avanze Tech Labs launched a new solution to automate the post-closing process and reduce operating costs. Called STACX, Avanze Tech Labs said the post-closing SaaS solution leverages artificial intelligence (AI), optical character recognition (OCR) and machine learning (ML) to support lenders and servicers, title companies and correspondent lending channels by creating an automated workflow solution that enables faster cycle time, improves auditing and processes more documents with higher accuracy.

"Post-closing has been an ignored sector in the digital mortgage evolution, and we saw an opportunity to better serve the industry," said Auvese Pasha, president and CEO of Avanze Tech Labs. "With STACX, we are using AI in the most intelligent way to expedite loan processing and increase confidence in quality assurance, making the life of the post-closing user easier and enabling the business to operate with speed and agility."

## Recent Integrations

- **SoftPro** expanded its nationwide network of third-party vendors with the release of its new integration with **DataTrace**. SoftPro users can now access DataTrace's title database for title searches, title production and tax reporting. This integration provides access to over 560 title plants, nationwide tax and recorded property data and more than seven billion document images.
- **AccuTitle** has integrated its technology platforms with **TitleTap's** automated marketing services. This feature allows customers to generate emails to predefined parties soliciting feedback on their experience.

## Housing Market Potential

Existing and Potential Home Sales\* (in Millions, Seasonally Adjusted Annualized Rate)

**6.24** SAAR

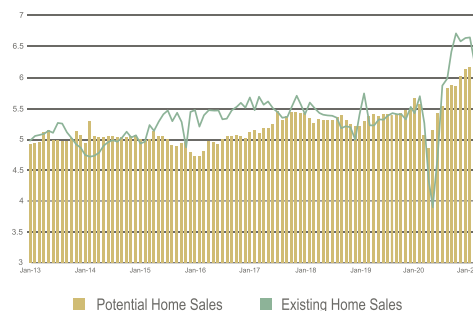
Existing Home Sales

**6.27** SAAR

Potential Home Sales

**-0.5%**

Market Performance Gap



\*Potential home sales measures what a healthy market level of home sales should be based on the economic, demographic and housing market environments.

## National Consumer House-Buying Power

How much home one can afford to buy given the average income and the prevailing mortgage rate

February 2021

**\$517,513**

House-Buying Power

**+15.6%**

Year-Over-Year

## Where House-Buying Power is Strongest

Top States and Cities

### States

1. New Jersey: **\$676,896**
2. Maryland: **\$664,504**
3. Hawaii: **\$662,289**
4. Massachusetts: **\$641,041**
5. California: **\$621,606**

### Cities

1. San Jose, CA: **\$1,102,983**
2. San Francisco, CA: **\$915,583**
3. Washington, DC: **\$847,880**
4. Boston, MA: **\$756,966**
5. San Diego, CA: **\$662,707**

Source: Mark Fleming, Chief Economist at First American Financial Corporation



---

## FNF Hires National Agency Education Trainer



Elizabeth Wysong Berg

Fidelity National Financial Family of Companies (FNF) has hired Elizabeth Wysong Berg NTP as national agency vice president for education and training. In this role, Berg will work with FNF's leaders to coordinate its education strategy and target learning opportunities where they're needed the most. She will work directly with Linda Grahovec, vice president and national agency director of education and marketing strategy for FNF.

development and growth of the company's New York state agency division. Prior to joining AmTrust, Ling held the role of senior counsel at Big Apple Abstract Corp. She also previously served as senior underwriting counsel at MacGregor Abstract Corp, New York Title Services and First Nationwide Title Agency LLC. In her more than 25 years in the industry, Ling has also worked at companies including First American Title National Commercial Services, Fidelity National Title Group and Stewart Title Insurance Company.

---

## NATIC Appoints Northwest Regional Underwriting Counsel



Andrea Alderman Keith

North American Title Insurance Co. (NATIC) has added Andrea Alderman Keith as Northwest regional underwriting counsel to provide underwriting guidance, support and education to title agents and affiliates in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and additional jurisdictions. She previously worked as a regional title officer in the California market, where she specialized in servicing lenders' foreclosure and REO needs, and as a foreclosure litigator for a Florida-based law firm.

---

## First National Title Names New Compliance/Regulatory Counsel

First National Title Insurance Co. (FNTI) announced it named Chad Hansen as the company's new compliance/regulatory counsel. Hansen has 23 years of experience in the title industry, working with regional and national underwriters and owning and operating title agencies in several states.

---

## Omni Title Names VP of Business Development



Jon Lindahl

Columbus, Ohio-based Omni Title LLC named Jon Lindahl as vice president of business development. Lindahl has worked in the real estate title insurance industry since 2004 as a licensed title agent and escrow officer. His experience in the title industry includes residential and commercial real estate transactions, new construction and investment property.

---

## Stewart Title Names Group Vice President for Southeast Direct Operations

Stewart Information Services Corp. recently hired Ana Villela-Murillo as group vice president for the Southeast. In this role, she will oversee direct operations in Florida, Alabama, Arkansas and Tennessee. Prior to joining Stewart, Villela-Murillo worked at First American Title for 24 years, serving as vice president of operations since 2014 and spending the last two years managing operations in Florida.

---

## Boston National Title Promotes SVP National Commercial Division

Boston National Title (BNT) has promoted Lisa Vogel to senior vice president of its national commercial division. BNT recruited Vogel in 2015 to develop and launch its commercial business, which now manages major deals within and across all 50 states.

---

## AmTrust Names Underwriting Counsel for New York Division

AmTrust Title Insurance named Margaret Ling as business development and underwriting counsel. Ling's focus will be on the continued support,



Those who know  
trust Cloudstar.

[www.mycloudstar.com](http://www.mycloudstar.com)

## A Virtual Day on the Hill

### THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CANCELED LAST YEAR'S ALTA ADVOCACY SUMMIT.

This year we held this important event virtually! Despite missing in-person interactions, the virtual event led to a record number of ALTA members participating to help protect and promote the interests of our industry. Over three days, we had 218 Capitol Hill meetings with nearly 400 ALTA members attending the event.

I was fortunate to kick off the conference by interviewing U.S. Rep. Ed Perlmutter (D-Co.), chair of the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Financial Institutions. The congressman and I were former partners at a law firm in Colorado before he turned to the political arena. Rep. Perlmutter has been a great champion and friend of the title industry for years and has been leading the effort in Congress to allow title companies and banks to provide services to legal marijuana businesses.

Our conversation highlighted the value in building personal relationships. During the second day, ALTA CEO Diane Tomb moderated a discussion with former Sens. Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and John Breaux (D-La.). The two provided insight about relationship building and their former Senate colleague and current President Joe Biden. Sen. Lott was the majority leader during the last 50-50 Senate. He said not much of the center remains, making it harder to reach compromises. Sen. Lott added that D.C.'s worst enemy is the airplane because members of Congress fly in on Monday and leave on Wednesday, reducing opportunities for lawmakers with different perspectives to interact and socialize. Sen. Breaux said this has led to a lack of understanding of what people are about.

We rounded out the event on the third day with a message from Cedric Richmond, senior advisor to the president and director of the White House Office of Public Engagement, as well as an interview of freshman Rep. Young Kim (R-CA). Rep. Kim is a former small business owner and congressional staffer who made the leap to elected official.

During all three days, we virtually walked the marble halls of Congress. We successfully told our story of how title and settlement professionals—truly essential workers—helped keep the real estate market churning by closing historic order volumes despite unprecedented conditions during a global pandemic. Our main ask was to garner support for the recently reintroduced Securing and Enabling Commerce Using Remote and Electronic (SECURE) Notarization Act of 2021, S. 1625. Along with SECURE, we talked about a range of topics from protecting 1031 exchanges to wire transfer fraud and the need for legal clarity when doing deals with marijuana businesses.

This was my 14th Advocacy Summit. It won't be my last. As always, I was so inspired to participate alongside industry professionals from across the country. Virtual or not, the Advocacy Summit is critical for the industry's future. I only hope even more of our members help tell our story next time.



**BILL BURDING NTP**  
ALTA president



[ALTA.ORG/MARKETPLACE](http://ALTA.ORG/MARKETPLACE)

FIND  
SOLUTIONS  
FOR YOUR  
BUSINESS

**ALTA**  
**Market**  
**place**



# Tell Your Story

## Social Media Marketing Calendar

Social Media marketing is one of the most direct and cost-effective ways a company can reach customers and consumers. ALTA members have access to a full year of marketing content to use on social media that will save you time & resources.



Learn more at [alta.org/social-media-calendar/](http://alta.org/social-media-calendar/)