

NOVEMBER 2021

# TITLE News

AMERICAN LAND TITLE ASSOCIATION



## Tech Helping Title Industry Keep Closing Costs Down

*AI/Automation Continues to  
Drive Faster Turn Times*





# Thankful

## FOR OUR AGENTS

The FNF Family of Companies is thankful for all the work our team and agents have done in 2021. It's been an exciting and busy time for all of us. You've leaned on FNF to provide the guidance, knowledge and resources needed to navigate through it all, and our strong, flexible experts delivered in every way possible.

When it comes to your title journey, you can trust us to lead the way thanks to all our great teams from sea to shining sea. No matter what 2022 has in store, FNF is here for you and your customers.

Together, we can keep doing great things.




 Alamo Title Insurance.

 CHICAGO TITLE INSURANCE COMPANY

 Commonwealth LAND TITLE INSURANCE COMPANY

 Fidelity National Title Insurance Company

 National Title Insurance of New York, Inc.



# iN This Issue

VOLUME 100 | NUMBER 11 | NOVEMBER 2021

## COVER STORY

### 10 Tech Helping Title Industry Keep Closing Costs Down

AI/Automation Continues to Drive Faster Turn Times

## FEATURES

### 14 To Sell or Not to Sell (or Buy)

How Do Title Agencies Decide Whether It's Worth Entering the M&A Market?

### 18 So, You've Acquired a Title Business. Now What?

Don't Overlook Importance—and Cost—of Integrating Two Existing Firms

### 20 Congress Addresses Consumer Privacy

ALTA Reminds CFPB the Industry Already Regulated by GLBA

### 23 Challenges, Mystery Fuels Path for Title Agency Owner

Member Profile: Becky Taylor

## DEPARTMENTS

- 5 Publisher's Desk
- 6 ALTA News
- 26 Industry Update
- 32 Movers & Shakers
- 36 Closing Comment



DON'T MISS THIS MONTH'S  
DIGITAL ISSUE OF

# TITLENews

The digital edition of **TITLENews** includes a webinar recording that details how automation has evolved in the settlement process. Listen to this webinar recording to learn how to use AI to make your operation more efficient.

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

PRESIDENT-ELECT  
**Jack Rattikin III**  
Rattikin Title Co.  
Fort Worth, Texas

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

CHAIR, FINANCE COMMITTEE  
**Quinn H. Stufflebeam**  
Title Financial Corp.  
Blackfoot, Idaho

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

BOARD REPRESENTATIVES,  
TITLE INSURANCE UNDERWRITERS  
SECTION

**Joe Grealish**  
FNF Family of Companies  
Houston, Texas

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

CHAIR, ABSTRACTERS AND TITLE  
INSURANCE AGENTS SECTION  
**Richard H. Welshons**  
DCA Title  
Hastings, Minn.

BOARD REPRESENTATIVES, ABSTRACTERS  
AND TITLE AGENTS SECTION  
**Lisa M. Steele**  
Mother Lode Holding Co.  
Roseville, Calif.

**Craig Haskins**  
Knight Barry Title Inc.  
Milwaukee, Wis.

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

## 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**

VICE PRESIDENT  
OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS  
**Elizabeth Blosser**

GENERAL COUNSEL  
**Steve Gottheim**

VICE PRESIDENT OF COMMUNICATIONS  
**Jeremy Yohe**

## Delight Your Customers With Tech and Brilliance

### DELIGHT IS A POWERFUL THING COMPANIES CAN USE TO GENERATE LOYALTY AMONG CUSTOMERS. It



**JEREMY YOHE**

ALTA vice president of communications

doesn't take enormous effort. Actually, it's little things like knowing your customers and responding accordingly when problems arise. Making someone smile is a sure way to remind them why they're a loyal customer to begin with. You can't go wrong looking for ways to delight, even when things don't go right.

Take this example. A customer purchased the hard-to-find Mos Eisley Cantina LEGO set at Target. The instruction booklet of the 3,000-piece set is 400 pages long. If you're buying this set, you're clearly a fan of LEGO and Star Wars. A few hours into building the set, it was discovered one of the bags of pieces was missing. Imagine the disappointment! The consumer had two options: Take the set back to Target or contact LEGO directly.

The customer reached out via the company's website. This is an experience all of us can relate to and it's something most of us would probably rather avoid. A corporate "contact us" page can sometimes seem like a black hole. If you're lucky enough to get a response, it's something automated or handled by someone responsible for generating hundreds of responses a day. If you do get a reply, often it doesn't address your issue or it's generic. This is what makes LEGO's retort an incredible example for all companies:

*Dear John,*

*Thanks for getting in touch with us and providing that information!*

*I am so sorry that you are missing bag 14 from your Mos Eisley Cantina! This must be the work of Lord Vader.*

*Fear not, for I have hired Han to get that bag right out to you.*

*Have a bricktastic day and may the Force be with you :)*

I don't know if it's in LEGO's protocols to train its employees to take this level of care when handling customer issues. But this is nothing short of brilliant. The employee who wrote that email clearly understands LEGO's audience. Not only did it apologize for the mistake, but it also added personality and clearly explained how LEGO would resolve the problem. The response turned a disappointing situation into something charming.

As you'll read in this edition's cover article, title companies are utilizing technology to deliver title commitments and policies faster to their customers. While handling record levels of business, companies are finding ways to keep costs down as home values continue to increase. A simplified process is what your customers want and expect. They also need you when problems arise. Don't forget the personal touch as you drive for speed and efficiency.

Find ways to delight your customers with the brilliance of your technology and your people.



## ALTA Welcomes 2021-22 Board of Governors and Exec Committees

Here are the 2021-22 ALTA Board of Governors, as well as the Abstracters and Title Insurance Agents Executive Committee and the Title Insurance Underwriters Executive Committee.

### Board of Governors



**President**  
Daniel M. Wold  
Old Republic National  
Title Insurance Co.



**President-Elect**  
Jack Rattikin III  
Rattikin Title Co.



**Underwriters  
Section Chair**  
Don Kennedy  
First American  
Title Insurance Co.



**Agents Section Chair**  
Richard H. Welshons  
DCA Title



**Chair of Finance  
Committee**  
Quinn H. Stufflebeam,  
Title Financial Corp.



**Agents Section Rep**  
Lisa M. Steele  
Mother Lode  
Holding Co.



**Agents Section Rep**  
Craig Haskins  
Knight Barry  
Title Inc.



**Underwriters  
Section Rep**  
Joe Grealish  
FNF Family of  
Companies



**Underwriters  
Section Rep**  
Tara Smith  
Stewart Title  
Guaranty Co.



**Treasurer**  
David  
Townsend MTP, NTP,  
Agents National  
Title Insurance Co.



**Immediate  
Past President**  
Bill Burding NTP  
Orange Coast  
Title Co.

### Underwriters Executive Committee

**Chair** (may serve 2 one-year terms): Don Kennedy, First American Title Insurance Co.

**Vice-Chair:** Donald A. O'Neill, WFG National Title Insurance Co.

**Secretary:** Scott T. Chandler CTIS, NTP, Westcor Land Title Insurance Co.

**Three-year term:** Joe Grealish, FNF Family of Companies

**Three-year term:** Emilio Fernandez, North American Title Insurance Co.

**Three-year term:** James M. Czapiga, CATIC

**Two-year term:** Scott T. Chandler CTIS, NTP, Westcor Land Title Insurance Co.

**Two-year term:** Jeffery J. Bluhm, Old Republic National Title Insurance Co.

**Two-year term:** David Townsend MTP, NTP, Agents National Title Insurance Co.

**One-year term:** Tara Smith, Stewart Title Guaranty Co.

**One-year term:** Donald A. O'Neill, WFG National Title Insurance Co.

**One-year term:** Scott McCall, Title Resources Guaranty Co

### Abstracters and Title Insurance Agents Executive Committee

**Chair:** Richard H. Welshons, DCA Title

**Vice-Chair:** Deborah S. Bailey, Bailey Helms Legal

**Secretary:** Brent J. Laliberte NTP, Bayou Title Inc.

**Three-year term:** John Williams, Bluegrass land Title LLC

**Three-year term:** Tyler Newlon, Pioneer Title Agency Inc.

**Three-year term:** Wendy Ethen, Guaranty Commercial Title Inc.

**Two-year term:** Brent J. Laliberte NTP, Bayou Title Inc.

**Two-year term:** Charles H. Gray, Surety Land Title Inc.

**Two-year term:** Nicole Plath, Fortune Title Agency Inc.

**One-year term:** Deborah S. Bailey, Bailey Helms Legal

**One-year term:** Lisa M. Steele, Mother Lode Holding Co.

**One-year term:** Craig Haskins, Knight Barry Title Inc.



# Agency Services

Learn how title agents find it ez to work with Old Republic Title's:

ezJacket | ezRemit | ezPremiumPay | ezMarket® | ezShare | ezLearning

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



OLD REPUBLIC INSURANCE GROUP

©2021 Old Republic Title

AgencyDriven™

## ALTA Ready to Work With New CFPB Director on Issues Impacting Members

The U.S. Senate voted 50-48 on Sept. 30 to confirm Federal Trade Commission official Rohit Chopra as the next director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB).

ALTA congratulated Chopra on his confirmation and looks forward to working with him and the bureau's staff to help provide positive and compliant real estate settlement experiences for consumers. ALTA is ready to serve as a resource on important issues, such as wire transfer fraud, third-party oversight and mortgage disclosures.

Chopra has said his focus would be "unlawful and avoidable foreclosures" in the housing market and "systemic inequities faced by families of color" in the mortgage market.

In regard to mortgage disclosures, ALTA has consistently said the CFPB's rule for the disclosure of title insurance fees does not provide consumers with clear information about their title insurance costs.



Rohit Chopra

"This problem of not allowing title insurance companies to disclose available discounts for lenders title insurance is exacerbated in states where it is common for the seller to pay for all or a portion of the buyer's title insurance costs," said ALTA CEO Diane Tomb. "In these states, the CFPB's mandated formula not only leads to an incorrect disclosure of the cost of title insurance but confusion over how much the seller is obligated to pay.

Over 40 percent of American homebuyers felt taken advantage of or confused by the calculation of title insurance fees under the CFPB's method.

Another area of concern involves consumer financial data. ALTA has reminded the CFPB that the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (GLBA) already limits how financial institutions—including title and settlement services companies—share and use customers' personal information. There are several things the CFPB should consider when evaluating access and use of data.

"One key area is in the transparency and disclosure regarding who has access to the consumer data, the use of any intermediaries or data access aggregators to process data, how the data is used and stored, control over whether their data is sold and whether the consumer can opt out of data collection or sharing practices," Tomb said.

Additionally, ALTA is hopeful the CFPB continues its recent trend of providing more formal rulemaking for financial institutions to rely on and less regulation by enforcement.

"Businesses regulated by the bureau should have the right to know the rules before any enforcement actions commence," Tomb said.

## 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: 58
- New Associate Members: 5
- New Attorney Members: 8
- State with the most new members: Texas, 10
- Total Members: 6,085

# CALENDAR

## 2022 ALTA CONFERENCES

### ALTA SPRINGBOARD

March 15-16

Tampa, Fla.

### ALTA ADVOCACY SUMMIT

May 16-18

Washington, D.C.

## 2021 STATE CONFERENCES

### FLORIDA

Nov. 8-10

Ponte Vedra, Fla.

### KENTUCKY

Nov. 11

Louisville, Ky.

### LOUISIANA

Dec. 2-4

New Orleans

## 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, \$460,000 has been pledged from 650 people to TIPAC. In addition, \$141,500 from 22 companies has been pledged to the TIPAC Education Fund. Check out who has supported the industry at [alta.org/tipac](https://alta.org/tipac).



# CLEAR2GO<sup>®</sup>

Expand your search and exam capacity and accelerate your workflow.

Clear2Go, First American's automated decision engine, provides information to help you quickly and efficiently produce title.

#### Receive results in minutes to:

- ▶ Direct your workflow
- ▶ Provide public record documents
- ▶ Analyze various data sources
- ▶ Identify potential risks
- ▶ And more.

Maximize efficiency and save time by leveraging the nation's largest property and title plant data, on your First American residential refinance orders, with Clear2Go.

Clear2Go is subject to First American's underwriting requirements and eligibility criteria, and is not available for purchase transactions, commercial properties, vacant land, manufactured homes or transactions greater than \$2,000,000. Service availability excludes certain states and counties based on regulatory restrictions.

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, the Clear2Go logo, First American Title, Clear2Go and firstam.com are registered trademarks or trademarks of First American Financial Corporation and/or its affiliates.



**First American Title<sup>™</sup>**

[www.firstam.com/clear2go](http://www.firstam.com/clear2go)





# Tech *Helping* Title Industry *Keep Closing Costs* **DOWN**

*AI/Automation Continues to  
Drive Faster Turn Times*

By Jeremy Yohe

# CONTINUED LOW LEVELS OF HOUSING INVENTORY,

combined with record-low mortgage rates spurring housing demand, have caused an increase in median sales prices for existing single-family homes in nearly every market across the country during the second quarter of 2021.

According to the National Association of Realtors (NAR), median sales price of single-family existing homes rose 22.9% to \$357,900, an increase of \$66,800 from one year ago.

With home prices rising, the average monthly mortgage payment on an existing single-family home financed with a 30-year fixed-rate loan and 20% down payment rose to \$1,215. This is up \$196 from one year ago, NAR reported. The monthly mortgage payment grew even as the effective 30-year fixed mortgage rate decreased to 3.05% (3.29% one year ago). Among all homebuyers, the monthly mortgage payment as a share of the median family income rose to 16.5% in the second quarter of 2021 (from 14.0% one year ago).

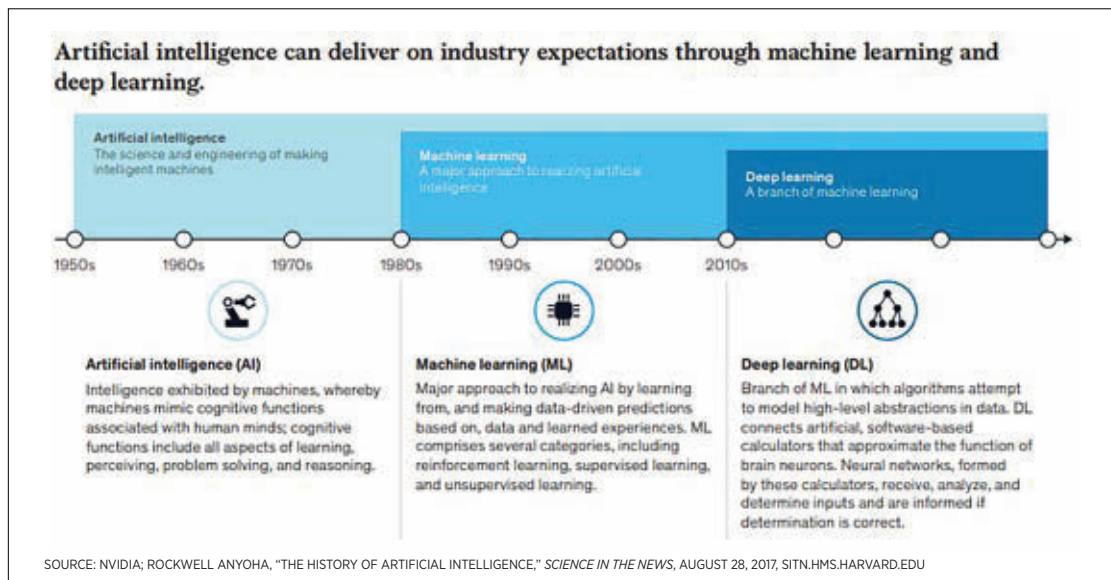
“Housing affordability for first-time buyers is weakening,” said Lawrence Yun, NAR’s chief economist. “Unfortunately, the benefits of historically low interest rates are overwhelmed by home prices rising too fast, thereby requiring a higher income in order to become a homeowner.”

Countering the skyrocketing home values, the title and settlement industry continues to find ways to manage fees associated with buying a home as closing costs as a percentage of purchase price declined during the first half of 2021. According to the latest data from ClosingCorp, closing costs as a percentage of purchase prices declined to 1.03% this year, down from 1.06% in 2020.

“Although the average home price increased, the closing costs, excluding taxes, on that property only increased by \$400,” said Bob Jennings, CEO of ClosingCorp. “In addition to keeping up with high demand, the mortgage industry is doing a good job in holding down the costs it can control.”

## Tech-driven Tools

Streamlining the homebuying process was a precept for Max Simkoff when he launched States Title in 2016. Three years later, the company acquired North American Title Co. (NATC) and North American Title





Insurance Co. (NATIC) from Lennar. The company rebranded as Doma and went public earlier this year after completing its merger with special purpose acquisition company Capitol Investment Corp. V.

Company officials said the transaction was expected to provide up to \$645 million in cash proceeds and a fully committed private investment in public equity (PIPE) of \$300 million. Up to \$345 million of cash was to be held in Capitol's trust account. Approximately \$510 million of the cash proceeds were expected to be retained by Doma, which will be used to fuel growth and expand the company's machine intelligence platform.

"I founded Doma to remove friction and frustration from homebuying and to make closing on a home as simple and efficient as booking a ride or ordering a meal," Simkoff said. "Our patented machine intelligence technology reduces title processing time from five days to as little as one minute—our goal is that the entire mortgage closing process move from a 50-plus day ordeal to less than a week,"

According to a report from ICE Mortgage Technology, it took an average of 46 days to close a transaction in August. This is three days faster than the same time a year ago, but four days slower than August 2019.

Reducing the closing timeline is on everyone's mind—especially lenders as they look to deliver for their customers and then sell the loans on the secondary market. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the trend of customers expecting speed and transparency. Successful financial institutions are prioritizing a tech-first approach to transactions. Earlier this year, Wells Fargo announced it will utilize Doma's title and escrow platform to improve the refinance process and enhance the experience for its customers.

"In order to do that, it's essential that we embrace modern day digital tools that maximize efficiency," said Kristy Fercho, head of Wells Fargo Home Lending. "Doma's technology-led approach to instant title underwriting and more streamlined closing is aligned with our commitment to reduce time to close, lower costs for our customers and create an exceptional experience."

In August, First American Title Insurance Co. announced that its Clear2Go automated title decision engine is now available to title agents that underwrite with the company. For eligible residential refinance or home equity transactions, Clear2Go can be used to automate the title search, document collection and title examination to create same-day title commitments. First American reported it has used the automated title production process on more than one million

residential refinance and home equity transactions.

The title commitments powered by Clear2Go are backed by First American's underwriting rules and vetted against a collection of property and title data resources. Clear2Go was designed to meet applicable state-level title plant requirements, according to First American.

"Clear2Go is another example of First American's commitment to leadership in the digital transformation of the title and settlement industry," said Evan Zanic, president of First American Title's agency division. "Our title agent customers can benefit from proven technology that has powered our own title production, helping them reduce costs, enhance efficiency and improve their customers' experience."

In April, Spruce launched an 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 automated underwriting model was launched in Colorado and Arizona in conjunction with Spruce's partnership with American Digital Title Insurance Co.

"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"

## Tech Patents

Texas-based Flueid also recently received a patent for its technology that the company says centralizes and automates the title clearance decision in less than a minute.

The U.S. Patent & Trademark Office (USPTO) issued the patent for the Flueid Decision (formerly Insurful) platform. The system can be integrated with the core operating systems of point of sale (POS) platforms, lender operating systems (LOS), title production systems (TPS), servicing platforms and marketplaces.

First launched in mid-2020, the Flueid Decision platform uses traditional and nontraditional data sources, proprietary logic and insights in its search processes.

Peter Bowman and Peter Richter self-funded the launch of Flueid Software Corp. in July 2017. Both were executives at Title365, which was acquired by



*“Our title agent customers can benefit from proven technology that has powered our own title production, helping them reduce costs, enhance efficiency and improve their customers’ experience.”*

—Evan Zanic, president of First American

Blend from Mr. Cooper Group earlier this year for approximately \$422 million.

“For nearly 20 years, our leadership team has been on a journey to modernize the real estate transaction using data and technology,” Bowman said. “Our goal is to deliver trusted digital decisions to our partners that don’t replace, but support, their businesses. That’s why we’ve created a truly independent, multi-tenant solution that can power multiple decisions and provide clients with greater visibility and choice in their workflows no matter where a partner sits within the transaction ecosystem.”

Meanwhile, First American Financial Corp. received a patent from the USPTO for an innovative improvement to optical character recognition (OCR) technology that leverages artificial intelligence. The patented enhancement applies artificial intelligence to validate and correct text obtained from a document image via OCR, fueling more accurate automated title underwriting and production on key text-based components of the title policy.

“Automated title production and accelerating the digital transformation of real estate transactions depend upon obtaining accurate, structured data from document images,” said Mark Fleming, senior vice president of Decision Sciences at First American. “This patented method allows us to transform unstructured data pulled from public records and other sources into structured data more rapidly and with greater accuracy than conventional OCR validation and error-correction techniques. This patent builds on our rich history of innovation, including pioneering a variety of OCR technology advancements and other data extraction techniques that help move our automated title underwriting and production efforts forward.”

## Automated Communications

Qualia recently released new automation features to help title and escrow companies improve efficiency when communicating with customers. The new Qualia Connect capabilities provide ways for title and escrow businesses to create custom automations for many common partner and client interactions. Businesses can configure more triggers to automatically send tailored communications to clients based on activity in the file.

“The current record housing market has certainly heightened expectations for what the homebuying experience should be,” said Brian Thome, vice president of customer success for Qualia. “In our Homebuyer Sentiment Index from earlier this year, 53% of recent homebuyers reported they selected their real estate agent due to a differentiated level of service around the closing. With these new Connect features we’ve made it even easier for lenders, real estate agents, and title and escrow businesses to deliver the experience their clients are demanding.”

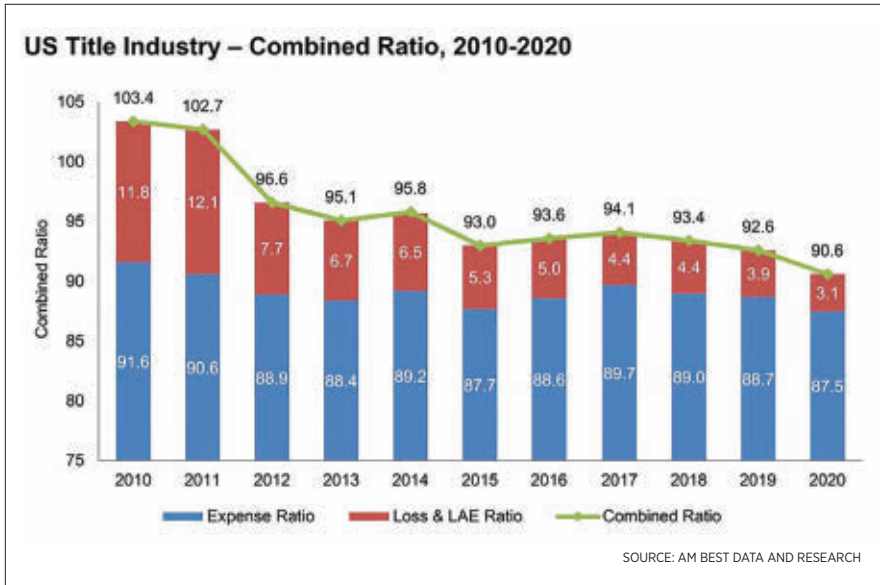
The new feature also allows advanced quoting and ordering. Companies can increase capacity to accept new business through auto-accept and bulk-order features. There’s also expanded security. Connect’s new default two-factor authentication helps protect against the growing threat of cyberattacks and wire fraud.

“The key to title is communication with all parties, and Connect makes that so simple for us,” said Wendy Jeffery, senior director of title and escrow for Homie Title.

## Post-closing Improvements

New solutions are also addressing post-closing bottlenecks. Avanze Tech Labs launched a new solution to automate the post-closing process and reduce operating costs. Called STACX, Avanze Tech Labs said its SaaS solution leverages 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.

STACX utilizes AI technology to automate the classification and extraction of data from loan documents. The technology leverages an open API



framework to integrate with existing document management systems and loan origination software (LOS). STACX allows its clients to create custom workflows and automated compliance checklists to streamline communication. This allows staff to focus on more challenging tasks versus items that can now be automated.

“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.”

Earlier this year, SYNARGO Inc. released an application that also delivers automation capabilities aimed at streamlining repetitive manual post-closing tasks. The SYNARGO PostClosing+ application consolidates quality-control tracking information relevant to all stages of the post-closing process, from scanning and separating packages to identifying recordables and integrating all shipping phases.

Title companies and lenders can choose to integrate with PostClosing+ or access it as a stand-alone application. Both interfaces deliver status updates and improve efficiency by reducing the need for

back-and-forth communication.

“By utilizing automated workflows and advanced APIs, SYNARGO can directly integrate with our customers’ title software,” said Shawn Roney, vice president of technology at SYNARGO. “This direct connection allows us to deliver, track and update post-closing files securely in real-time without the hassle of multiple logins.”

### Automating Oversight

ALTA is also getting into the mix offering a tech solution to help streamline things for title agencies and underwriters. In October, the ALTA Registry, the national database of title and settlement agents, added a new feature that allows companies to quickly provide errors and omissions (E&O) policy information to underwriters.

After the E&O information is uploaded, underwriters can then access the data to quickly verify the information. This new tool includes document-level automatic scrubbing using Deep Secure by Forcepoint’s malware removal technology and data extraction via AREAL’s artificial intelligence powered document processing technology.

“The ALTA Registry has evolved into a data clearinghouse for title underwriters, lenders and settlement agents,” said Jack Rattikin III, CEO of Rattikin Title and co-chair of the ALTA Registry Committee. “The Registry provides an optimal way for

underwriters to manage oversight of their agents’ E&O data.”

Nearly 8,800 title agents, settlement companies and real estate attorneys appear in the ALTA Registry. The ALTA Registry allows title insurance agents and settlement companies to communicate with underwriters to confirm their company name and contact information—providing mortgage lenders with a trusted industry online database to identify transaction partners.

The ALTA Registry also closes an access point for potential malware and drives down oversight costs by improving accuracy and automated data downloads.

“A secure and neutral data-sharing utility that benefits all title agents and underwriters will be a welcome solution to maintaining current E&O coverage details,” said Eddie Oddo NTP, vice president of Corporate Business Solutions for First American Title Insurance Company and co-chair of the ALTA Registry Committee. “The Registry standardizes the process and eliminates the need for title agents to send E&O information to multiple underwriters, allowing industry professionals to focus on the tasks that drive their business.”

### Looking Forward

Kourtnie Beckwith, financial analyst with AM Best, said the ratings firm is keeping an eye on title companies that find ways to innovate, as they will likely increase market influence and enhance their market share.

AM Best reported that tech advances that reduce the time and money spent on underwriting, title searching and related examinations will continue to be priorities for title companies. Lower expense ratios can augment profitability and potentially lower the cost of title insurance, according to AM Best.

“AM Best believes that the entrance of smaller regional (underwriters) or even insurtechs still need some time to be seen in terms of their acceptability and their effectiveness,” Beckwith said. ■



**JEREMY YOHE** is ALTA’s vice president of communications. He can be reached at [jyohe@alta.org](mailto:jyohe@alta.org).



## 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*

# To Sell or Not to Sell (or Buy)

How Do Title Agencies Decide Whether  
It's Worth Entering the M&A Market?

By Howard Turk



Several businesses in the title industry, agencies as well as other related firms, have had an incredibly profitable run over the past two years. This has resulted in many finding themselves flush with cash. It has also, as a more competitive purchase market emerges, driven some owners to ask, “Is it time to cash in on my hard work building my business?” For others, perhaps the time is now to grow their market footprints through acquisition.

The knee-jerk reaction, coming off one of the strongest years the industry has ever experienced, might be something along the lines of “If not now, when?” However, that’s a gut feeling. The mergers and acquisitions (M&A) market is much more sophisticated. Timing is not always directly correlated to national volume or performance.

Whether a title agency intends to enter as a buyer or seller, the M&A market can be incredibly complex for unique, privately held businesses. There is no universal market for title agents, and the value of a title business can be affected by a wide number of disparate factors.

The business mix of residential volume to commercial and/or REO/default volume matters. The proportion of top-line revenue attributed to residential refinances matters (unless you have robust integrations). Corporate concentration issues matter. Even the geographic footprint of a title business can make all the difference in valuation. After all, this is not truly a national marketplace, but an aggregation of many local markets.

Most people looking to buy or sell a valuable item like a house have the luxury of adequate and often free information to inform their decision. When buying or selling, it takes two clicks on the internet to find mountains of information offering to help them put a reasonably accurate number on the property in question. It’s also easy to find professionals (such as real estate agents) willing to help the buyer or seller in that regard.

That’s not really the case for the owner of a title-related business asking, “What is my business worth in this market?” The same is true for someone thinking about becoming a buyer in the same market. How much will it truly cost to acquire another firm?

Accurately answering those questions is a real challenge, especially because so many variables go into determining an accurate number. A professional valuation is a good option, but it’s critical to find the right firm. The number of valuation professionals

with an extensive understanding of our unique title industry is fairly limited. Many larger firms that cover numerous industries claim to cover the title industry as well. However, as is the case with other “one-size-fits-all” services, few of them have extensive or specific experience with the title insurance industry.

Firms unfamiliar with the settlement services world can struggle to get an accurate understanding of how private equity firms might vary from strategic buyers when it comes to evaluating the multiple factors that come with putting a price on a title business. That can result in a significant variance when the time actually comes to buy or sell. And while the preliminary report those firms issue will certainly be an investment in and of itself, the accuracy when tested in the market may be less than advertised. For even a title agency flush with cash, frivolous spending is never an option.

When evaluating a title agency or similar title-related business, there are many factors involved beyond a basic P&L analysis. These include things like current market conditions, past performance, market potential, existing (and hidden) debt, assets, the ease (or difficulty) of integration between the two businesses post-merger or acquisition, and the sustainability of the business model.

Do not make the mistake too many owners have made time and time again. Don’t try to simply do an apples-to-apples comparison of your business to what you consider a competitor or similar firm. Odds are it’s not a true across-the-board comparison—not without a thorough knowledge of the most private details of that business and a clear understanding of what potential buyers and sellers are seeking in your market. Too many of these kinds of assumptions end up missing what the owner considers an innocuous detail, which may have tremendous importance in the actual market. The result can be disastrous.

For the title agent or owner seriously considering M&A activity, there aren’t a lot of off-the-shelf options. There’s no Zillow for title businesses, no true



***The rule of thumb for M&A transactions in all industries is that 40% will never close. But many of the 60% that do close aren't at optimal value for the seller.***

value calculator on some free website. However, the route all too many firms take—winging it—is never a good choice either. Thus, for any serious owner, an experienced professional firm should be consulted. Some even offer affordable market “snapshots” that give the business a good idea of what his or her agency (or target agency for buyers) is likely worth without costing an arm and a leg.

The key, however, is finding a consultant or firm that truly understands the industry and the buyer's or seller's market. When evaluating an M&A firm or consultant, be sure to ask them questions such as, “How many title businesses have you sold? Have you ever run a title business yourself? How recently have you consulted on a sale? What are the factors unique to my market? What are strategic buyers and/or private equity firms looking for when evaluating a title business?” And of course, request testimonials. Ask for and talk to references and previous clients. As Albert Einstein said, “The only source of knowledge is experience.”

Almost anyone can deliver a hypothesis as to the value of your firm. But nothing beats a consultant or firm with extensive experience marketing and selling firms much like your own. The counseling you seek as you set about your M&A journey should be informed by experience as well as expertise. Do they understand the nuances and intricacies of the title industry? Do they know the agent/underwriter splits? Have they marketed and sold a large number of agencies for top dollar? In the past, the easy solution for an agent seeking to sell was to simply approach his or her underwriter. That's not necessarily the best road to maximizing value anymore, as private equity firms and financial buyers begin to stake their claim in the market.

Keep in mind, too, that getting professional assistance when it comes to M&A should involve more than an answer to the valuation question. An experienced professional can also help a business owner decide if, indeed, now is the right time to buy or sell.

The way the M&A game is played in the title industry today is quickly changing from what it used to be. For example, we are starting to see variation in the multiples and clear patterns as to when an

underwriter is the right buyer and when they are not. Many times, that variation depends on the size of the business. However, the increments at which the multiples increase are not always uniform. Your advisor should be able to quickly understand where your agency fits into that pattern.

It may also be the case that the value of your agency or business could be increased dramatically by making a small investment or two and waiting for a year or so—a difference that could amount to thousands or more. Perhaps you need to make a simple adjustment like adding an outsourcer to parts of your process. However, far too many title business owners who have worked so hard to find success, end up making that decision based upon little more than a gut reaction, which usually costs them.

In the end, your decision to buy or sell should be based upon solid information and an expertise in properly applying that information. While the value of your business (or of the business you may be targeting for acquisition) is at the core of your decision, the market's conditions are almost as important. Just like a home, your business is only worth what someone in your market will pay for it. Unlike the resources available for selling a house, however, there is no library of information about title agency valuation.

Selling or buying another business is a serious matter. The general rule of thumb for M&A transactions in all industries is that 40% will never close. But many of the 60% that do close aren't at optimal value for the seller. A bad acquisition could become costly or, even worse, sink your entire brand if you enter the transaction without a solid idea of what's in store for you.

After spending a lifetime building your business up to its peak value, wouldn't it be a shame to settle for far less than its true value because you weren't willing to put that same effort into discovering what it's actually worth?



**HOWARD TURK** is the founder and managing director of Turk & Company, a Denver-based firm that serves as an M&A facilitator for title agencies and underwriters nationwide. He can be reached at [howard.turk@turkandco.com](mailto:howard.turk@turkandco.com).



*Tell Your Story*

POWERED BY 

For more information on these member-only resources visit [alta.org/homeowner](http://alta.org/homeowner)

# ALTA PRINTS

*on demand printing from ALTA*

Receive Free Ground Shipping When You  
Purchase \$250 or More from ALTAprints

**No Discount Code Required!**

-  **Brand**
-  **Print**
-  **Download**
-  **Easy**



Get started today at [alta.org/alta-prints](http://alta.org/alta-prints)

# So, You've Acquired a Title Business. Now What?



## Don't Overlook Importance—and Cost— of Integrating Two Existing Firms

**IT'S BEEN AN ACTIVE YEAR FOR MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS (M&A)** in the settlement services space, to the surprise of nearly no one. Last year, 2020 was a record year for title order volume, leaving many firms flush with cash. While 2021 has been a year of opportunity in a rising purchase market, many economists forecast an imminent decline in refinance transactions. Regardless of what we're currently seeing, it will be nearly impossible to repeat the historic spike seen last year. The likelihood is that 2021 will be very good—but not as good as 2020. Title agencies and settlement services firms once again will be forced to compete for market share.



This unusual turn in the market has left many title companies facing some key strategic choices. More than a few, understanding that the market dynamic is shifting to one of increased competition, have plotted a course based on M&A: making strategic investments to increase their geographic and/or market footprints. Others, aware that, as good as 2022 may be, it won't be 2021, are looking to sell high or "cash in." It's the perfect environment for M&A activity.

For the title agent or owner seeking to grow, the due diligence and valuation process is critical to the success of the strategy. But often overlooked in the larger process is what comes after the contracts are signed. For many, the real work begins once multiple offices and firms become one in name. A lot of thought, work and, yes, capital will still have to be injected into the process of integrating the new entity and positioning it to operate efficiently and profitably. What follows are a few of the things some acquiring businesses don't always fully consider before they've received the proverbial keys to their new offices.

While the M&A due diligence process should include a pretty thorough review of the business being acquired, there are still aspects of the acquired business the new owner or owners may have to learn about after the ink on the contract has dried. The new owner is probably well aware of the production system being used and, if it's a title agency, the underwriters they work with. But many times, the acquiring agent or owner doesn't have a thorough understanding of the way that company does business at a granular level. For example, if the staff of an agency is used to handling the post-closing process for their own files, incorporating that knowledgeable title staff into a process-oriented business where the curative department only does curative while closers only do closings may be a challenge—although the thought of no longer having to handle post-closing might not be disagreeable to the new staff. If the previous owner was an incredibly hands-on manager, a new owner who prefers to delegate or allow more freedom could also, in some ways, provide a challenge as the two cultures blend.

Acquiring owners are likely very familiar with the geographical market or markets in which they operate their existing firms. But if the company and offices being acquired are outside of those familiar markets, those owners may need to rely on some of the professionals from the acquired companies as they acclimate to that new market. Anything from demographics or customs to, of course, regulatory differences can have a big impact on the way an acquiring firm does business day to day. It's advisable to have a plan (and a contingency plan) that will acclimate the new owner and key personnel unfamiliar with the new market to the unique characteristics of that market. It could save a surprising amount of time, energy and money, in the long run.

Acquiring owners may also believe they have performed adequate due diligence as to the technology and systems being inherited with the new offices. However, if the intention is to replace a production system with a different technology, those owners may be surprised by the need to keep at least one license for the system being replaced—and the cost. You see, existing clients will not care to again provide the sensitive data that will otherwise be lost in the archives of the old platform. Acquiring

owners should plan to make a little investment in maintaining one license in order to have access to existing data for inherited customers.

In fact, one thing that seems to surprise a number of title business owners engaging in an M&A strategy is the investment required after the acquisition. The cost of training, tech integrations or outright replacement and even hiring or retraining often outpaces the conservative estimates of the acquiring owners. It's also highly advisable to dig deeply into the hidden costs associated with the business being acquired. Little things such as long-term contracts with third-party service providers or even copier leases can become unexpected costs when the acquiring owner seeks to change the way the little things are done. Another fairly common surprise may be the requirements of a pre-existing IT services or hosting contract, which could delay software installations or a full-on integration of the company-wide network. Even worse, it could lead to invoices for services that aren't even being used.

### ***One thing that seems to surprise a number of title business owners engaging in an M&A strategy is the investment required after the acquisition.***

Finally, there is the cost of time when integrating two office cultures. Acquiring owners should be prepared to spend time getting to know and understand the existing staff—unless they are planning the costly and time-consuming task of replacing them. It's human nature for the professionals in an acquired business to be anxious about their job security. Some may even proactively begin to seek new employment elsewhere. A major mistake made by acquiring owners is to assume those employees can be quickly replaced (or integrated) without impacting that office's production. The new owners who seem to have the smoothest integrations are the ones who invest the time and resources into understanding—and being accessible to—the professionals associated with the acquired business.

Engaging in an M&A strategy is a proven means of successfully growing market share, which is imperative in a purchase market. But it's not a given that simply making the acquisition will double or triple a business' revenue and order volume.

When insufficient planning and attention are given to the post-acquisition integration process, a merger or acquisition can have disastrous effects—right up to dragging the acquiring business itself into crisis. By taking the time and effort beforehand to carefully plot a post-acquisition strategy, the acquiring owner will be much more likely to reap the maximum benefits of the overall strategy.



**AARON DAVIS** is chief executive officer of Florida Agency Network and AMD Enterprises.

# Congress Addresses Consumer Privacy

## ALTA Reminds CFPB the Industry Already Regulated by GLBA

**ALTA JOINED 21 OTHER ASSOCIATIONS URGING CONGRESS TO PASS** national privacy legislation that equally protects all Americans.

In a [letter](#) to U.S. Sens. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), chair of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, and Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) ranking member of the committee, the groups urged the committee to develop legislation that provides robust protections for consumers, predictability for businesses and new resources for the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

“Data has helped keep the ‘digital lights’ on for small business struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic, bolsters public health and expands financial inclusion for underserved communities,” the groups wrote. “With data playing such a critical role in our economy, consumers deserve robust privacy protections that are clear and understandable.”

The letter points out that over 120 countries have adopted comprehensive data protection laws, while the United States has a patchwork of legislation at the state level making it difficult for small business to compete due to increased compliance costs.

“This patchwork also fosters consumer confusion, as state residency is now the sole determinate of a U.S. consumer’s privacy rights,” the letter said.

ALTA has reminded the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) that the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (GLBA) already limits how financial institutions—including title and settlement services companies—share and use customers’ personal information.

The Senate committee held a hearing Sept. 29 examining how to better safeguard consumer privacy rights and the need for a comprehensive federal privacy law.

To open the hearing, Sen. Wicker pointed out the FTC reported

that identity theft increased by almost 3,000% during 2020, while cyberattacks and data breaches are also on the rise. She said Congress has an opportunity to develop bipartisan national privacy legislation. Sen. Wicker called on President Biden to appoint someone from his senior staff to be a liaison to Congress on the issue and to prioritize the enactment of a data privacy law this year.

“Congress, not the FTC, is responsible for developing a comprehensive national data privacy law,” Sen. Wicker said. “Only Congress can develop longstanding data protections for consumers that meaningfully safeguard their personal information. Anything short of congressional action would create significant regulatory uncertainty for businesses and confuse consumers about the scope and durability of their privacy rights. Americans deserve to have their data protected. The time for Congress to act to pass federal data privacy legislation is now.”

Earlier this year, Sens. Wicker and Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) reintroduced the Setting an American Framework to Ensure Data Access, Transparency, and Accountability (SAFE DATA) Act. The legislation would provide Americans with more choice and control over their data and direct businesses to be more transparent and accountable for their data practices. The bill would also enhance the FTC’s authority and provide additional resources to enforce the act.

Several experts testifying before the committee agreed that federal legislation is needed.

David Vladeck, a professor and faculty director for the Center on Privacy and Technology Georgetown Law, supported additional



funding for the FTC. He believes the agency does not have adequate resources to safeguard online privacy and fight digital threats.

“There is plainly a path forward for the FTC to create a new bureau that focuses on protecting privacy and combatting other digital harms, without undermining the Bureau of Consumer Protection’s ability to do its job,” Vladeck said.

Morgan Reed, president of The App Association, said his group would like to see federal requirements put in place that curb data processing activities that expose consumers to undue privacy risks. The App Association would like to see a single set of national rules governing authorized data processing activities and data security practices.

Ashkan Soltani, an independent researcher and technologist, formerly served as the chief technologist at the FTC. In addition to funding, he would like to see the FTC get additional privacy authority “so the agency can properly fulfill its mission.”

“It is critical that Congress passes federal privacy legislation that builds upon, but does not preempt, privacy legislation adopted in states like California and Colorado,” Soltani said. “Already, there has been a concerted effort in Congress and in state houses across the nation to muddy the conversation and introduce privacy bills that appear strong, but merely entrench the status quo of privacy violations. Specifically, bills like the one adopted in Virginia appear robust, but allow exploitative business practices to continue unabated.”

## Senate Democrats Urge FTC to Address Data Privacy

Nine Senate Democrats sent a letter to FTC Chair Lina Khan

urging the commission to “begin a rulemaking process” on data privacy. The letter is another indication that the FTC is likely to put data privacy rules on its agenda in the next few years.

In the letter, the senators argued that a national standard for data privacy and security is needed to:

- protect consumers
- reinforce civil rights
- safeguard the nation’s cybersecurity.

The lawmakers argued that “the rulemaking should consider strong protections for the data of members of marginalized communities, prohibitions on certain practices (such as the exploitative targeting of children and teens), opt-in consent rules on use of personal data and global opt-out standards.”

The letter is signed by Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Chris Coons (D-Del.), Ben Ray Lujan (D-N.M.), Cory Booker (D-N.J.) and Ed Markey (D-Mass.).

This comes on the heels of President Biden nominating noted privacy hawk Alvaro Bedoya to fill the third Democratic seat on the commission. Bedoya is the founding director of the Center on Privacy & Technology at Georgetown Law. Bedoya was an aide to former Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) and chief counsel of the Senate Judiciary privacy subcommittee. Bedoya has written extensively on surveillance law, and his [most recent paper](#) argues that privacy should be a civil right.

Lastly, House Democrats voted to add \$1 billion to the [FTC budget](#) to help the agency create a new privacy and data security bureau as part of the reconciliation package.



# EDUCATION & RESOURCES FOR YOUR TITLE BUSINESS

Did you know that we publish free e-books that you can download and share at any time? Topics include:

Remote Online Notarization

Compliance Best Practices

Wire Fraud Prevention

Disaster Recovery

Data Security

& more!

Download 20+ e-books today!  
View our e-book library: visit  
[www.softprocorp.com/ebooks](http://www.softprocorp.com/ebooks)

## MEMBER Profile

Becky Taylor

President | Titleworks Inc.

# Challenges, Mystery Fuels Path for Title Agency Owner



### **How long have you been in the title industry and how did you get started in this profession?**

I worked in the real estate section of a law firm after college (1987) with an eye toward law school. When I moved to a position at a title company in 1992, I was hooked in by the title industry. In 1995, I became a licensed title agent when I joined a small title insurance company. In 2006, I became the owner of Titleworks Inc.

## What's a day on the job like for you? What excites you about what you do or what is the most challenging aspect of your job?

Every day is different, which is why it is easy to have been in the same industry for 29 years and counting. I love challenges, mysteries and investigations. The most challenging aspect is finding the best way to solve a title search challenge—what is the fastest way, what is the easiest way. Sometimes, easy doesn't mean fast, and fast doesn't mean easy.

## What's your best industry "war" story?

I'm not sure this is the best, but it is a funny story. The Name Affidavit, for many borrowers, contains one or two "also known as" names. One borrower's Name Affidavit had at least 20 "also known as" names. The borrower, without missing a beat, laughed and showed her husband and commented: "I guess this is what happens when you've been married six times."

## Why is the title industry a great career opportunity for those entering the workforce?

It's a great industry for one reason because it doesn't require an associate degree, a four-year degree or a vocational training school. That doesn't mean that it's an easy industry or an industry for everyone. It means that if you are a hard worker, detail-oriented and conscientious, you will succeed. The title industry is on the job training and can provide a long-standing and fulfilling career.

## What advice do you have for professionals starting their career in the industry?

When you are working, make sure you are present in that moment. Focus on the work so as not to miss details. Always ask questions—it shows you are interested in the work you are doing and want to learn more.

## How has the industry evolved since you began your career? How has your company had to change in order to remain competitive?

In the beginning, I prepared Settlement Statements on a typewriter and used a calculator for totals on the Settlement Statement. Obviously, technology has changed and preparing an ALTA Settlement Statement is much easier now. My company has had to keep up with changing technology most recently moving to a web-based settlement system.

## What have you learned about yourself or your company since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

I value my employees so much. They have worked quite hard since the start of the pandemic. I appreciate their work ethic and commitment to helping our clients. Personally, I have learned that work is important but that a healthy work-personal life balance is the most important.

## Why are you a member of ALTA?

I am a member of ALTA because of the education provided through the webinars, the publications and, also, the guidance for Best Practices.

## Tell us something that others in the industry may not know about you.

Since Oct. 31, 2017, I have lost 120 pounds and kept it off.

*I am a member of ALTA because of the education provided through the webinars, the publications and, also, the guidance on Best Practices.*

## If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be and why?

The Apostle Paul. He endured much hardship and always stayed true to his faith. In the midst of his hardship, he did not lament the situation but instead encouraged others.

## What's your favorite book/movie/TV series? Why?

- TV Series: Law & Order. There was even an episode about a title company!
- Book: Anything by Jodi Picoult. Her books tackle difficult issues and are thought provoking.
- Movie: *The Shawshank Redemption*

## What's in your music playlist?

I mainly listen to True Crime podcasts.

## ALTA Member Profiles

Know someone who ALTA should consider for a member profile? Send your suggestions to [communications@alta.org](mailto:communications@alta.org).





# Looking for Solutions? **TrustLink Can Help.**

**TrustLink's personalized service offers 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

## PLTA Announces Trailblazer Award to Honor Anastasi

Anne Anastasi CLTP, NTP was recently recognized for her many achievements and advocacy for the title industry during the Pennsylvania Land Title Association's (PLTA) Centennial Convention.

First, Anastasi received the Pennsylvania Land Title Institute's William W. Rice III Excellence in Education Award.

But the recognition didn't stop there. The PLTA also

bestowed an award to Anastasi named in her honor, The Anne L. Anastasi Trailblazer Award for Outstanding Achievement and Innovation.

"I attended one of her classes many years ago, and I was so impressed with her presentation that I went up to her afterward and said, 'I want to be like you,'" said Lisa McEntee, the 2020-21 PLTA president who presented Anastasi the award.

Anastasi is well known in the title industry. In 1999, she became the first woman to lead the PLTA. In 2006, the PLTA presented her with the James G. Schmidt Distinguished Service Award, given to the individual who has earned the recognition and respect of their peers for substantial service to the industry. In 2010, she served as president of ALTA. During her time leading ALTA, she testified before the U.S. Financial Services Subcommittee and encouraged more transparency for the consumer in the closing process. Also, in 2010, the



PLTA recognized her with the Albert E. Pentecost Award, which is given to the person who made the greatest contribution to the association during the preceding year. In 2013, she was made an honorary member of ALTA.

Currently, Anastasi is first vice president for Old Republic National Title with her office in Hatboro, Pa. She travels the country

conducting seminars for title agents, as well as state and federal regulators, about the vital role our industry plays in the nation's economy.

"When an assistant attorney general of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania said to me, 'any monkey can do a title search' I knew right then and there that I would not stop until every regulator, consumer, real estate professional, anyone who would listen and frankly, those who did not want to listen, heard our story and were made to understand the importance of what we do and the brilliance of the people who make it happen," Anastasi said. "Naming a PLTA annual award after me for the person who will continue to carry that mantle and continue to trailblaze on behalf of this proud industry is an immeasurable honor."

---

## Land Title Association of Arizona Honors Person of the Year

The Land Title Association of Arizona (LTAA) recently honored Tyler Newlon of Pioneer Title Agency with its John K. Graham Title Person of The Year award.

Newlon has been actively involved in the LTAA, ALTA and the American Society of Association Executives. For the past few years, he has worked as co-chair of LTAA's Legislative Committee with Larry Phelps.

"In addition to helping guide several pieces of legislation benefiting our industry, he led the charge for one of the most important laws to be passed in recent times, the remote online notarization bill," said Tom Davis, LTAA's immediate past president. "Tyler has become the foremost expert on RON. His leadership has benefited the entire title industry and is deserving of this recognition."

Newlon serves on ALTA's Digital Closing Work Group and has assisted in helping get RON passed in other states.

Candidates are judged on qualifications and letters of recommendation. LTAA involvement is not necessarily a prerequisite for receiving the award, however, association involvement is given greater consideration.



---

## Cyber Coverage Premiums Increase 25%, Survey Shows

The average premium for cyber insurance coverage increased 25.5% during the second quarter of 2021, according to a survey from the Council of Insurance Agents & Brokers (CIAB). This is on top of an increase of 18% in the first quarter of the year.



The increase for cyber insurance was caused by poor risk management protocols and lack of employee training, which resulted in more ransomware attacks, the CIAB reported.

“Carriers continued to approach writing Cyber risk with caution in Q2 2021,” said Ken Crerar, president/CEO of CIAB. “The rapid increase in ransomware attacks highlighted the need for brokers to work with clients to develop and practice robust risk management strategies to confront the growing threat. In a world where costly cyberattacks are becoming the norm rather than the exception, the broker is in a unique position to help clients identify vulnerabilities, find coverage and protect their firms.”

Brokers who took the survey emphasized that adapting to and adopting new technologies to meet the needs of their clients would be crucial to growth in the coming years. This included being more open to employees working remotely from different geographies, demonstrating the shift in attitudes toward remote work. Overall, “Brokers need to remain strong advocates for their clients by telling both the underwriters and the clients the harsh realities of the day,” said one respondent from a large Northeastern firm. “We need to pursue new products that may be more tailored

to specific client needs and be ready to create bespoke policies and procedures to respond to these needs.”

Nearly 80% of respondents said there was an increase in cyber claims in Q2 2021, supporting assessments that the rise in claims was one of the main reasons for the rapid increase in cyber premiums.

Despite the increase in prices, 95% of respondents said there was an increase in demand for cyber insurance. CIAB adds that insurers also have started to cut limits and demand customers complete additional risk management protocols.

---

## Old Republic Settles No-poach Allegations in New York

Old Republic Title Insurance Co. (ORT) agreed to pay \$1 million to settle allegations it entered into no-poach agreements with competitors in New York, according to the state’s attorney general (OAG).

Old Republic, which cooperated with the attorney general’s office, didn’t admit or deny the findings.

No-poach agreements are arrangements among two or more companies not to solicit, recruit or hire each other’s employees. These agreements can be written or verbal.

The attorney general’s investigation concluded that Old Republic entered into no-poach agreements with agencies. The OAG said the agreements effectively ended competition for employees between Old Republic and the agencies, potentially impacting New York workers. The investigation did not identify any procompetitive justifications for these agreements

In addition to the fine, Old Republic agreed to terminate any existing no-poach agreements and refrain from engaging in these agreements. Old Republic also has agreed to provide complete and prompt cooperation with the attorney general’s office.

“ORT agrees to use their best efforts to secure the full and truthful cooperation of current officers, directors, employees and agents with the ongoing OAG investigation and any related

proceedings and actions,” the Assurance of Discontinuance said.

Old Republic is to provide a copy of the settlement with each of its officers, directors, human resources managers and senior managers who supervise employee recruiting, solicitation or hiring efforts. The company also must notify existing appointed agencies of the assurance. For two years, Old Republic must notify the attorney general of any newly contracted agencies within 14 days after entering into a new agency or service agreement.

---

## Compass Makes More Acquisitions in Title Space

In a move to strengthen its title and escrow business, Compass has signed agreements to acquire LegacyTexas Title Co. and Denver-based First Alliance Title LLC.

The transactions are contingent upon regulatory approval and expected to close before the end of the year. Terms of the deals were not disclosed.

In February, Compass announced the acquisition of Washington, D.C.-based KVS Title. In October, the company acquired title and escrow software startup Modus. Compass now serves California, Colorado, Florida, Washington, Maryland, Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Texas.

---

## Insurance Broker Acrisure Enters Title Market

Global insurance broker Acrisure has entered the real estate services business through its acquisition of New York-based Tempo Title.

Through this acquisition, Acrisure will establish Acrisure Real Estate Services, a new division to provide homeowners, lenders and investors a broad suite of real estate services.

“Customer needs go beyond our core insurance lines and Acrisure has the team, technology and customer focus to be a singular provider for multiple financial solutions,” said Greg Williams, co-founder,



president and CEO of Acrisure. “Deals of this magnitude need to work strategically and culturally. With Tempo, we have a partner that anticipates and solves client needs, and does so with the same focus on autonomy, entrepreneurship and growth that powered Acrisure from \$38 million to \$3 billion in revenue in just over eight years.”

Acrisure Real Estate Services joins Acrisure Asset Management as new divisions established by the company in 2021. In a press release, the company said Acrisure Real Estate Services will tap into its artificial intelligence and data analytics capabilities to provide efficiency.

Tempo Title is licensed in 43 states, has 90 offices and generates over \$300 million in annual revenue. With this announcement, the rebranding of Tempo to Acrisure Real Estate Services will occur over the near term. Tempo Title’s operating partners will continue operating under their own brand names.

## Title Veteran Launches New Title Operation in South Florida



Industry veteran Marlen Rodriguez recently launched Miami-based New Dawn Title Group, which also has offices in Miami-Dade,

Broward and Palm Beach counties. The title company facilitates closings using remote online notarization (RON) and other mobile and flexible options for residential and commercial transactions.

Rodriguez previously ran her own company for over a decade, served as president of a privately-owned affiliated title company and also worked for a national underwriter.

Rodriguez said it’s her mission to make sure customers have peace of mind when it comes to closing their transactions.

“We deliver a high-value, personal touch to all of the experiences we facilitate,” Rodriguez said. “There’s not a

one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to each closing. I’m bringing everything I’ve learned in this business to provide tailored services that we know customers will appreciate—and Realtors can then focus on getting more deals as they learn to count on us as their trusted title partner.”

Company culture has been important from the start for Rodriguez, who focuses on the three Cs: Communication, Connection and Compassion.

“Everything we have invested in is to make sure we are providing the best customer experience, along with focusing on fraud prevention,” Rodriguez said. “We are flexible, and cater to the needs of today’s Realtors, lenders, sellers and buyers. We know how stressful the events can be leading up to a closing, and we are the provider of that much-needed peace of mind.”

## Long Companies Expands Into Title, Escrow

Arizona-based Long Companies recently expanded into the title and escrow services market.

To provide a one-stop-shop, Long Companies launched Agave Title Agency. In addition to the title agency, Long Companies is also comprised of Long Realty Company, Prosperity Home Mortgage and Long Insurance Group. Long Companies is a subsidiary of HomeServices of America.

Coordinating the new escrow organization is Erin Fitzgerald, director of core services. Agave Title is housed at the company’s main office to serve the Tucson and Southern Arizona markets.

“We are building an all-company local service experience, not an individual-office experience,” said Reneé Gonzales, CEO of Long Companies and president of Agave Title Agency. “Our goal is to provide an exceptional real estate service experience that builds long-lasting relationships. Agave Title Agency is built from the ground up to deliver on that promise.”

## Covius to Acquire Nationwide Title Clearing

Covius Holdings has reached an agreement to acquire Florida-based national lien release provider Nationwide Title Clearing (NTC).

The transaction is expected to close early in the fourth quarter, subject to customary closing conditions. The terms of the agreement were not disclosed.

According to a release, approximately 670 NTC associates will join Covius.

“For 30 years, NTC has been a trusted provider of high-quality post-closing services to originators, servicers and the capital markets sector,” said Rob Clements, chairman and CEO of Covius. “This acquisition significantly expands Covius’ post-closing capabilities, in the same way last year’s Clayton acquisition scaled our due diligence offerings. Similarly, Covius’ technology suite can be applied to NTC operations to further increase efficiency.”

## CATIC Begins Operations in South Carolina

Connecticut Attorneys Title Insurance Co. (CATIC) recently became licensed in South Carolina and started issuing title insurance policies.

In business for more than 50 years, the CATIC Family of Companies is now licensed in every state east of the Mississippi and in Texas. The company does business through an independent agent network in 13 states. Its sister company, CATIC Title Insurance Company, issues policies in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

“We are excited to enter the South Carolina market, as we continue to grow our operations,” said James Czapiga, CEO of CATIC. “We look forward to bringing our unparalleled service and support to real estate professionals throughout the state.”



## Black Friday Starts Now!

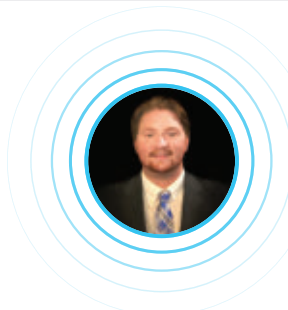
Do more each workday with limited time deals on business PCs, servers, and top electronics. ALTA Members can save up to 45% off select systems now until 12/6! Visit [www.Dell.com/ALTA](http://www.Dell.com/ALTA) to access these savings or call our US Small Business Advisors at 800-757-8442

For any questions around the best remote solution for you and your business, call our Small Business Advisors at 800-757-8442.



Members can save up to 45% on select systems

Mention Member ID: 530018550207 for savings.



**Christian Mims**

Strategic Partnership Account Executive

PHONE: (512) 513-2433

EMAIL: [Christian\\_Mims@Dell.com](mailto:Christian_Mims@Dell.com)

## Survey: Homebuying Surge Highlights Need for Homeclosing Consumer Resources

Only one in five homebuyers understands the documents they signed at closing, according to a survey commissioned by Qualia. Results of the Homebuyer Sentiment Index also found that consumers are acting quickly in a competitive market with nearly a quarter of homebuyers purchasing their home sight unseen. The survey, conducted by independent third-party research firm Savanta Research, polled more than 1,000 consumers.

“This survey emphasizes the need for increased education and transparency during the home buying and selling process,” said Nate Baker, CEO of Qualia. “Our core belief is that technology that powers the transaction is the key to providing that assurance.”

The survey indicated that recent homebuyers found the real estate closing process to be the most stressful and complicated part of the real estate transaction itself. In fact, when Qualia explored the consumer sentiments around the entire homebuying journey, the only thing more stressful or complicated than the closing was the move-in process.

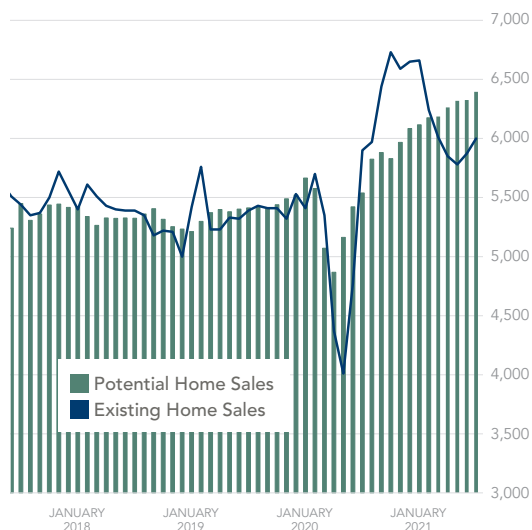
Future homebuyers are also apprehensive about real estate closings. One in four future homebuyers reported that they do not understand the closing process. Qualia’s survey illuminates the value of combining knowledgeable local agents to guide homebuyers through the process with technology that automates real-time transaction updates and offers consumers instant access to information.

### Available Resources

Through the [Homeowner Outreach Program](#), ALTA provides exclusive resources—including blogs, educational flyers, print and digital ads, infographics, posters and presentations—to help ALTA members explain title insurance and the closing process. ALTA members are also listed on ALTA’s consumer education website, [Home Closing 101](#).

## Housing Market Potential

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



**6.00** SAAR  
Existing Home Sales

**6.40** SAAR  
Potential Home Sales

**-6.2%**  
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

July 2021

**\$478,587**  
House-Buying Power

**+3.8%**  
Year-Over-Year

## Where House-Buying Power is Strongest

Top States and Markets

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>1</b> New Jersey<br><b>\$723,489</b>    | <b>1</b> San Jose, CA<br><b>\$1,081,757</b>    |
| <b>2</b> Maryland<br><b>\$701,739</b>      | <b>2</b> San Francisco, CA<br><b>\$996,457</b> |
| <b>3</b> Massachusetts<br><b>\$688,427</b> | <b>3</b> Washington, DC<br><b>\$895,191</b>    |
| <b>4</b> Hawaii<br><b>\$688,357</b>        | <b>4</b> Boston, MA<br><b>\$788,111</b>        |
| <b>5</b> California<br><b>\$661,571</b>    | <b>5</b> San Diego, CA<br><b>\$703,693</b>     |

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





**Those who know  
trust Cloudstar.**



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

---

## First American Promotes Chief Legal Officer

First American Financial Corp. named Lisa Cornehl as senior vice president and chief legal officer. In her new position, Cornehl will be responsible for setting the company's legal strategy and overseeing legal affairs. She previously served as deputy general counsel, litigation and as chief privacy officer. Since joining First American in 2011 as senior litigation counsel, Cornehl was promoted to deputy general counsel, litigation in 2015 and was appointed chief privacy officer in 2018. Earlier in her career, she worked for a leading international law firm. Cornehl serves on ALTA's Data Privacy Work Group.

---

## WFG Appoints VP of Strategic Growth



Jason Vasek

WFG National Title Insurance Company has hired industry veteran Jason Vasek as vice president of strategic growth. After serving in the military, Vasek took a job as a receptionist at Texas American Title and was quickly attracted to the work, the people and the service provided. He then went to First American Title, and began his ascent up the traditional operations side of things, from reception and escrow assistant to escrow officer and branch manager. His last role at First American Title was as divisional president in Austin, Texas, where he also oversaw training and development.

---

## AmTrust Title Names Head of Technology



Priti Desai

AmTrust Title Insurance Company's New York Agency Division named Priti Desai as its new head of technology. In the new role, Desai will be responsible for all aspects of technology for AmTrust Title. Desai brings a track record of directing global technology teams to deliver the latest technologies such as process automation and virtual assistants to provide an optimal customer experience, increase productivity and reduce costs. Prior to AmTrust, Desai served for over two decades in a variety of roles, including tenures in title insurance as well as Q Strategies Corporation, Epicor Software and Scan Optics Corporation.

---

## Equity National Title Appoints COO



Jennifer Pensa

Providence, R.I.-based Equity National Title has named Jennifer Pensa as its new chief operating officer. In this role, Pensa will manage the day-to-day operations of the business. She will be charged with managing and strategically optimizing the systems, technology and production processes that are critical to settlement services providers in an emerging purchase mortgage market. Pensa most recently served as executive vice president and chief innovation officer with Chelsea Groton Bank in Groton, Conn. Before that, she was a vice president with WSFS Bank in Delaware.

---

## First National Title Appoints Southeast Region Agency Manager

First National Title Insurance Co. (FNTI) recently added Matt Powell as senior vice president and agency manager for its Southeast region. Powell has two decades of industry knowledge and experience having worked in management positions with two other national underwriters.

---

## Doma Hires Louisiana Agency Manager

Doma has named Karen Woodard as agency manager for Louisiana. In this role, Woodard will service independent title agent and attorney customers, and secure new business in an important area of expansion for Doma underwriting. Woodard brings



Karen Woodard

20 years of experience in diverse aspects of title insurance and real estate, including title research and review, abstracting, curative work, contract negotiation and management, real estate sales, legal research and accounting. She entered the title insurance industry as a legal assistant, where she supported a law firm partner with antitrust, class action, real estate and estate planning cases.

AMERICAN  
LAND TITLE  
ASSOCIATION



# Title Insurance Law Publications

[www.alta.org/publications](http://www.alta.org/publications)

The American Land Title Association (ALTA) offers several legal publications, which are some of the favorite research materials for land title professionals and counsel around the United States. The publications feature practical analysis valuable to claims administrators, coverage counsel, underwriters, agency managers, title examiners, regulators, escrow officers and more.

## Subscribe Today

Visit [www.alta.org/publications](http://www.alta.org/publications) to subscribe to any of ALTA's publications

## Grab Your Discount

Claims departments and law firms qualify for group subscription rates and can receive these legal publications at a discounted price. Contact [cperez@alta.org](mailto:cperez@alta.org) for a group subscription or if you have any questions.

### Title and Escrow Claims Guide

Need advice on how to handle claims on land title insurance policies, closing protection letters and closing mistakes? Available in print and electronic versions, the two volume book is the ultimate resource and the preferred research tool for land title claims professionals and retained counsel. The Claims Guide, authored by industry veteran J. Bushnell Nielsen, includes form letters regularly used by claims professionals (the print version includes a CD containing the form letters). It is also a great resource for title companies to use when training new employees in claims, underwriting and title examination.

#### Price per copy:

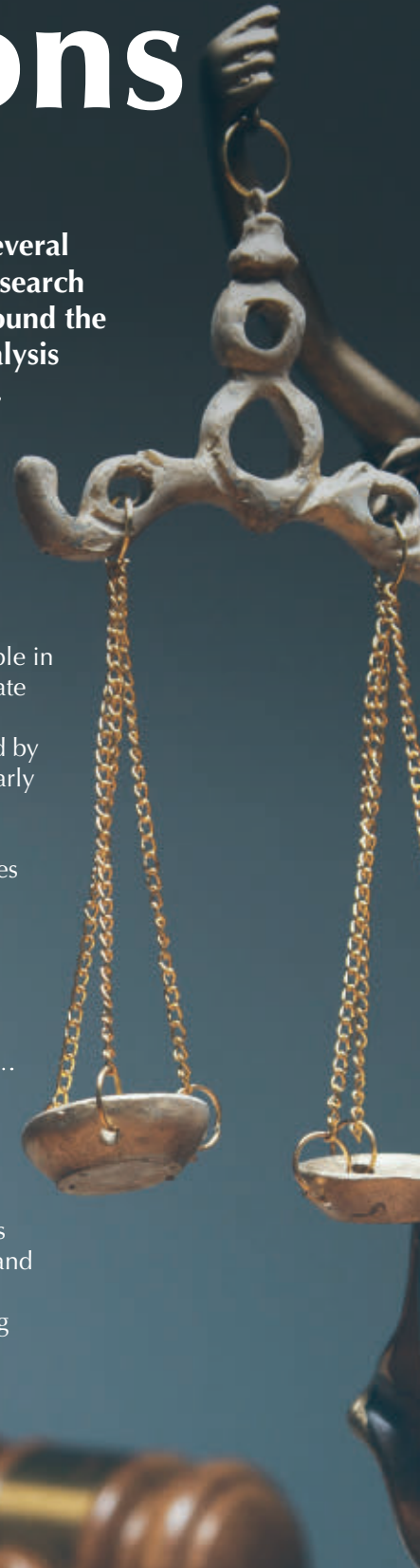
Digital: ALTA members: \$200 | Nonmembers: \$300  
Print: ALTA members: \$270 | Nonmembers: \$370

### Title Insurance Law Newsletter

This monthly newsletter is the source of information about current law affecting the title insurance industry around the United States. The digital newsletter reports on important cases and decisions regarding title insurance coverage, class actions and regulatory enforcement, closing protection letters, escrow and settlement duties, agent/underwriter disputes, conveyancing law and RESPA and TILA compliance and violations. Author J. Bushnell Nielsen offers insightful analysis. Should you want a sample of the newsletter prior to purchase, please contact [cperez@alta.org](mailto:cperez@alta.org).

#### Annual subscription:

ALTA members: \$200 | Nonmembers: \$300





## Time to Recalibrate ALTA Dues

**AS A BUSINESS LEADER,** you understand the need to evaluate the fees you charge so they appropriately reflect the changing market. After careful consideration and due diligence, ALTA decided it is time to recalibrate its membership dues structure for the first time since 2007. Despite doubling the number of members served and vastly expanding its portfolio, ALTA dues have remained unchanged over the last 15 years. ALTA's revamped dues structure will go into effect for 2022.



**BILL BURDING NTP**  
ALTA president

Under my direction, ALTA worked with an outside firm to complete an internal assessment and market analysis against other associations and their fees and services. The company interviewed members to learn how ALTA helps them address marketplace challenges, uncover areas of improvement, and develop a deeper understanding of what is important to them. Responses showed that ALTA members recognize the value the association provides through advocacy, networking, education and information.

Some members may be pleasantly surprised to see their dues went down. Smaller companies with lower title insurance revenue will have a lower, discounted yearly rate. Other dues levels went up slightly and the top limit a title agency pays has been raised.

ALTA strives to provide you with the highest value and the best possible experience. The additional funding will enable the association to continue serving you at the optimal level that is expected. Since 2007, ALTA has developed additional benefits aimed at helping your company and the industry.

These offerings include the ALTA Best Practices, Homeowner Outreach Program, Our Values, ALTA Registry, Title Action Network, Congressional Liaisons Program, Tell Our Story Campaign, and ALTA Good Deeds Foundation. New education courses have also been created that address ethics, escrow accounting, commercial transactions, and the nuts and bolts of the industry.

ALTA continues to provide members with a plethora of publications and webinars to stay informed about the latest business trends as well as legislative and regulatory changes. Let's not forget the networking opportunities ALTA provides where we all benefit.

As the industry grows and members thrive, it's more important than ever to ensure ALTA has the necessary resources to continue to serve our industry. As we've just come from the busiest and most disruptive year in the history of our industry, I'm confident you can understand that now is the time to recalibrate and institute these changes. Thank you for your continued support



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

**FIND  
SOLUTIONS  
FOR YOUR  
BUSINESS**

**ALTA**

**Market  
place**

The logo for ALTA Market place features a stylized starburst or flower-like symbol to the left of the text. The symbol consists of several arrows or petals pointing towards a central point, with one arrow in red and the others in blue.



# Your One and Done Solution to Underwriter Oversight



## The ALTA Registry Helps You

- Simplify the process to get E&O info to your underwriter(s)
- Verify your identity to enhance security and help reduce risk of fraud
- Showcase your company's ability to perform remote online notarizations



ALTA  
REGISTRY

ALTA.ORG/REGISTRY | 202-296-3671