

Real estate Web battle intensifies **Amanda Fung**

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The U.S. real estate market's slump isn't stopping commercial real estate Web site PropertyShark.com from rolling out consumer residential listings.

The Brooklyn-based site expects to introduce the service for homebuyers by Sept. 1. This will be first time the five-year-old site—which provides data on sale prices, financing and appraisal values for more than 25 million properties in 20 major markets—has moved beyond commercial real estate.

"We have conquered delivering difficult-to-find information to professionals," says PropertyShark Chief Executive Bill Staniford. "We're ready to add another tool."

Mr. Staniford acknowledges that replicating such success with consumers might be difficult. In addition to the battered condition of the real estate industry, the residential listings market is overcrowded.

But real estate sites report runaway growth, citing consumers' enduring desire for information.

National competitors Trulia.com and Zillow.com both recently raised substantial infusions of venture funding.

In New York, PropertyShark's largest market, local sites StreetEasy.com and ResidentialNYC.com—the portal for industry group the Real Estate Board of New York—have established themselves as major players.

StreetEasy, a two-year-old firm offering overall market and neighborhood research, claims that it provides superior listings. Its technology scours the Web, receives feeds from brokerages and accepts submissions from brokers.

"We provide search by things like zones and elementary schools," says StreetEasy CEO Michael Smith, who isn't concerned about PropertyShark's entrance into the market. "No other tool does that."

ResidentialNYC boasts exclusive listings that are updated every 24 hours from 75 brokerage firms, which pay a \$100 annual membership fee.

"The people who run ResidentialNYC are the people out there selling property every day—it has a real feel," says REBNY President Steven Spinola. He adds that, unlike StreetEasy, its listings lead directly to brokers' Web sites.

PropertyShark's service will also take users to brokerage Web sites, according to Mr. Staniford.

Regardless of which site provides the most comprehensive and reliable listings, traffic to ResidentialNYC and StreetEasy has ballooned in the past year. Both attribute the surge to the uniqueness of New York City and say that, though transactions are down, consumers still demand their real estate data.

StreetEasy, which generates most of its revenues from ads, has doubled traffic from a year ago, attracting about 4.5 million page views and 250,000 unique visitors a month in 2008. The firm, which has raised \$3 million in venture funding, does not disclose financials.

Consumer cachet

ResidentialNYC, which launched in October, says it is getting about 85,000 page views a day.

Additionally, newer sites like Propertyqube.com, which combines residential listings and social networking, have

gained traction. The site, introduced in May, has 10,000 members and expects to reach 25,000 by the end of the year, says co-founder David Bethony.

Mr. Staniford doesn't anticipate the residential service to be a cash cow, though it will give PropertyShark a higher profile with consumers. The site will continue to focus on the brokerage community and real estate investors.

PropertyShark has been profitable since it was founded in 2003, according to Mr. Staniford. Revenues so far this year are more than \$3 million—triple the amount in all of 2006. Membership has doubled since January 2007, to more than 400,000. Most of the site's revenues come from subscriptions, which range from \$19.95 a month for limited data access to \$1,100 a year for full access. Major brokerages buy corporate subscriptions. PropertyShark also conducts training sessions, for a fee.

Several members requested the residential listing service so that they could easily view properties without having to leave PropertyShark.com "Listings are a commodity," Mr. Staniford says. "For us, it's an extension of the business. We are already generating revenue."

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