

Special: Profile

NAR's e-PRO: Online Technology Training And Certification

By Saul Klein

"I had a preliminary meeting with a prospective new client last night who has a little house to sell and will be buying a bigger home. He said he selected me because of the e-PRO designation! He reviewed all the available designations on Realtor.com and felt that the e-Pro was the most important credential, and narrowed his search for agents to only those with the e-PRO. How nice to see the public taking notice!"

Mary Leizinger, RE/MAX Results Realtor, ABR, CRS, e-PRO, GRI, MBA

After a false start with the initial provider, NAR turned to a long established technology solution provider and consulting firm to bring the second version of e-PRO to the industry. The current e-PRO Certification Program was developed by Internet Crusade®, a Hawaii Corporation doing business in San Diego and a technology solution provider and consultant to the real estate industry since 1995. This is a program created by Realtors for Realtors.

THE TECHNOLOGY TIDE

*"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."*

—from Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar"

And there is a "tide" in the affairs of the real estate industry practitioners, and that tide is technology. Most of these

practitioners are too involved in the day-to-day business of real estate to notice much of the change, but it is there nonetheless and it poses a challenge to the success, even the survival, of many who believe that the way they have always done business will continue into the indefinite future. Today's real estate professionals face challenges from both consumers and from new competing forces as a result of technological advancement over the last eight years.

The National Association of Realtors (NAR) recognizes this "tide" and has included the e-PRO Certification in its "Strategic Focus Initiatives for 2003 Watch List of Real Estate Industry Trends and Impacts."

One of NAR's key initiatives is to impress upon its members the importance of embracing technology and how it can be used to enhance their success. More than 8,000 members have signed up

for e-PRO, NAR's online technology certification program designed by Realtors for Realtors to prepare real estate professionals to make the most of the Internet and other technologies as they serve today's "connected consumer."

INFLUENCING THE CONNECTED CONSUMER

It is time to revise your compelling argument to today's savvy consumer. With all the options available to consumers today, and the downward pressure on commissions, how do you influence prospective buyers and sellers? In other words, why should a consumer hire *you* for their real estate needs? The answer can be found in your response to the following question:

If a prospect could hire anyone in your city to work with, to either buy or sell property, why should they hire you?

The e-PRO Certification will help you formulate your answer to that critical question.

MAIN THEMES OF THE E-PRO COURSE

1.) It's the little things that make a difference.

A NAR study tells us that the number of buyers and sellers shopping online for a home and for a real estate agent is on the rise. Based on a survey of online buyers by the California Association of Realtors in 2002, typical online buyers earn more money and buy more expensive homes than conventional buyers. Online buyers are truly a "niche" worth cultivating.

Often, real estate professionals will let the fact that technology is such a large body of knowledge and information in-



**Online Technology
Certification Program of the
National Association of REALTORS®**

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timidate them and prevent them from taking action. They avoid technology solutions because they believe technology is an “all or nothing” proposition. This is not the case. Little points and tips included in one’s day-to-day practice can, and often do, have a positive impact on the bottom line. Many real estate professionals are afraid to create and implement a technology plan of action, giving those with a plan a distinct advantage. Module 4 of the e-PRO course of instruction works with students to create their own personal technology plan of action.

2.) It’s easy when you know how.

Don’t you hate it when you ask a technology question and you get the condescending reply: “That’s easy”? It makes you wish you never asked. The fact is, most of the things you want to do with technology are just 3 or 4 “clicks” away — you just need someone to show you the right “clicks.” After that, it *is* easy. The e-PRO program will give you access to technology and real estate professionals who are willing to share information you can use in your business. Your membership in this online community continues after you complete the course of instruction and are certified ... and there is no annual fee for this program.

3.) Differentiate yourself from the competition.

Real estate is a “me too” business. Ninety plus percent of the work performed by residential real estate professionals is the same after obtaining the listing (place listing in the MLS, put up a “for sale” sign, put a lock box on the property, run classified ads and hold an open house). Technology gives you a great opportunity to differentiate yourself from your competition.

Even real estate agent and broker marketing is “me too.” Have you ever known an agent to give out note pads/magnets/calendars/fly swatters/rain caps/and the like? Any new marketing idea is quickly copied by others, as this is a “me too” business. Most agents have Web sites and use sold riders ... it is all “me too.” Have you ever been on a listing appointment and watched the seller take

InternetCrusade® Principals

The three principals of InternetCrusade® are real estate brokers who have been in the real estate business for a combined total of over 100 years. Their approach to technology is not technology for the sake of technology, but how to use technology in the real estate business. All three are long-time and well-known real estate educators.



(From left) **John Reilly** is an Attorney licensed in 3 states (California, Hawaii and New York) and is the author of “The Language of Real Estate” and many other real estate text books. **Saul Klein** is a California broker and was the 1993 president of the San Diego Association of Realtors as well as the 1999 Designated Realtor of the Year. **Mike Barnett** was first licensed in New Jersey and is currently licensed in Arizona where he served as a director of the Scottsdale Association of Realtors. More information on InternetCrusade and its mission, products and services can be found at the Web site <http://InternetCrusade.com>.

notes on one of the pads given to them by one of your competitors as you glance across the kitchen to the refrigerator and notice all the magnets of agents long since out of the business?

What can you do that is different and will make you stand out from the crowd? E-PRO is the answer. There are over 860,000 Realtors and only 6,000 e-PROs.

More and more consumers and real estate professionals are becoming aware of the e-PRO Certification. Consumers at the popular <http://www.realtor.com> Web site can click on “Why Use an e-

PRO?” that contains a link to the e-PRO National Directory to help locate an Internet-savvy Realtor.

4.) Integrate technology into what you are already doing.

Technology will not replace the real estate professional. Nor is technology alone the answer to survival in a changing business. Successful real estate professionals will look at their business and figure out ways to integrate technology into what they are already doing to make them more effective and efficient.

Profile

5.) Raising the bar without leaving anyone behind.

e-PRO is designed to insure that all who enroll graduate from the program. It is state-of-the-art online learning coupled with the personal touch of instructor and student contact through the development of the e-PRO online community.

CONSTRUCTION OF COURSE CONTENT; TECHNOLOGY DELIVERY PLATFORM

- Candidates have a 6-month enrollment period to complete the course which takes about 20 to 30 hours.
- Course is taught entirely online.
- Teaches to all levels, from novice

to technology expert; designed to bring something to everyone and receives glowing testimonials daily.

- There is no annual fee and e-PRO is an elective for both the CRS and the ABR Designations. It is approved for continuing education in a number of states.

- Lifetime access to e-PRO community through listserv discussion forums.

e-PRO is presented in four modules; each module contains four sections (See Sidebar). The technology will allow for 3000 simultaneous users per second; is administered through a Web interface accessed at <http://eProNAR.com> from any computer with Internet access and includes the following components:

Text Reading Material – from the book entitled “Real Estate Technology Guide for Practitioners,” written by Saul Klein, John Reilly and Mike Barnett.

Review Questions – to make sure the student is following the material; asked every 500 words or so. If a student misses the question, they are told why and allowed to answer the question again before being allowed to move forward in the course.

Virtual Field Trips – students are sent to various Web sites to learn to better utilize the resources of the Internet and the World Wide Web. They are then asked to answer discussion questions about what they discovered on the field trips. The answers to these and other assignments are later reviewed by an instructor when the coursework is “validated.”

SECTION EXAMS

Each section has a twelve question quiz following the readings and the field trips. A score of 75% is required to move forward and, if the student is unable to score 75%, he or she is allowed to re-take the exam until a passing score of 75% or better is obtained. The questions are pulled randomly from a pool of questions for each section. Each question teaches or relates to a learning objective of the course (“raising the bar without leaving anyone behind”).

e-PRO Module Content

Module 1: Understanding the Miracle of the Internet

In this module, students learn about the technology challenge and making the technology investment. This includes, among other things, an understanding and awareness of: Consumer Use of the Internet, the e-Transaction, Real Estate Portals, Privacy Issues, Connectivity Choices, Domain Name Structure, and Hosting.

Module 2: Becoming an E-Mail Power House

Most people's concept of e-mail is “send and receive.” This limits the power e-mail can bring to your business. To more effectively handle e-mail, real estate professionals must get better at taking advantage of the functionality on both the client and server side. Setting up your permanent e-mail address is one of the most important lessons for today's real estate professional. Your e-mail address is your identity on the Internet. Among other topics, module 2 covers the following: E-mail as a Communication Tool, Fundamentals of Effective E-Mail-based Marketing, Importance of Promptness When Replying to E-mail, Build Distribution Lists or Groups for Every Transaction, Making the Most of E-mail Embedded Links, Driving People to Your Web Site, Mass Mailings, Auto-Responder, Fundamental Elements of an E-mail Marketing Strategy.

Module 3: World Wide Web ... Marketing, Publishing, Service and Support

An Internet presence is made up of both an e-mail presence and a Web presence. Just as your domain is the foundation of your e-mail presence (You@YourBrand.com), your domain is the center of your Web presence as well. The address of your Web site, the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) should contain your domain (<http://YourBrand.com>). The focus of module 3 is the examination of Web site options and how they are being used by today's (and in some cases tomorrow's) real estate professional and the home buying and selling public. A sampling of topics covered: Importance of a Web Strategy, Web Sites in the Real Estate Industry, Your Web Site is *You* to the Visitor, Getting Return Visitors to Your Web Site, Search Engines and Behind-the-Scenes Content – Meta Tags, Listing Package and Listing Presentation, Creating a Buyer Internet Resource Presentation.

Module 4: Tying It All Together ... Tools of the Trade, Virtual Community and Technology Plan of Action

Module 4 helps you tie everything together. You will learn about: Virtual Communities – Their Functions and Benefits, Power of the Real Estate Industry and the Virtual Community, Joining the e-PROTalk Community, Relationship and Referral Business through Community, Advertising and Lead Generation on the Internet, Technology Tools Available to Real Estate Professionals, Fundamentals of a Technology Plan of Action.

All this is delivered online in the convenience of your own home or office.

“The e-PRO program will give you access to technology and real estate professionals who are willing to share information you can use in your business.”

FINAL EXAM

A fifty-question exam requires a 75% passing grade. If a student does not obtain a 75%, he/she is allowed to retake the exam until a 75% or better is obtained.

There is also an e-mail component to allow students to become more familiar with their e-mail software and functionality. There is a Listserv discussion forum for each module giving the student contact with instructors, current students, and graduates ... a true national support network for technology as well as a place to ask questions and receive answers.

CUSTOMIZED PLATFORMS

Commenting on the functionality of the technology platform Internet Crusade created for the e-PRO program, Vice-President of Technology, Mike Barnett points out:

“The delivery platform that we designed for ePRO (from the ground up) includes features and fail-safes which allow for its use to present any type of information (in any language) while at the same time being able to monitor and control the flow of the data in ‘real-time.’

While the user is experiencing the e-PRO course of instruction, the backend systems are monitoring the exact usage of the course, including the time spent on each page. Please note: the student can not move ahead without spending a pre-determined amount of time to accomplish the goal of each individual page — each page has its own timer.

In addition, the delivery platform monitors the IP address of the computer(s) being used, as well as other valuable data. Security is utilized and access for more than one person with the same username and password is not permitted, insuring the integrity of the data.

Also, based on these same identifiers (username and password), the platform will identify the user and can deliver different navigation tools and/or information (including customer colors and graphics) so the platform can be totally customized (and filtered) for any combination of different ‘groups.’

For example, currently e-PRO has

been customized for a large MLS, a large broker and a State Association where their specific requests and training aides have been added — anyone signing on who falls into the special groups is delivered the custom information.

You can see how versatile the platform can be, and because the technology is delivered in ‘real-time,’ changes made to the material are seen by the next visitor to that page.”

E-PRO AFFILIATE PROGRAM

There are 330 Realtor Associations who support the e-PRO Affiliate Program. They send out e-mail announcements to their members, sponsor complimentary “Intro to e-PRO” events conducted by Saul Klein and Mike Barnett across the country, and provide sign-up information on their Association Web site. The Association provides this information as a member service, as well as a source of non-dues revenue for sign-ups at the events and from their Web site.

E-PRO SCHOLARSHIPS

A number of vendors have recognized the importance of technology training for today’s real estate professional by participating in the e-PRO Scholarship program. Using a variety of criteria, they have provided full-tuition e-PRO scholarships. To date, Rapattoni Corporation has awarded the most scholarships — see <http://eproscholarships.internetcrusade.com>.

Other participants include eNeigh-

Benefits of



- Enhance Technology Proficiency
- Enhance E-mail Efficiency
- Enhance Web Efficiency

borhoods, HomeFeedback.com, HomeGain.com, Visual Tour, and IRES.

CE APPROVAL

The e-PRO course is approved for continuing education credit in several states. Check the list of states and the hours allowed by going to <http://eProNAR.com> and clicking on the CE Approval button. The course has been submitted to ARELLO for distance learning certification. In addition, both CRS and ABR allow the e-PRO course to substitute for one of their elective course requirements.

BOTTOM LINE ... YOUR BOTTOM LINE

Learning technology for the sake of technology is a worthless endeavor for most real estate professionals. The real benefits from technology will come when the technology is integrated into your business. It is a goal of e-PRO that graduates make and keep more of their hard-earned commissions ... isn't that the name of the game?

You can sign up for e-PRO at <http://eProNAR.com>. You can also attend one of the hundreds of “Intro to e-PRO” events which are being delivered at Associations around the country by InternetCrusade®.

So what are you waiting for? As Nike says ... “Just DO It.”

— Saul Klein

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