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DON'T MISS THIS MONTH'S
DIGITAL ISSUE OF

TITLENews

The digital edition of **TITLENews** includes a webinar recording that provides tips to help businesses of all shapes and sizes develop an effective social media strategy to improve brand recognition and drive realistic results.

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The Homeownership Gap

THE U.S. HOMEOWNERSHIP RATE CLIMBED TO 65.5% IN 2020, UP 1.3% FROM 2019 AND THE LARGEST ANNUAL INCREASE ON RECORD, according to the National Association of

Realtors (NAR). This included 2.6 million new homeowning households.

More Americans are likely to own a home now than during any year following the Great Recession. (The homeownership rate in 2010 was 65.4%.) Black Americans, however, continue to face significant obstacles along the path to homeownership. According to NAR, the homeownership rate for Black Americans of 43.4% is lower than it was a decade ago (44.2% in 2010). Conversely, White Americans (72.1%), Asian Americans (61.7%) and Hispanic Americans (51.1%) all achieved decade-long highs in homeownership in 2020, with the rate for Hispanic Americans setting a record and reaching above 50% for the first time.

Jessica Lautz, NAR vice president of demographics and behavioral insights, said housing affordability and low inventory has made it even more challenging for all buyers to become homeowners, but even more so for Black Americans.

The median existing-home price for all housing types in March was \$375,300, up 15% from the year before, according to NAR. That marks more than a decade's worth of consecutive year-over-year increases, the longest running streak on record.

NAR analysis shows approximately half of all homes currently listed for sale (51%) are affordable to households with at least \$100,000 income. Nationwide, nearly half of all Asian households annually earn more than \$100,000. However, only 35% of White households, 25% of Hispanic households and 20% of Black households have incomes greater than \$100,000.

Additionally, data from NAR showed that Black households (41%) are more than twice as likely as Asian households (18%) and nearly twice as likely as white households (22%) to have student loan debt. Approximately a quarter of Hispanic households (26%) reported having student loan debt. Black and Hispanic applicants (7% each) were rejected for mortgage loans at greater rates than white and Asian applicants—4% and 3%, respectively. Black Americans (14%) and Hispanic Americans (12%) were at least twice as likely than white Americans (6%) to tap into their 401(k) or pension funds as a down payment source for a home purchase.

The lack of intergenerational wealth that can be used to make lump-sum down payments is another area that has impeded homeownership for Black Americans. As you'll read in this edition's cover article, ALTA members Dione Joseph and Jeff McEvoy are involved in the CONVERGENCE program, which promotes sustainable, affordable homes for purchase and rental for underserved people and communities, especially minorities and low-to-moderate-income Americans.

Together, we can help provide more affordable housing options, increase homeownership and the wealth-building opportunities that come with it.



JEREMY YOHE

ALTA vice president of communications

ALTA Submits Letter in Response to CFPB's Request for Information on 'Junk Fees'

ALTA recently submitted a [comment letter](#) in response to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's (CFPB) request for information (RFI) on fees imposed by providers of consumer financial products or services.

The letter highlights the value the title insurance industry provides and the robust nature of the current regulatory framework. While ALTA shares the CFPB's desire to root out companies and practices that mislead consumers about charges, the bureau would benefit from conducting a full Administrative Procedures Act rulemaking before taking action on any area of concern, including so-called "junk fees." In the letter, ALTA said businesses can best serve customers when there are clear regulatory rules and that the RFI does not provide the needed rules.

"Consumers benefit when regulators discourage bad acts through enforcement while also encouraging good behavior through clear rules and guidance," ALTA wrote. "We encourage the bureau to take its ability to promote good practices seriously through rulemaking. If the CFPB sees a clear need to address so-called 'junk fees,' it should use the rulemaking process to first clearly define a 'junk fee' and then develop clear regulatory requirements addressing them. The value of dependable guidance makes it easier for businesses to comply with regulations by giving them examples of acceptable practices that can serve as a solid basis for making decisions."

ALTA pointed out that the CFPB's description of a "junk fee

is flawed and provided no support in law. Even more troubling, the subjective nature of the bureau's description is so broad and expansive it potentially captures most legitimate fees paid by consumers, ALTA wrote.

The association also pointed out that it worked closely with the bureau during the development and implementation of the TILA-RESPA Integrated Disclosures (TRID). The regulation sets strict rules for the way the industry's fees are disclosed to consumers, the timing of those disclosures, and when changed circumstances allow for alterations to the disclosures.

"Given this reality, it would seem impossible for our fees to be of the nature the CFPB intended to address when issuing this broad RFI," ALTA's letter stated. "That is why we are so troubled that the bureau referenced outdated, questionable and inflammatory opinion pieces on industry competition in the RFI's footnotes."

ALTA also reminded the CFPB that the industry is comprehensively regulated by each state's department of insurance, by the CFPB through RESPA and where applicable, by the state bar/supreme court rules.

"Real estate transactions are extremely local—varying from state to state and even city to city," ALTA wrote. "The state department of insurance oversees the industry's practices and rates, and examines them to ensure they are not excessive, inadequate and unfairly discriminatory."

ALTA Announces New and Updated Policy Forms

ALTA's Forms Committee announced several new and updated policy forms became available effective April 2.

The following forms are new or revised:

- ALTA Endorsement – Tribal Waivers and Consents (New Endorsement)
- ALTA Policy – Residential Limited Coverage Mortgage Modification Policy (Revised Policy)
- ALTA Policy – Junior Loan Policy (Revised Policy)
- ALTA Policy – Short Form Junior Loan Policy (Revised Policy)
- ALTA Addendum – Addendum to Short Form Junior Loan Policy (Revised Addendum, found within the Short Form Junior Loan Policy)

- ALTA Endorsements to Junior Loan Policy – JR 1 and JR 2 (Revised Endorsements)

The Forms Committee has continued its ongoing work to develop and modify forms to align with legal, regulatory and social justice considerations. This release represents the continued work of the ALTA Forms Committee and Subcommittees, and from contributors during the public comment period who have provided us with the additional perspective to ensure updated documents are in line with the needs of the marketplace and the consumer.

The forms can be found [here](#).

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| ALTA Good Deeds Foundation Wins PRNews Nonprofit Award

The ALTA Good Deeds Foundation recently won Honorable Mention in the Corporate/Nonprofit Partnership category of the 2021 PRNews Nonprofit Awards.

The foundation won the award for working with corporate partners to raise more than \$800,000 in the organization's first year of operation. Created shortly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the foundation has awarded \$423,000 in grants to local charities across the United States.

"As a PRNews Nonprofit Awards winner, the ALTA Good Deeds Foundation is proud to support the charitable efforts of title professionals as we work to build and strengthen our local communities," said ALTA CEO and Foundation Board Member Diane Tomb. "I am so appreciative of the hard work and dedication the ALTA Good Deeds

Foundation Board and ALTA staff who are doing their own good deeds, volunteering their time and resources to assist the foundation."

The PRNews Nonprofit Awards program is dedicated to honoring the most talented communicators and teams in the nonprofit sector. The awards spotlight the people, organizations and brands challenging assumptions, pushing boundaries and embracing the seemingly impossible to create winning campaigns.

"It is only with the help of ALTA members and corporate donors that the foundation's work provides meaning and serves a purpose," said Foundation Board Chair Mary O'Donnell, president and CEO of Westcor Land Title Insurance Co. in Maitland, Fla. "Thank you to all who have made donations and helped the foundation grow."

| 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: 40
- New Associate Members: 1
- New Attorney Members: 7
- State with the most new members: Florida with 6
- Total Members: 5,752



CALENDAR

2022 ALTA CONFERENCES

2022 LARGE AGENTS CONFERENCE

July 17-19
Asheville, NC

2022 ALTA ONE

Oct. 11-14
Coronado, CA

STATE CONVENTIONS

ARKANSAS

June 2-3
El Dorado, Ark.

WYOMING

June 5-6
Sheridan, Wyo.

SOUTH DAKOTA

June 8-10
Rambkota Pierre, S.D.

NEW JERSEY

June 12-14
Atlantic City, N.J.

TEXAS

June 13-15
Fort Worth, Texas

IOWA

June 13-15
Moravia, Iowa

NEW ENGLAND

June 16-19
Manchester, Vt.

UTAH

June 30-July 1
Alta, Utah



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Helping Drive Affordable Housing

*ALTA Members
Participating in MBA
CONVERGENCE Initiatives*

By Jeremy Yohe

WHILE GROWING UP IN A CHICAGO SUBURB some 50 years ago, Jeff McEvoy often played handball against the wall of a store behind his house. He fondly recalls tidy streets dotted with groomed, postage-stamp yards. An older neighbor would holler at him and his friends to get off the grass.

“We needed that person having pride in their neighborhood,” McEvoy said.

McEvoy and his parents moved to Memphis in 1974. As he got older, McEvoy remembered the neighbor and noticed some rougher areas in the city he now called home.

“I think about my old neighbor in Chicago, but imagine getting chased by a drug addict in an abandoned home,” said McEvoy, now managing attorney of Home Surety Title and Escrow. “I want to help kids be able to walk to school safely and create a community where people have pride in where they live.”

Serving on the board of directors with both the local and state Mortgage Bankers Association, McEvoy has for some time followed his passion of giving back. He’s proud of having worked to improve blighted areas in his adopted hometown.

“You can make a lot of dollars in your life, but you always want to leave a mark somewhere,” he said. “Hopefully, we can make a significant change in some communities and provide housing to a child who has to deal with a dangerous neighborhood.”



CONVERGENCE Memphis

McEvoy’s company is participating in the MBA’s CONVERGENCE Memphis initiative to increase African American homeownership. In these communities, CONVERGENCE Memphis efforts are amplifying existing local efforts and deploying additional national and state resources to complete several workstreams. The initiative has three main goals:

- Amplify the outreach and counseling efforts of the Memphis affordable housing industry to increase the number of African Americans who are mortgage ready and purchasing in Memphis communities.
- In the target communities, facilitate neighborhood revitalization that increases efforts to improve the existing supply of affordable housing and promotes an equitable and accessible housing finance system to make investments.
- Focus outreach on sustainable homeownership and preservation through strategies to promote generational financial well-being.

“We have a lot of blights in Memphis,” McEvoy said. “This program is focused on cleaning up the areas and creating affordable housing by knocking down

buildings and building new houses.”

The COVID-19 pandemic that started in March 2020 slowed the initiative, but things are moving forward. Steve O’Connor, MBA’s senior vice president for Affordable Housing Initiatives, has worked with Memphis-area public officials, community activists, mortgage industry partners and other stakeholders to establish the initiative, which he says is the start of a multi-year campaign.

“CONVERGENCE Memphis allows us to test ways in which cross-sector collaboration can address the challenges of minority homeownership,” O’Connor said. “The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated these challenges. Minority households have been struggling—they’re facing employment and health insecurity; they’re taking two steps back; they’re falling deeper into the hole. The communities we are trying to serve—the people who are on the front lines—need our help. We wanted to be creative in our approach. And we want to make sure that any recovery is an equitable one—it must help the people who we are trying to help in the first place.”

Memphis is an ideal location for the initiative. According to the most recent American Community

FHFA Focused on Affordable Housing

Getting the secondary market and the government-sponsored entities (GSEs) on board is essential as well. According to the Federal Housing Finance Agency’s (FHFA) 2022 Scorecard for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the GSEs are putting a greater emphasis on issues related to affordability, fair lending and equity. The 2022 Scorecard includes specific single-family initiatives related to facilitating a greater supply of affordable housing, updating the current pricing framework, modernizing the appraisal process, improving the availability of small-balance loans, finalizing the review of new credit score models and ensuring a focus on the effects of climate change.

The 2022 Scorecard establishes a \$78 billion cap for 2022 on the multifamily purchase volume of each GSE, for a total of \$156 billion. Within this cap, certain loans in affordable and underserved market segments are considered “mission-driven.” The 2022 Scorecard requires that a minimum of 50% of GSE multifamily loan purchases be mission-driven. Furthermore, the 2022 Scorecard requires that a minimum of 25% of GSE multifamily loan purchases be affordable to residents at 60% of area

median income (AMI) or below. Loan purchases that meet the minimum 25% requirement may also count as loan purchases that meet the minimum 50% requirement.

FHFA will classify as mission-driven a proportionate amount of the loan for properties in the targeted affordable category, depending on the percentage of units that are restricted by a regulatory agreement or recorded use restriction. FHFA will classify as mission-driven 50% of the loan amount if the percentage of restricted units is less than 50% of the total units in a project, and 100% of the loan amount if the percentage of restricted units is equal to or more than 50%. The following are examples of loans on targeted affordable housing properties that FHFA will classify as mission-driven:

- Loans on properties subsidized by the low-income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program, which limits tenant incomes at 60% of AMI or below;
- Loans on properties developed under state or local inclusionary zoning, real estate tax abatement, loan or similar programs, where the property owner has agreed to:

- restrict a portion of the units for occupancy by tenants with limited incomes in accordance with the requirements of the state or local program and restrict the rents that can be charged for those units at rents affordable to those tenants
- enforce these restrictions through a regulatory agreement or recorded use restriction;
- Loans on properties covered by a Section 8 Housing Assistance Payment contract where the contract limits tenant incomes to 80% of AMI or below. FHFA will not consider a unit that is occupied by a Section 8 certificate or voucher holder as a targeted affordable housing unit unless there is also a contract, a regulatory agreement or a recorded use restriction.
- Loans on properties where a Public Housing Authority (PHA), or a nonprofit development affiliate of a PHA, is the borrower, and where the regulatory agreement or recorded use restriction restricts all or a portion of the units for occupancy by tenants with limited incomes and/or restricts the rents that can be charged for those units.

"We can't just go in and tell the communities how to do things. Community Development Centers don't just want new homes that I think people might want to move into. It's not just about me."

- Jeff McEvoy



Survey data, the overall share of Memphis households who own their home was 49% in 2015, while homeownership rates for the U.S. were 64%. During that same time, of the homeowners in Memphis, 43% percent of the city's Black community owned homes compared to 62% of the city's white households. At the Metropolitan statistical area level, the disparity is even wider—48% for African American households, compared to 75% for white households.

"Memphis, which has been an important focal point in the struggle for civil rights, is a majority-minority city with housing issues—and lots of scar tissue from the Great Recession," O'Connor said. "We wanted to identify a community where these challenges were obvious, and the housing challenges in Memphis are acute. There's also Freddie Mac data that identified a large cohort of 'mortgage ready' African Americans who are potential homebuyers. It's a community where we see an opportunity to make a real impact in the coming years."

There are many groups—from lenders and city officials to developers and community leaders—that need to be involved for the program to succeed. McEvoy was recently named to the board of directors for CONVERGENCE Memphis Inc., a new nonprofit formed to strengthen ties in the community.

"It's such a learning curve. From trying to figure out the politics and the humanity side, to finding the right players and board of directors who have a service heart," McEvoy said. "We can't just go in and tell the communities how to do things. Community

Development Centers (CDC) don't just want new homes that I think people might want to move into. It's not just about me."

One of the issues the program is running into are appraisal gap issues, where it costs more to build the house than what it appraises for. McEvoy said the program strives to get the properties to the people who need them. Trusts are established and ground leases are offered for some of the CDCs so they can sell portions of the property. This allows them to bring in the people who will most benefit from the houses.

Based off his suggestion, potential homeowners of these properties will be encouraged to have a will completed prior to getting to the closing table.

"In a lot of these situations, the grandparent buys the house and eventually dies," McEvoy said. "There are several grandchildren, but the property falls into the abyss and goes into a tax sale."

This is where McEvoy said some of his title company's underwriters have agreed to a pilot and provide an endorsement to take some risk and underwrite the tax sales.

"These types of properties involve more title problems and require more work and more time," he added. "When looking at tax sales, there are many things you need to consider."

Efforts in Ohio

Dione Joseph, a commercial underwriter for Ohio-based Title First Agency, embraces the same passion



“We have the soaring housing prices, also we have the investment groups that are purchasing properties for redevelopment. If I’m a black prospective homeowner, if you can get past all the myths, you now must compete with investors buying with cash.”

—Dione Joseph, a commercial underwriter for Ohio-based Title First Agency

for the program. Born in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, she moved to the Bronx when she was 9 and landed in Columbus in 2000. Now a 20-year resident of the Ohio capital, Joseph has seen how a myriad of issues such as discrimination, redlining and highway projects in the city that have impacted homeownership for Blacks.

Joseph said she got involved in the program because of Chuck Cain, senior vice president of national operations for the FNF Family of Companies. The two developed a strategy to have a title professional involved in the program’s different work streams. Joseph is focused on products and programs, while Cain works on preservation and sustainability. Meanwhile, Bryce Mathis of Landsel Title Agency Inc. participates on the outreach and education aspect.

Joseph has been helping develop a matrix of the various lending products that are available to help buyers get loans. She said there are a lot of myths in the Black community related to buying real estate. First, these potential homeowners don’t think they can’t get a mortgage if they have student loan debt. Some also believe the down payment must be really high, or that they need a near-perfect credit score to secure a loan.

“We have the soaring housing prices, also, we have the investment groups that are purchasing properties for redevelopment. If I’m a Black prospective homeowner, if you can get past all the myths, you now must compete with investors buying with cash.”

Like McEvoy, Joseph said there are several title issues that impact the ability to sell these properties or refinance mortgages. Often, a transaction requires months of legal work on the settlement side to resolve judgments against the property, ranging from spousal

and child support to federal tax liens.

In addition to industry stakeholders, Joseph said key partners involved in CONVERGENCE Columbus include the Columbus Urban League, Habitat for Humanity, Homeport, the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority, Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae.

“The groups involved in this process have mushroomed, but we need that many stakeholders because the issue in the community is trust. I had to be reminded about what it’s like to live in a city. Pay day loans all around you. People with the least amount of money are asked to pay the most.”

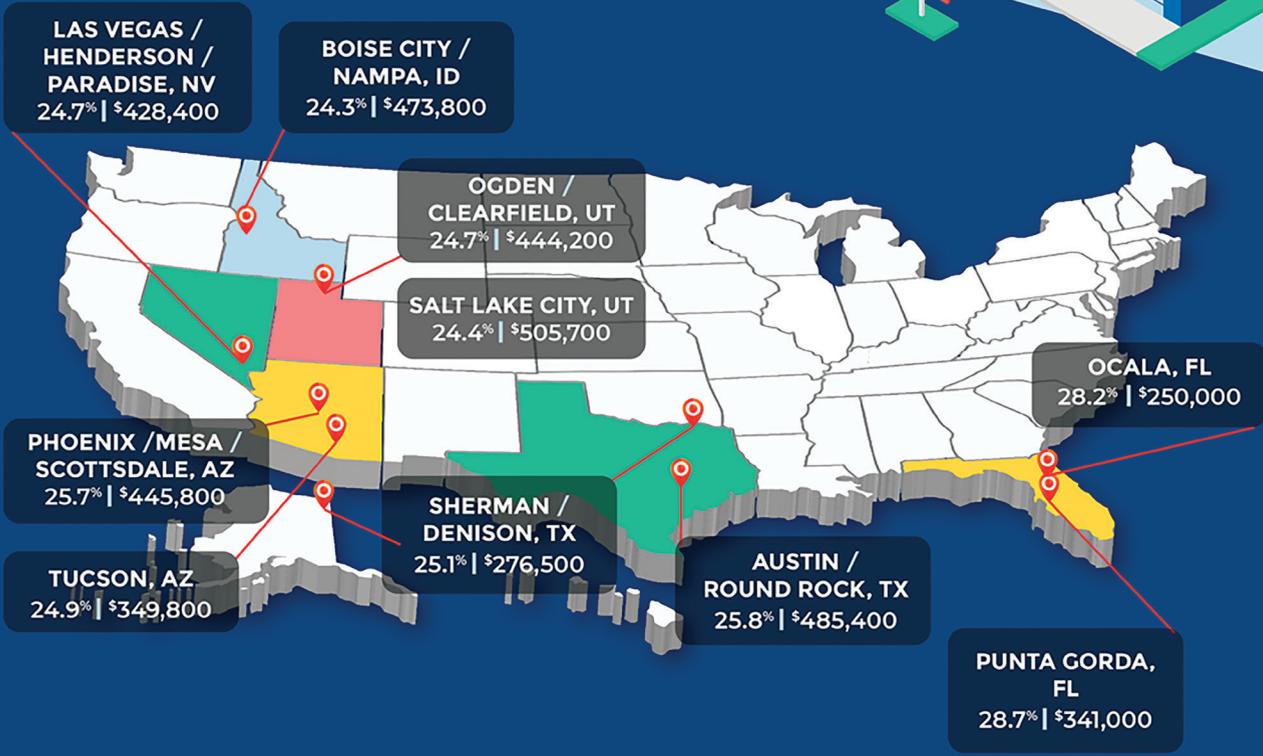
Joseph encouraged more title professionals to get involved because they understand how zoning changes and decisions being made by developers impact the neighborhoods. She said her peers should be more vocal if they see a disproportionate impact. As these communities have a renaissance, Joseph would like to see title professionals also move back into these communities and, ultimately, have some Black title professionals become title company owners.

“It would be nice for program participants to not have to drive to the suburbs to close the deal,” Joseph said. “We are in a unique position to make a difference. It’s urgent because as the city develops, we don’t want to forget the Black community. This is really an economic discussion as this relates to African American wealth. We want to help the Black community become more financially literate, help increase Black homeownership and position them for generational wealth. These are goals we can reach.” ■



JEREMY YOHE is ALTA’s vice president of communications. He can be reached at jyohe@alta.org.

METRO AREAS WITH LARGEST PERCENT GAIN IN EXISTING SINGLE-FAMILY HOME PRICE IN 2021 Q4*



- 1.) Punta Gorda, FL
- 2.) Ocala, FL
- 3.) Austin/Round Rock, TX
- 4.) Phoenix/Mesa/Scottsdale, AZ
- 5.) Sherman/Denison, TX
- 6.) Tucson, AZ
- 7.) Las Vegas/Henderson/Paradise, NV
- 8.) Ogden/Clearfield, UT
- 9.) Salt Lake City, UT
- 10.) Boise City/Nampa, ID

*Year-over-year percent increase in the median sales price in 183 markets



Seller Able to Void Purchase Contract Requiring Portion of Proceeds Paid in Crypto

IN A RECENT CASE IN GEORGIA, A FEDERAL COURT ALLOWED A SELLER to void the purchase contract because the buyers desire to pay using cryptocurrency violated state law.

In *Shea v. Best Buy Homes LLC* (533 F.Supp.3d 1321 (N.D. Ga. 2021)), the seller listed their home for sale at a price of \$125,000. The buyer offered a purchase contract that stated, “30% OF PURCHASE PRICE [WAS] TO BE PAID WITH TROPTIONS.GOLD CRYPTOCURRENCY (POC).” Proof of funds was provided in the form of a current deposit statement from the buyers checking account and the website for the crypto currency’s promoter. The seller claimed they accepted the contract because they thought the crypto would instantaneously be converted to U.S. currency.

At closing, the seller was told they would need to open a crypto wallet for Troptions to receive payment. The seller claimed that the buyer, real estate broker and closing attorney refused to help her open the crypto wallet and handle the currency conversion. The seller refused to finalize the closing paperwork. Buyer filed a breach of contract action seeking specific performance and lis pendens. The seller countered with a host of claims including that the contract was void as a violation of the Georgia Uniform Securities Act (GUSA), a version of the Uniform Law Commission’s Uniform Securities Act (USA).

Under Georgia law, “[a] contract to do... an illegal thing is void.’ But a contract does not fall within this principle unless its object or purpose is illegal.” O.C.G.A. § 13-8-1.

GUSA prohibits a person from selling or offering to sell unregistered securities in the state. The question became whether the crypto requirement in the contract was the sale of an unregistered security. The standard definition of a security is: (1) an investment of money (2) in a common enterprise (3) with the expectation of profits to come solely from others’ efforts. (See *SEC v. W.J. Howey Co.*, 328 U.S. 293 (1946)). Examining the



Troptions website and Facebook page, the court easily found the first two prongs. The website stated things like that Troptions are “serviced and managed by TROPTIONS CORPORATION,” which “exists to facilitate the usefulness and utility of TROPTIONS.”

The decision hinged on the third prong, where the court found that because the Troptions promoters were “[d]eveloping an ECO-SYSTEM of vendors accepting Troptions (car dealerships, fast food chains, legal services, ATM machines etc.)” and that early investors could, “purchase large quantities of coins at a discounted rate,’ and ‘sell the private coins to our investors below market value” that the website is designed to induce investors into relying on the acumen of the promoters of Troptions as an appreciating asset.

- **Why this decision matters:** The decision creates an additional risk for parties when buying real estate with crypto. While the decision is specific to the marketing of Troptions, most other crypto and meme coin promoters use similar marketing tactics. Further, the Howey decision focuses on the recipient’s expectation of profit, which could be caused by outside promoters on platforms like Twitter or Reddit.
- **Additionally, this decision** that this cryptocurrency is a security under Georgia law is in alignment with guidance from federal agencies including the SEC’s “Framework for ‘Investment Contract’ Analysis of Digital Assets” and IRS Notice 2014-21 that treats the sale of crypto as property subject to capital gains taxation. Recently, the Biden administration issued an Executive Order on cryptocurrency pushing federal agencies to publish studies and rules to improve consumer protection in these markets.

While the Howey test is fact intensive, every court to examine the issue of whether a cryptocurrency is a security has answered in the affirmative. None of these cases have dealt with Bitcoin or Ethereum, the two most widespread cryptocurrencies

Lastly, USA is the law in 21 states.

Steve Gottheim is ALTA’s senior counsel. He can be reached at sgottheim@alta.org.

Ubitquity Unveils Solution to Facilitate Deals Involving Cryptocurrency

Earlier this year, Ubitquity LLC launched a new solution to facilitate residential and commercial real estate deals involving the use of cryptocurrency.

Features of UbitquityPay include blockchain explorer preview of funds, collection and disbursement of funds, escrow theft mitigation, no chargeback/clawbacks of funds, next-day settlements, and supports dozens of cryptocurrencies and trusted custodial wallets.

“UbitquityPay is the global solution for crypto payments plus real estate transactions. The launch of *UbitquityPay.com* will act as an initial online portal for those buyers, title companies, underwriters and banks,” said Nathan Wosnack, founder and CEO of Ubitquity. “We have been working for a number of years to get to this exciting point at our company. UbitquityPay will definitely revolutionize the global real estate industry.”

According to Ubitquity, the solution will allow title and escrow professionals to disburse funds to all counterparties to a real estate transaction securely, instantly and in an immutable fashion with complete transparency.

Ubitquity reported it has a network of crypto banks and approved title insurance underwriters. Its custodial wallets comply with KYC/AML requirements to ensure cryptocurrency funds are verified and traceable within each transaction.

UbitquityPay has several partners, including Washington State-based Rainier Title and HEIGHTZERO Real Estate and Consulting.



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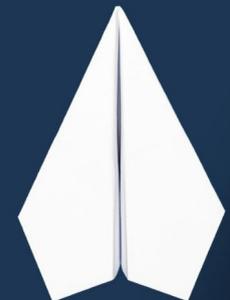
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The Clearing House Raises RTP Limit to \$1 Million



Bank Exec Says Title Companies
Can Potentially Grow Business
Using This Payment Method

IN RESPONSE TO THE CHANGING NEEDS IN TODAY'S INCREASINGLY DIGITAL ECONOMY, financial institutions can now send real-time payments of up to \$1 million for their customers.

The Clearing House (TCH) announced it increased the general transaction value limit from \$100,000 to \$1 million on its real-time platform network (RTP).

Under the new rules, depository institutions on the RTP network are required to accept payments up to \$1 million. However, individual participants may set a lower value limit for payments they originate. RTP provides process automation and simplification by aligning with the global ISO 20022 standard, along with two-way data-rich messaging. RTP payments can currently be used for transactions up to \$100,000, initiated as standalone payments or request for payments (RfP).

Increasingly, corporate users are looking for ways to transfer higher value payments for various use cases, including real estate closings, commercial loan funding, merchant settlement, supplier payments and more. The increase to \$1 million for the RTP transaction limit follows a similar increase to the same-day Automated Clearing House (ACH) transaction limit, which took place on March 18.

"Financial institutions and their customers have asked for the ability to send larger value RTP payments for a variety of payment needs, and we have responded," said Jim Colassano, senior vice president of product development for The Clearing House. "Financial institutions on the RTP network can send RTP payments, up to \$1 million, for business-to-business purchases, insurance payouts, real estate closings and more."

The RTP network enables instantaneous settlement and availability, so those funds can be used or withdrawn as cash within seconds. According to The Clearing House, the network reaches 61% of U.S. demand deposit accounts and all federally insured depository institutions. More than 200 financial institutions are connected to the RTP network. The RTP network offers a flat pricing structure for all depository institutions, regardless of size, that does not have monthly fees, volume discounts or minimum volume requirements.

U.S. Bank was one of the first banks live on the RTP network and took part in the first-ever RTP payment. In 2019, U.S. Bank opened all routing numbers to receive and send real-time payments with messaging capabilities.

Rick Bruhn, head of commercial deposit and payment solutions at U.S. Bank, said the exchange of information on the RTP network takes seconds to complete, rather than the usual one to two days from a standard ACH transaction or longer for other methods like checks. From a settlement standpoint, this saves parties on both sides of the transaction time and expense compared to more traditional payment methods.

In a B2B transaction, the request for payment (RfP) through an RTP workflow processes payments through the following steps:

- The biller initiates a request for payment through their online banking application.
- The biller's bank validates that the receiver's bank accepts RTP and routes the request for payment to the receiver's online

banking application over the RTP network.

- The receiver verifies they want to pay and sends the payment back through their app.
- The RTP network validates the receiver's payment.
- The RTP network sends the payment to the biller's app.
- Confirmation of the payment is provided back to the receiver's app.

This process results in an immediate payment. For example, a real estate agent could send an RfP after a transaction closes to receive the real estate commission. The title agency could pay the commission immediately through the RTP. "Realtors want to get paid quicker and they don't want to pay wire transfer fees," Bruhn said.

"There's flexibility to do transactions outside of traditional business hours. You can make payments on a Saturday morning from anywhere."

With both businesses and consumers enabled, RfP simplifies the ability to move money, any time of the day, with straight-through processing and reconciliation. Money sent through an RTP is considered irrevocable funds. Once received, the money can't be recalled like an ACH payment and the consumer can't dispute the transaction.

Some state good fund laws may not include RTP directly, but similar to wire, RTP meets similar irrevocable funds requirements. Some states might choose to revise statutes to explicitly list RTP.

Bruhn believes money sent via RTP will help thwart business email compromise and wire fraud scams because consumers won't receive an email or text with wire instructions. Rather, the consumer will get a request for payment from the title company.

"The consumer will never receive payment instructions until at the closing table," Bruhn said. "The company can initiate the request for payment right from their phone."

Additionally, Bruhn is seeing RTP being used for cash-out refinances. After the three-day right to cancel, money can be sent to the consumer immediately.

Bruhn said there isn't much a title company needs to do to get set up to use RTP. It's like setting up a wire transfer service. U.S. Bank is also working to build an API functionality with title production software systems that simplifies the payment process further.

"There's flexibility to do transactions outside of traditional business hours," Bruhn said. "You can make payments on a Saturday morning from anywhere. The competitive landscape is shifting, and this gives title companies a new marketing tool to capture new business."

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ALTA SPRINGBOARD

Take Your Business to the Next Level



The Secrets of Influence

ARE YOU CURIOUS WHY PEOPLE MAKE THE DECISIONS THEY MAKE AND HOW THESE DECISIONS AFFECT THEM? The world scientific community has amassed astounding research on human behavior but only a small portion of it is applied. During an Idea Festival at the 2022 ALTA SPRINGBOARD, behavioral scientist Jon Levy helped more than 300 attendees learn how to apply cutting-edge science to influence their customers.

Sponsored by First American, Levy offered insight on how to influence decisions people make and how to use that knowledge to market, sell and create more loyal customers.

To open his presentation, Levy had attendees guess the application that's in the lower right-hand corner of their phone. He did the same exercise again, but the second time he asked people what time was on the phone.

"People have no idea. It's not a flaw of the brain, but how it's designed. If we have to pay attention to everything, we would go crazy," Levy said.

The behavioral scientist said that most of life takes place in our

blind spots, "where we think we know what's going on but really don't."

More than 10 years ago, Levy was broke. To have an extraordinary life, he realized he needed to surround himself with exceptional people. The work of professors Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler inspired him. In their research, these academics found that who you know influences your entire life. The correlation was deep whether you talked about weight gain, your odds of divorce, happiness, success, and so on.

"The found that not only are we influenced by our friends, we're influenced by our friend's friends," Levy said.

To get the most out of the people Levy admired in the world, he conducted a social experiment. He created a secret dining experience to bring influential people together to positively affect each other—including himself. During the experiment, influential people prepared a meal together. As they cooked, they weren't allowed to share their occupations or even their last names. During the meal, they played a game to discover what each person did for work. The participants found out they were sitting next to Nobel laureates, Olympic athletes, celebrities, the editor-in-chief of a major magazine, an Oscar winner, a Grammy winner, and more.

Over the years, Levy has hosted over 2,000 people at over 227 dinners.

Levy said the dinners led him to think about what impacts quality of life. He's a zealot for the importance of building connections. The quality of someone's life, their career and overall happiness is a byproduct of who they are connected to, Levy said.

Connections between people are spurred in general by things that are familiar to them, including common friends and activities. "If you want to connect, you need to expose commonalities that make us feel safe," Levy said.

In the traditional business world, people would take someone out to dinner and try to find a common bond. However, you can't buy a relationship. It takes work. Levy said this is a critical blind spot. In reality, relationships are formed by something he called the Ikea effect—based on the store that requires you to put together the furniture before you can use it. You can apply this principle to building deep bonds with other people, Levy said.

If you want to get someone's interest, Levy believes it's better to email and ask if they have a favorite book. Find a small thing you

can ask of people. It could be their opinion or their expertise. "You can't just be a taker," Levy said.

For years, he didn't understand why this worked. "It turns out, there is this misconception of trust," Levy said. "There's this belief that trust proceeds vulnerability. It's actually the other way around. If you both can be vulnerable, then trust skyrockets."

Levy told attendees that he used to think he couldn't bother anyone and that he could handle everything himself. "I didn't realize how much I was preventing people from connecting and trusting me. If I asked for support, I thought I'd be viewed as incompetent," Levy added. "Small screw-ups make us more perfect. People who make small mistakes shows their vulnerability. We think if we look perfect, we will be liked more."

Levy offered some easy solutions to help leaders build trust with their employees.

- Change how you run team meetings. Give staff an opportunity to feel engaged and connected.
- Play online games such as Kahoot or Quplash.
- During video calls, put something about you in your background and let people ask questions.
- If don't have a nice background, make a virtual one.
- Get people to discuss passion topics.
- Give staff a photo of the team to remind them of a sense of belonging.
- Sour and sweet: Have people share something good and something bad.
- Have staff discuss their proudest career accomplishment.
- Include pets and children during calls if appropriate. This humanizes you and often makes you more endearing.



Shift Your Brilliance

Industries are being transformed at the speed of light. To keep pace, individuals within an organization must raise the bar on their performance and reset their mindset. The leadership skills of yesterday will not carry forward in today's continually evolving economy. During an Idea Festival, author, entrepreneur and life coach Simon Bailey shared tips on how people can find their brilliance. He said that "every single person has brilliance within them. The problem is that this brilliance often gets buried by society's rigid rules on how we are allowed to use our talents and abilities. It's only when we learn to shift our way of thinking that we can find our spark."

Bailey said employees and companies must shift and embrace new methodologies to survive, compete and thrive through the ever-changing demographic, technological and regulatory marketplace changes that affect businesses today. The time-worn formulas of yesterday will not hold up to the technological solutions that will continue to automate "traditional" business processes.

"There will come a time when you have to let go of the old to embrace the new," Bailey said. "This has to happen so you can grow and expand. When that happens, that's the invitation to shift."

One of the first steps to achieve brilliance is to own the moment. Bailey said moments create momentum, which creates monumental results. People need to realize that setbacks are a setup for a comeback, Bailey said.

In a world where businesses are struggling to attract talent, it's important to remember people want to work where they are celebrated. Bailey encouraged attendees to not think they have jobs to offer but are providing opportunities. He shared results of a Gallup poll that discovered seven out of 10 people are stressed out at work. Managers need to take the time to ask about employees' well-being and provide feedback.

"It's the breakfast of champions. Ask if employees feel valued," Bailey said.

He shared a few examples of what companies are doing to improve morale. One business lets staff rate meetings from one to five whether it was worth their time. Another organization takes hikes during the middle of the afternoon in an effort to "own the moment in our culture."

"Sometimes you need to get out of the environment and talk about things that have nothing to do with the business," Bailey said. "Creating play causes stickiness."

In order to create moments, it's important to upgrade your verbal software. Bailey said people must be intentional with their words and come from a place of kindness and hope.

"Be present when you're listening to people," he said. "Think about if you need to ask another question. How do you

complement and celebrate where they are?"

Creating a moment also starts with how someone wants to receive information. Bailey related this to the book "The Five Love Languages," which details five different ways of expressing and receiving love. These include words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service and physical touch. In business, these translate to feedback and mentorship, workplace bonding, new opportunities and challenges; support, and encouraging touchpoints.



"When I relate to the cargo in your ship, we have a relationship," Bailey said.

He provided these five tips to create a moment:

1. Be creative.
2. Have adaptability.
3. Collaborate.
4. Tell a story.
5. Be emotionally intelligent.

Concluding his presentation, Bailey challenged attendees to develop and nurture key relationships. He also encouraged everyone to continue their pursuit of learning. Bailey said Pixar requires employees take four hours of education classes per week. The company wants its employees to constantly learn.

"You have a variety of resources at ALTA to keep learning and growing your career. ALTA will work if you work it," Bailey said.

ALTA SPRINGBOARD



How to Achieve a Human-centric Digital Transformation

Businesses can't ignore the need for digitization, and humanity can't ignore the need for purpose and meaning. The best and ultimately most successful approach to digital transformation strategy is one that starts with strategic purpose, uses ongoing data and results to improve and achieves sustainable business success.

During the Westcor-sponsored Idea Festival, tech humanist Kate O'Neill shared insight to help attendees better understand the human impact of emerging technologies.

Companies like Google, Etsy and Cisco have turned to O'Neill to get a reality check and be successful and respectful with human-centric data and technology.

O'Neill has spent her career helping companies, organizations, city governments, museums and entities of all kinds solve strategic problems arising from integrating data and emerging technology into their business model and operations.

"This is a different way to think about the future. When we talk about it as a concept, we either think its dystopia or utopia," O'Neill said. "The either-or framing doesn't help. We need to think holistically. The future won't be either of these things. It's what we make of it. We get to make choices about the processes and technology we adopt and the experiences we provide."

According to O'Neill, in order to prepare for a world where everything is connected, we need "to build our best technology, grow our best businesses and become our best selves."

O'Neill encouraged attendees to create the best futures for the most people by developing opportunities for the most people to thrive.

"Data is about people," she said. "When you hear tech, think human experiences. Remember to orient everything in that direction to serve the people who need to be served. Emerging tech will add capacity and scale like never before."

O'Neill shared how the new Amazon Go convenience stores operate and could impact human interaction. The stores are partially automated with customers able to purchase products without being checked out by a cashier or using a self-checkout station.

Basically, the customer scans their phone, shops and then walks out. Everything gets scanned as the customer walks through gate and the appropriate amount is charged to their account. O'Neill said there are some rules: Anything you take off a shelf is automatically added to your virtual cart.

"Since products you take go into your cart, you can't take things for other shoppers," she said.

O'Neill said Amazon plans to roll this out into Whole Foods with the goal of opening 2,000 stores across the country.

"If we are saying it's OK to not help each other in that environment, we're saying it's OK not to help people in any environment," O'Neill said. "Experience at scale changes culture. Experience at scale is culture. It's a profound thing to think about."

Her point is that businesses need to think about the experiences they want people to have. As digital closings evolve, title companies will want to think of how homebuyers will feel during a remote closing.

O'Neill encourages companies to use humanizing language. Instead of always saying "users" or "customers," say "people" when you mean "people." Get clear on what human problems you're trying to solve at scale, and encourage teams to translate their own work into how it helps the company solve those problems, she said.

O'Neill also mentioned a quote from Bill Gates, which highlighted how automation can enhance processes, not fix broken ones. "The first rule of any technology used in a business is that automation applied to an efficient operation will magnify the efficiency. The second is that automation applied to an inefficient operation will magnify the inefficiency," Gates said.

O'Neill believes that artificial intelligence and some of the other emerging technologies will have capacity and scale like never before. This means we have an ever-increasing obligation to think responsibly about the world we are building through their use.

"Humans can't leave meaning up to machines," O'Neill said. "Look for tech that moves us forward but do it with a purpose that moves your company forward. Subtle nuances are not AI's strong suit."

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From Bar Manager to Title Agent

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

I began as a title agent almost six years ago. How I began working at Frontier Secured Title Company is a funny story. I kind of fell into my profession. I have a very good friend, and her husband was an agent and attorney at the time. I was managing a local bar and grill in the evenings/nights, and my kids were pressuring me to find a job that was more of an 8-5, because they missed me in the evenings. There was an opening, and my friend encouraged me to apply. I went from being a bar manager with a Bachelor of Fine Arts to a title agent. I haven't ever looked back or regretted it!

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?

A day on the job for me is slightly different every day. We handle each file from contract to close, so it is hard for me to pick just one favorite thing! I do enjoy searching, because in northwest Kansas, it is boots on the ground. Of all the counties that we cover, maybe one or two are actually online and can be searched remotely. I also love being a part of the closing, especially when it is with a first-time homebuyer. Sharing in their first major purchase is so rewarding.

Why is the title industry a great career opportunity for those entering the workforce? Where are you finding new employees?

The industry is a great career opportunity for anyone. It is one of the few jobs that is hands on with no knowledge required to start! You can quite literally learn as you go! As far as finding new employees, you can find them anywhere! As I mentioned I was a bar manager, you could recruit right out of high school by attending the local job fairs that they put on. For this job, there is no place you should not look!

What's your best industry "war" story?

My best "war" story would have to be this one closing where I received the contract and it listed two single unrelated people as the sellers. I proceeded to put all their information into Qualia, which sent out an automated email for them to confirm vesting. While waiting for a response, I went over to the register's office to begin the search. The deed only had the two single people listed. Great! Easy closing. Oh boy, was I wrong. It was a cash closing, so everything moved along quite quickly. I believe that we only had approximately two weeks from the time I received the contract to the time it was supposed to close. A few days later, Qualia notifies me that there are "issues." One of the sellers had a registered domestic partner that they were in the process of divorcing. I contacted underwriting counsel as I had not heard of such a thing before. They advised that we have the partner sign the deed as well. So, Monday finally rolls around, and the closing is on Thursday. I am finally able to get a hold of the partner, unfortunately, he is driving a semi down the interstate and is unable to come to my office to sign the deed. While I am on the phone with him trying to determine where he is, my boss is online attempting to find a title company that is in front of this guy, so that he can just stop in on his way through that town. That is only one of the crazy things in this particular closing that was different! In the end, it all worked out, but it was really close to being extended. We got the deed in the office the morning of closing.

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

The industry is dramatically different now then it was six years ago, mostly attributed to the pandemic. It has made every industry rethink the way that they do business for us specifically, it has ushered in a new generation of technology that was on the fringes of our world. A majority of the companies still had the "in the office" work model. To become more competitive, we have actually expanded our coverage area.

How does your company differentiate itself in the market (and you can't say customer service)?

How are we different from others in the market? Well, we are trying to stay on top of all the upcoming technology. What is commonplace in the cities has not yet reached the smaller towns. We are unable to provide any source of online notarization at this time because our courthouses won't accept anything but original ink. But that has yet to stop us from trying to be ready so that when those technologies make it here, we already have policies and procedures implemented. Because of our smaller community and the "everyone knows everyone" ideal, we strive to build relationships.

Why are you a member of ALTA?

When I joined Frontier Secured Title Company, formerly Sherman County Abstract Co. Inc, they were already members of ALTA, if only to have access to their forms. During my time here, I have made the push to be more active. With the 2020 ALTA SPRINGBOARD being in Denver, the decision to try out an ALTA meeting was an easy one. From that moment on, we have been active members. It wasn't until we were able to see ALTA in action, to be a part of the discussions in person, that we understood why ALTA is so important. We had no idea the number of resources that were available that we were missing out on.

Which ALTA committees do you participate in? Why do you participate?

I am part of Homeowner Outreach Program Work Group, as well as the Membership and Title Action Network committees. Each committee affords a different perspective on what ALTA is about. They are a great way to build resources, friendships and a sense of community. All while allowing you to be a part of something that can effect real change in our world.

What is something that others in the industry may not know about you?

I am a sci-fi nerd. I love everything from Doctor Who to Harry Potter. I am also a very involved mother with one daughter in dance and another in taekwondo, as well as a son still in diapers. That keeps me very busy.

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

I think one of the most amazing people to have dinner with would be Benedict Cumberbatch. I am fascinated with his acting style and many of his performances. I really enjoy the approach of British acting and television, and I would love to hear about his experiences in comparison to filming with American directors.

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

One of my favorite TV shows is Doctor Who. The idea that he can travel in space and time fascinates me. Also, the fact that the character carries a sonic screwdriver instead of a weapon is a fantastic take, implying that he is there to help and not to harm. One of the biggest take-aways, at least in recent years of the show, is that no matter who you are, you matter.

What's in your music playlist?

My music playlist is pretty diverse. It depends on what I am doing. If I am working on accounting or reconciling, I prefer heavy metal. On the flip side, if I am cleaning, I prefer '90s alternative. But a good audio book is always in there.



War in Ukraine Increases Cyber Risk: Social Engineering Red Flags

Cyberattacks on businesses and government agencies have increased following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with the risk of spillover cyberattacks against non-primary targets becoming much more widespread.

The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), urged corporate leaders to prepare for attacks and adapt their C-suites accordingly.

In a bulletin from the DHS, the agency said: "We assess that Russia would consider initiating a cyberattack against the Homeland if it perceived a U.S. or NATO response to a possible Russian invasion of Ukraine threatened its long-term national security."

Some immediate actions that can be taken to strengthen cyber posture include:

- Enable multifactor authentication.
- Set antivirus

- and antimalware programs to conduct regular scans.
- Enable strong spam filters to prevent phishing emails from reaching end users.
- Update software.
- Filter network traffic

Experts also expect an increase in sophisticated social engineering schemes centered around the war. Avanan, an email cybersecurity firm,

reported an 800% increase in phishing attacks since February 27.

"We are seeing cybercriminals use Russia and Ukraine-centric social

engineering efforts, like phishing emails, leveraging current events to solicit an emotional response to the war," says Ros Smothers, former CIA cyber threat

analyst and technical intelligence officer, now at KnowBe4. "In other words, people are less likely to think before they click."

Social Engineering Red Flags

FROM

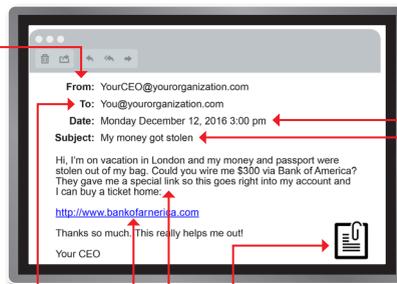
- I don't recognize the sender's email address as someone I **ordinarily communicate with**.
- This email is from **someone outside my organization and it's not related to my job responsibilities**.
- This email was sent from **someone inside the organization** or from a customer, vendor, or partner and is **very unusual or out of character**.
- Is the sender's email address from a **suspicious domain** (like microsoft-support.com)?
- I **don't know the sender personally** and they were **not vouched for** by someone I trust.
- I **don't have a business relationship** nor any past communications with the sender.
- This is an **unexpected or unusual email** with an **embedded hyperlink or an attachment** from someone I haven't communicated with recently.

TO

- I was cc'd on an email sent to one or more people, but I **don't personally know** the other people it was sent to.
- I received an email that was also sent to an **unusual mix of people**. For instance, it might be sent to a random group of people at my organization whose last names start with the same letter, or a whole list of unrelated addresses.

HYPERLINKS

- I hover my mouse over a hyperlink that's displayed in the email message, but the **link-to address is for a different website**. (This is a **big red flag**.)
- I received an email that only has **long hyperlinks with no further information**, and the rest of the email is completely blank.
- I received an email with a **hyperlink that is a misspelling** of a known web site. For instance, www.bankofamerica.com — the "m" is really two characters — "r" and "n."



DATE

- Did I receive an email that I normally would get during regular business hours, but it was **sent at an unusual time** like 3 a.m.?

SUBJECT

- Did I get an email with a subject line that is **irrelevant or does not match** the message content?
- Is the email message a reply to something I **never sent or requested**?

ATTACHMENTS

- The sender included an email attachment that I **was not expecting** or that **makes no sense** in relation to the email message. (This sender doesn't ordinarily send me this type of attachment.)
- I see an attachment with a possibly **dangerous file type**. The only file type that is **always safe to click on is a .txt file**.

CONTENT

- Is the sender asking me to click on a link or open an attachment to **avoid a negative consequence** or to **gain something of value**?
- Is the email **out of the ordinary**, or does it have **bad grammar** or **spelling errors**?
- Is the sender asking me to click a link or open up an attachment that **seems odd or illogical**?
- Do I have an **uncomfortable gut feeling** about the sender's request to open an attachment or click a link?
- Is the email asking me to look at a **compromising or embarrassing picture** of myself or someone I know?

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Washington S.C. Rules Law Strikes Right Balance Addressing Discriminatory Covenants

The Washington Supreme Court held the state's discriminatory covenants law strikes a balance between removing racial covenants from a home's chain of title while keeping them part of the public record.

In *May v. Spokane County*, the property owner sought a judgment that would have physically removed a racially restrictive covenant from the county land title records. The trial court ruled against the plaintiff as did the Washington Court of Appeals.

Shortly afterward the ruling by the court of appeals, the legislature adopted House Bill 1335, which provided a right to a declaratory judgment striking an illegal covenant from the public records. The former statute did not provide for any action by county recording officials to amend the public records as a result of the litigation. As amended last year, the law now specifies a process by which the court would strike through the illegal language on a certified copy of the original record, then recording the amended document. The law states the original document must be maintained by county officers or transferred to the archives maintained by the Washington Secretary of State.

The Washington legislature's intent in drafting the new law is clear, the Washington Supreme Court said.

Realogy, Centerbridge Launch Underwriting Joint Venture

Title Resources Guaranty Company (TRG) received approval from the Texas Department of Insurance to form and fund its previously announced

title underwriting joint venture with Centerbridge Partners and Realogy Holdings Corp.

As part of the transaction the stock of TRG, which conducts underwriting operations, is being contributed to a new holding company that will be owned by the joint venture partners. Realogy will retain its title agencies in its Realogy Title Group division.

TRG will continue to be led by Scott McCall, president and CEO, a role he has served in since 2009.

"Title Resources Group has grown through our dedication to providing knowledgeable and responsive underwriting solutions to support our network of title insurance agents across America, while maintaining quality through integrity and financial stability," McCall said. "We're thrilled to form this partnership, a testament to the top-quality people and operations at our firm, and accelerate our profitable growth trajectory. With the support of our partners at Centerbridge, we're excited about the opportunity to broaden our reach and deepen our capabilities, through investment in our people and technology."

Guaranteed Rate Acquires Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund

Guaranteed Rate Companies completed its acquisition of Chicago-based underwriter Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund Inc. (ATG).

"Adding ATG's team to the Guaranteed Rate team is a total win-win situation, allowing us to further serve consumers in real estate sales and the purchase process," said Victor Ciardelli, president and CEO of Guaranteed Rate. "I have always appreciated and valued the importance of the lawyer's role in real estate transactions. That is why Guaranteed Rate is committed to the lawyer-agent business model created

by ATG. We look forward to building on ATG's success by giving lawyers and consumers the technology, tools and additional support that will enable ATG to flourish in the years to come."

Guaranteed Rate has more than 10,000 employees in over 850 branches across the U.S., serving all 50 states and Washington, D.C. The mortgage lender reported \$116 billion in total loan volume in 2021.

ATG President and CEO Peter Birnbaum said the acquisition provides a great opportunity for the underwriter's law firms, team members and customers. ATG generated \$65.3 million in premiums in 2021.

"With the support of Guaranteed Rate, ATG will continue to be the single most ardent and effective advocate for lawyers in the conveyancing process," Birnbaum said. "We are excited to be part of such an innovative, tech-forward company that is dedicated to preserving the lawyer-centric service model that has defined ATG's success over the years."

US Title Insurance Agency Acquires Utah-Based American Secure Title

Utah-based US Title Insurance Agency has acquired American Secure Title Insurance Agency, a title and escrow company with seven offices in Utah.

The combined organization will operate as US Title Insurance Agency, which operated 13 offices in Utah prior to the deal.

"This acquisition will allow us to combine forces with a well-respected brand to better serve the real estate and lending communities across a broader portion of the state," said Steve Borget, US Title president. "Our clients will benefit greatly from our enhanced reach."

American Secure Title has been family owned and operated since it was founded

in 1998 by Gary and Sandra Phillips. The first employee hired by the company was Kim Winward, who acquired an ownership interest early in her career. The leadership team of Chase Phillips, Adam Phillips and Chad Phillips will join with the existing administrative team at US Title and provide continuity for employees and clients alike.

US Title joined the Shaddock family of companies in 2020. Founded in 1980, US Title now has five local title plants, 18 offices and a team of over 175 experienced title and escrow professionals.

Qualia Rolls Out Automatic Ordering Feature

Qualia unveiled an automatic ordering feature into its Marketplace product. The new element allows title and escrow companies to automatically order closing services from participating vendors to eliminate hours off their workload and materially reduce the time it takes to complete closings.

Marketplace is Qualia's vendor management technology that title and escrow companies can use to find, order and manage the closing services they need. With automatic ordering, title and escrow agents are now able to set up rule-based automation to place closing orders, such as tax search, title search, HOA documents, and more, and assign specific vendors of their choosing.

"For title and escrow operations, centralized and automated ordering is a must-have," said Brian Thome, Qualia's vice president of customer success. "In many cases, teams are ordering the same product for the same types of transactions from the same vendors over and over again. This update to Marketplace removes the manual repetition for those users."

Proper Title Expands Reach in Illinois

Proper Title LLC announced the opening of its 13th location with a new office in Crystal Lake, Ill.

It is the company's first office in McHenry County and the sixth new location in the past two years.

"Even amid the pandemic, we've had an incredible growth trajectory that has seen us nearly double our total number of locations since the start of 2020," said Kathy Kwak, chief operating officer of Proper Title. "Earlier this year we entered an entirely new market with our first office in Indiana, and it's exciting to now follow that up with our very first location in McHenry County, which has been a very active area for us over the past two years. Both second-home buyers and those looking for a full-time residence have been drawn to McHenry County with wide open spaces and popular lakeside towns, so we're eager to welcome the buyers, sellers and attorneys we've been working with into our office."

New Mexico Title Rates to Decrease 6%

Title insurance rates will decrease 6% in New Mexico on July 1, the state's Office of Superintendent of Insurance (OSI) reported. This is the largest reduction in a decade, according to the regulator. The OSI sets rates through ratemaking hearings every odd-numbered year.

Considering the facts and circumstances involved in the rate case, the New Mexico Land Title Association (NMLTA) believes the rate decrease is acceptable to the title industry. The association worked hard on behalf of the title industry to maintain reasonable and fair premium rates in New Mexico.

"The 2021 New Mexico Biennial Rate Hearing was recently completed following months of proceedings, discovery and negotiations between the New Mexico

Office of Superintendent and interested parties from the title industry, including the New Mexico Land Title Association," the NMLTA said in a statement. "The OSI ultimately issued a final order reflecting a decrease in premium rates of 6%. This rate decrease was a negotiated compromise between the OSI and the title industry."

SoftPro Releases New Bank Wiring Application

SoftPro released a new application for sending and receiving wire transfers from within its closing and title platform, SoftPro Select.

With SoftPro Banking, users can manage wire transfers from a network of integrated banks from across the U.S. The feature allows wires to come in to the appropriate ledger. The platform also allows for the initiation of wire transactions directly from SoftPro Select and, upon appropriate internal approvals, have those requests securely sent to the participating banks for processing.

"The security and integrity of funds is paramount to every real estate transaction," said Patrick Hemen, SoftPro chief customer officer. "Having those funds tied directly to associated trust accounts maintains an audit trail while securely receipting and disbursing funds to and from integrated lenders."

With SoftPro Banking a user can search incoming wires by numerous fields including the trust account, received date, amount, status, federal reference number, ledger ID and originating bank. Users can search outgoing wires by trust account, last modified date, ledger ID, amount and status where they can then perform actions such as approving or rejecting the transaction. SoftPro Banking's security permissions allow for the designation of specific users as "approvers" for outgoing wires in addition to approval limits for those designated approvers.

Alanna Digitizes Data Collection Phase of Title Transaction

Alanna now has the ability to digitally process forms in the data gathering phase of a title insurance transaction.

Using Alanna Forms Processing, a title agency can now send customers a link to an online form via SMS text or email. Once completed by the customer, the form is reviewed for data conflicts or errors against any previously collected data. After approval, the data is digitally populated into the title agency's production platform, without the need for manual input.

Alanna Forms Processing helps eliminate the need to gather consumer data by phone, email, fax or other means, then manually keying that information into the company's operational system.

"We see title agents prioritizing the digitization of as many of their manual processes as possible, and the current means for many title agents to gather and review data is cumbersome and prone to error," said Hoyt Mann, co-founder and president of Alanna. "With this new ability, Alanna can further help title agents to refocus their employees away from tedious and straightforward processes and toward more complex tasks."

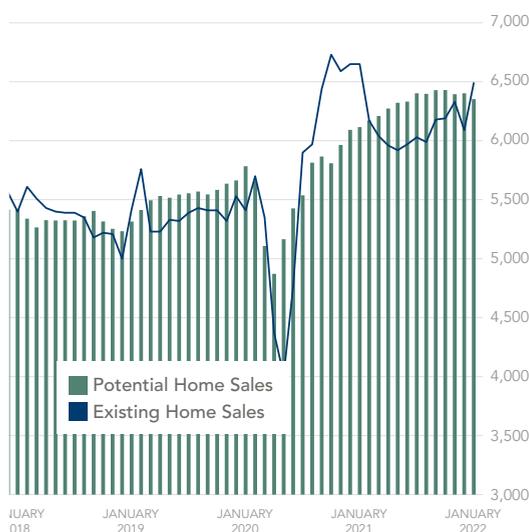
Pavaso Launches New Signing Experience

Pavaso released a new, optimized signing experience that the company says will help expedite digital closings for closing agents.

"We're always enhancing the platform and improving our product offering to meet the industry's needs, but this is much more than that," said Laura Mowrer, president of Pavaso. "We incorporated feedback from our customers to reengineer the process with streamlined signing workflows and added many new elements to create an entirely new experience. We're thrilled to be at the forefront of the e-closing evolution and to announce this release of our all-new signing experience."

Housing Market Potential

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



6.49 SAAR
Existing Home Sales

6.35 SAAR
Potential Home Sales

+2.2%
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

January 2022

\$458,317
House-Buying Power

-4.0%
Year-Over-Year

Where House-Buying Power is Strongest

Top States and Markets

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1 New Jersey
\$676,436 | 1 San Jose CA
\$992,918 |
| 2 Maryland
\$674,571 | 2 San Francisco, CA
\$953,386 |
| 3 Massachusetts
\$666,039 | 3 Washington, DC
\$856,199 |
| 4 Hawaii
\$634,382 | 4 Boston, MA
\$765,774 |
| 5 California
\$625,051 | 5 Seattle, WA
\$ 686,729 |

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



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Fidelity National Title Names President



Diane Day

Arizona-based Fidelity National Title Agency recently promoted Diane Day to president and county manager. With 36 years of title and escrow experience, Day has been a member of Fidelity National Title's leadership team for 14 years. As senior vice president, Day's primary responsibility was to manage and mentor each of the branch managers and their teams. In her new role, she will oversee the management of personnel, production, financial results and market penetration for escrow and title related services. She will continue to manage and mentor branch teams as well as the ancillary departments at Fidelity National Title.

First American Appoints Chief Innovation Officer



Paul Hurst

First American Financial Corp. appointed Paul Hurst as chief innovation officer and will be responsible for identifying opportunities to innovate through strategic venture investments, partnerships, and mergers and acquisitions. In addition to his new role, Hurst will continue to serve as the managing director of the company's venture investing arm. Hurst also helped develop and launch Endpoint, a digital title and settlement company funded by First American that streamlines home closing for real estate agents, buyers and sellers.

Title Alliance Appoints General Manager of Ohio, Florida



Lisa Scott

Pennsylvania-based Title Alliance promoted Lisa Scott to general manager of Ohio and Florida. She previously served as area operations manager, where she was responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations in her joint ventures. In this role, Scott will be responsible for ensuring the proper processes and procedures are implemented and will be accountable for profitability metrics set forth for each individual company. Scott has been in the title industry for 21 years, beginning as an abstractor before becoming manager and regional manager.

First Integrity Title Company Hires New Partner

Denver-based First Integrity Title Company announced that Tom Konkel has joined the company as a partner to lead strategic growth efforts locally and nationally. He brings more than three decades of professional experience in the title industry. Most recently, he was the executive vice president and director of Stewart Title Guarantee's national commercial services division.

Doma Expands Underwriting in New England Region

Doma Title Insurance Inc. expanded its underwriting footprint with two new hires in the New England area adding Laurie Barrett as agency manager and Lony-Ann Sheehan as regional underwriting counsel. Both will provide agency management and underwriting support to title agents and attorneys in Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. Barrett comes to Doma from a New England-based title company, where she served as business development manager. Sheehan comes from a law firm in Massachusetts, where she served as senior title attorney.

Core Title Services Adds Underwriting Counsel

New York-based Core Title Services recently added title industry veteran Mike Slive to its leadership team as senior vice president and underwriting counsel. His career spans more than 25 years in New York working in direct operations for the "Big Four" underwriting companies.

Ascendant National Title Names Operations Executive

Ascendant National Title recently hired Theresa Root as senior vice president of national operations. In this new role, she will focus on managing the operations, process and workflow for the company's title and closing operations. Root has more than 29 years of experience. Prior to joining Ascendant, she served as vice president of operations for Solidifi Title.

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Meets Your Localized Needs



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DAN WOLD
ALTA president

FROM THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS TO FEDERAL REGULATORY AGENCIES

such as the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, HUD and the Federal Housing Finance Agency, the talk of the town is affordable housing. Biden's proposed fiscal 2023 budget released in March, dedicates \$50 billion to increasing the nation's affordable housing supply through federal grants and loans. The proposed budget also calls for \$71.9 billion in discretionary funding for HUD, a 21% increase from 2021 enacted levels. Biden had previously sought funding increases for housing in the Build Back Better legislation that failed to pass the U.S. Senate last year.

While ALTA may not support everything in this proposal, we do advocate for public policies that expand homeownership affordability and protect against predatory practices undermining homeownership opportunities. ALTA promotes partnerships and initiatives to effectively address the challenging history of predatory practices such as discriminatory housing covenants and redlining. We also support title professionals' investment in their communities through the ALTA Good Deeds Foundation (AGDF), to serve and strengthen the neighborhoods in which they live and work.

During ALTA SPRINGBOARD in Tampa, Fla., AGDF awarded another round of grants totaling \$130,000. Twenty \$6,000 grants were awarded to charities supported by ALTA members, including Family Promise in Salt Lake City, a nonprofit organization that helps local families experiencing homelessness find lasting independence and security. Additionally, due to Russia's large-scale invasion on the Ukraine, the Foundation awarded a \$10,000 emergency grant to the World Central Kitchen (WCK), a not-for-profit organization devoted to providing meals in the wake of disasters.

To date, the foundation has awarded \$423,000 to 69 organizations. Our goal this year is to increase our total funds raised to \$1 million so that we can grow the foundation's reach and help even more neighborhoods around the nation. (To donate, go to altagooddeeds.org.)

In addition to ALTA's efforts, I'm proud of Old Republic Title's support of the Salvation Army's program Real Estate for Rehabilitation. The company provides information about the Salvation Army's pick-up service to people who are moving from one home to another, so they can easily donate household goods. These donations are collected and sold by the Salvation Army to fund its Adult Rehabilitation Centers across the country.

Across the country, title professionals give their time, talents and resources to make a positive impact on our neighbors and communities. There are many ways to get involved, including efforts like those discussed in this edition's cover article. By getting involved and doing what's right, our good deeds will help foster stronger communities.

HELP US MAKE IT TO \$1 MILLION!

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GOOD
DEEDS
FOUNDATION

GOAL

\$949K

— \$1MIL!

— \$500K

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That Can Add More
Spice to Your
Operation

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