

Technology and You

Quick and Easy Customer Contact

Chris Pardo used to spend her days making numerous phone calls to prospective buyers and sellers, sending faxes and compiling outgoing direct-mail pieces. All these tasks were necessary for Pardo, a real estate salesperson with Kroll Realty Inc. in Plantation, to maintain contact with buyers and sellers and keep them updated.

At the end of each day, with little time to spare, there was a rush to the post office to send overnight photos of listings and other correspondence.

All that changed eight years ago when Pardo discovered the e-mail software, *Microsoft Outlook Express*.

Now, instead of using the post office and commercial overnight services, the fax machine or the telephone, Pardo sits down at the computer and sends out all necessary information to buyers



Chris Pardo

and sellers with a simple click of the mouse. *Outlook Express* enables her to store e-mail addresses, sort incoming and outgoing mail by subject, and e-mail messages as well as photos

PROFILE

Computer: Hewlett Packard 8580

Software: *Microsoft Office, Microsoft Outlook Express, Quicken, Top Producer*

Printer: Hewlett Packard Officejet G55

Digital Camera: Hewlett Packard Photosmart C20

PDA: Handspring Visor Prism

Photo by Caroline Whitt

scanned directly into the computer. What used to be a 20-minute long-distance phone call to a prospective buyer has become a two-minute event when she types a message and clicks the send key.

E-mail software allows users to send, receive, store and organize electronic mail. It also allows users to organize e-mail addresses by category and topic.

Outlook Express saves Pardo money as well as time. Soon after she got the program, she was no longer reaching into her pockets for money to mail out pictures of house floor plans, interior and exterior views and contracts. "Instead of spending \$20 on sending an overnight package, I just e-mail them [prospective buyers] the photos," she says.

With the exchange of e-mail addresses, a real estate professional can quickly and easily communicate with out-of-state buyers and keep current local buyers and sellers updated.

Here are some of the ways Pardo uses *Outlook Express*:

- **Sending photos.** When customers tell Pardo the type of home they want to buy, she quickly searches the Web and locates available properties that

5 E-MAIL SOFTWARE PRODUCTS

Real estate professionals can send photos and contracts, store customers' e-mail addresses and communicate internationally by using e-mail software. Here are five products on the market:

1. American Online (AOL). One of the more popular choices for new Internet users, AOL sends out CD-ROMs and places them in stores like Wal-Mart, offering hours of free service just to sign up. After that, it costs about \$23.90 a month for unlimited access, (800) 540-9449 or <http://www.aol.com>.

2. EarthLink Network Inc. (also owns Netcom and Mindspring) Many new computers come with this software pre-installed or you can call (888) EARTHLINK, or visit <http://www.earthlink.net> to obtain a copy. Price is \$21.95 for monthly unlimited access through a standard modem, with DSL and business services also available.

3. Eudora Pro (Eudora Light). This product of Qualcomm works with any ISP that uses standard Internet e-mail protocols. Cost is \$49.95. To get more information, go to <http://www.eudora.com> or call (800) 2-Eudora.

4. Microsoft Outlook 2002 (Outlook Express). *Outlook* provides a single, integrated solution for organizing and managing digital communication tools. Cost is \$109. For more information, go to <http://www.microsoft.com/office/outlook>, or call (888) 218-5617.

5. Pegasus Mail. Pegasus is a standard-based electronic mail client for use by single or multiple users or on local area networks. It is available free online at www.pmail.com.

match their description. Then, Pardo e-mails a detailed description of each home's layout along with pictures for the buyer to view. She finds e-mail to be especially handy when she's interacting with people who live out of state.

• *Form follow-ups.* Sending contracts and other documents by *Outlook Express* is much quicker than the old process of mailing papers back and forth. Since Pardo no longer has to wait for contracts to be received by buyers and mailed back, what took days now takes only minutes.

"I had a buyer from Argentina. I e-mailed him the property pictures, documents and the sale and purchase contract, which he immediately signed and e-mailed back. The deal was completed without him actually viewing the home in person," says Pardo.

Here's how Pardo did that: "I faxed the contract I received from the buyer's agent to my efax number. That creates an e-mail form. I then sent the file to my client via email in Argentina. He opened the file, printed it and signed it. He then scanned it with his scanner, and e-mailed the file to me. I printed it and faxed it to the buyer's agent since the buyer's agent did not have e-mail," says Pardo.

"My client in Argentina had a computer but no fax machine, so this worked really well," she says.

Pardo believes e-mail is also a great way to track the recorded date and time when a contract was signed. E-mail also makes it easy to store and retrieve the contract for later reference.

• *Prospecting.* Another useful function of e-mail is storage of past customers' and clients' e-mail addresses for use in prospecting. Address books can be categorized by topic — buyer, seller, farming area — or any other category you choose.

When you're ready to e-mail a "Just Listed" notice or other promotion, you just open a new outgoing e-mail and click on the relevant group in your e-mail address book; immediately you'll see, in the "send to" section of the outgoing e-mail, the e-mail addresses of all your contacts in that group. You can even send "blind" copies of the e-mail to everyone so prospects can't see to how many people your message is being sent.


Incoming messages can also be categorized. For example, if you subscribe to a specific e-mail group that generates a lot of mail, you can program your e-mail to separate those

messages into a folder. Pardo subscribes to Stephen Canale's Tech Talk e-mail service, and this service generates a lot of e-mail. In *Outlook Express*, Pardo set up a separate folder in her inbox called "Tech-Talk," and then by going to "Tools," and clicking on "Rules" she directed any incoming e-mail with "Tech Talk" in the subject line into this folder. This allows her to view all those e-mails at one time rather than have them clutter her inbox.


Outlook Express is a sure way to

shorten a day's work. "*Outlook Express* makes e-mail easy, and e-mail makes my business easy," says Pardo. ■

This column, designed to offer examples of how salespeople and brokers are using computers in their offices, won the 2000 Florida Magazine Association first-place Charlie Awards for its category. The column is for general information only. Opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect an endorsement of the views by Florida Realtor magazine or the Florida Association of REALTORS.




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