

Leaping Forward in Technology

An Interview with Diane M. Ramirez,
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Halstead Property, LLC

EDITORS' NOTE In 1973, Diane Ramirez began her real estate career and she has worked for Halstead Property since founding the firm with Clark Halstead in 1984.

COMPANY BRIEF Halstead Property (halstead.com) is one of the largest and most innovative residential real estate brokerage firms in the New York metropolitan area. The firm has 1,300 sales and rental agents throughout Manhattan; Brooklyn; Riverdale; the Hamptons; Hudson Valley; New Jersey; and Fairfield County, Connecticut. In 2001, Halstead joined the distinguished family of real estate-related companies owned by Terra Holdings.



Diane M. Ramirez

How is this technology benefiting agents currently?

We have a fabulous Paperless Open House app that replaces a paper sign-up sheet and manual lead entry after an open house. The app also allows agents to send branded, customized follow-up e-mails – both automatic and manual – to attendees at the close of the open house. I was just chatting with an agent who commented on how much time the app saved her after an open house last weekend. She faced no guessing about properly spelled e-mail addresses, and reporting back to her client about attendance was as easy as exporting and sending an Excel file.

Will you give us a few examples of the other tools in the pipeline?

We have a number of exciting features that will make up our new technology environment. One in particular is Instant Value, a proprietary tool designed to help agents in the pricing of Manhattan apartments. It's like having access to an appraiser at your fingertips. Agents will be able to use it to prepare for exclusive pitch presentations and price reduction conversations, as well as for advising buyers on appropriate bids.

Our new Analytics tool will further empower agents with data by allowing them to instantly build customized market reports based on individual clients' needs. This is particularly useful, for instance, in showing historic appreciation of an area.

Our company has also decided that it is beneficial to make the investment, on behalf of our agents, in a renowned CRM system called Top Producer, which will be seamlessly integrated with our lead generation and management tools, the Paperless Open House app, and FiveStreet.

The integration of all of our tools is essential for both the adoption of the technology and the benefit of the agents in the management of their businesses.

Topping it all off will be a new, best-in-class listing system – the central focal point of our tech environment – that enables Halstead agents to service clients with all the newly launched tools, data, and other helpful resources at their disposal.

How do you balance the adoption of new technology with maintaining the personal touch that is so needed in this business?

I don't view new technology and that personal touch as mutually exclusive. In fact, it's precisely this new technology that enables our agents to provide the much more timely and personalized service that customers want and have come to expect. It's a win for our agents and a win for their clients, both of whom are benefiting from increased efficiency and access to more thorough, customized information.

What does it take for an agent to succeed in real estate today?

It takes not only a willingness, but an eagerness, to continuously learn, adapt, and evolve along with the business, which is constantly changing and progressing. ●

Halstead has grown consistently over the years. How would you characterize your next stage of strategic growth?

One of our biggest priorities for our current stage of growth is investing heavily in the best possible technology for our agents.

We are currently in the throes of the largest and most encompassing technology rollout in our company's history. The planning, manpower, and significant financial investment have been in the works for the past 18 months and will be game changing for our company and, potentially, for the industry.

What kind of technology have you invested in?

We are in the process of releasing a series of new tools – all aimed at helping to enhance agents' businesses – that work seamlessly together in a cohesive environment.

The tools will streamline and improve processes like lead and customer relationship management as well as put customizable market data at agent fingertips in an instant.

Why the investment now?

Halstead may not be the biggest brokerage out there, but we strive to be the best. We are committed to providing our agents with the most state-of-the-art tools and continuously empowering them to take their businesses to the next level. We believe they should be able to run their individual and team operations with an equivalent caliber of technology that any large company would use to scale their own growth.

■
The tools will streamline and improve processes like lead and customer relationship management.
■

As an ever-growing number of leads are generated online, we've also introduced a lead management system called FiveStreet that tightens agent responsiveness to potential customers that come from the Halstead and agent websites and a variety of generation sites, such as StreetEasy, New York Times, Zillow, Trulia, Wall Street Journal, and Realtor.com. FiveStreet alerts agents to each new lead and enables them to send automatic, customized e-mails within minutes. A quick response is critical in this business, and FiveStreet offers a major advantage in answering that need.