



## **Technology - Can't do without it but...Face-to-face meetings are the way to go**

August 12, 2013 - Long Island

Circa 1982, the real estate industry had manual listing books, and manual systems for tracking active customers, as well as assembling customer lists for mailings. I remember those days of typewriters, using carbon paper to revise letters, and a secretary's tedious task of revising proposals. Just imagine the amount of time it took to accomplish a fraction of what we can do today because of technology. But there are elements of doing business that can never be replaced such as interacting with people through face-to-face meetings, which I believe will always be a vital part of our industry.

It was April Fool's Day 1976 when the first Apple computer was released. Less than ten years later in 1984, the Apple Macintosh was released. It was around that time that a friend of mine wanted to become a computer consultant, advising potential customers on the process of purchasing a computer and creating software for their industry. He walked me through the process to buy the hardware and software. We sat down and we created a program utilizing search fields to obtain listing information and customer-based information. The equipment cost \$4,500 and, at that time, I created what I believed to be the first listing page with the ability to search by zip codes and size ranges, including a complete customer base. Needless to say, my broker was not happy because I now had all of the company information at my fingertips; something that previously was unheard of. From then until now, who would have thought that emails, brochures, websites, online listing information - you name it...whatever you are looking for...could be found instantly. Great marketing and sales tools are available - e-blast lists, time-sensitive material - no problem. However, technology also diminished a very important aspect that many of us have forgotten and some of us will never understand - " face-to-face meetings."

There was a time when a contract or a lease was sent out followed by the receiving attorney calling the other attorney with some general comments. Next thing you know, a meeting was set up for all the parties to get together to discuss all the changes or the outstanding issues. In these face-to-face meetings, it seemed relatively easy to get past most of the problems.

I'm afraid to say that with technology we have lost that necessary "Old School Real Estate 101" core value where deals were done by people, with people. Now people have a tendency to hide behind a curtain - a computer - which the emails and other digital communications provide. And, it takes a lot longer to get things done. There is no question about how emailing comments for a lease or a contract is a very good way to start. However, the face-to-face meetings accomplish some other very important things, including:

1. You really get to know the person you are dealing with and the personalities involved, which are very important. That goes for the buyer/seller/landlord and tenant, as well as the corresponding attorneys.

2. It seems issues can be resolved in less time at a meeting rather than trading emails, and all parties seem less likely to grand stand at a face-to-face.

Some things will never change in our industry - phone canvassing and walking the streets, seeing the people becoming a personality rather than a voice on the telephone or words in an email. I believe there will never ever be a substitute for a face-to-face development with a customer; and it is not just in the real estate industry, but I believe this applies to most industries. When you are part of any industry for a significant amount of time, the good news is that you see the changes that develop through the advancement of technology and from where it came.

To me, technology is very exciting and for my generation, I have adapted well. I can only imagine what advancements will bring us to the next level of contacting customers and creating new ideas for brochures and presentations. However, at the end of the day, meetings are the way to go. Stay tuned...

Ralph Perna is an executive managing director at Newmark Grubb Knight Frank, Melville, N.Y.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540