



NALTEA

The National Association of Land
Title Examiners and Abstractors

Message from the President

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Lynn Hammett, President
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Every evening I pull into the neighborhood and drive up to my mailbox. I open the door and pull out a stack of mail, and I'm always happy to see just one or two envelopes inside. Nothing good ever comes in the mail anymore, just bills and junk. Like most of you I also have to check the business mailbox, and of course it's the same thing. The business mail typically has checks, which is always good, and problem mail...not so good. This week, I thought of what it might be like to get something nice in the mailbox. It made me wonder, how do *you* stay in touch?

At one time, we used to send out cards to existing clients and potential clients. We did this pretty regularly, roughly every quarter. Sometimes we'd send a price list. Other times we'd just say "hello" and remind them that we were around. Every card would have a handwritten address. I always thought it added a more personal touch.

The previous go-go market that overtook the real estate industry made it nearly impossible to stay in touch in such a simple way as cards or personal notes. By the end of 2006 and 2007, we hardly had time for Christmas cards, much less any other correspondence that wasn't invoice related. The business climate today has changed, and there is time for simple steps that can really enhance your business opportunities.

Post cards are relatively easy to send. We've used some wonderful online services to develop and design our own giant postcards (8 1/2 x 5 1/2) that have nice stock photos on the front and our own text on the back. We usually put our prices on them and give them out in our daily travels. We also mail them of course.

We've frequently mailed "thank you" notes to clients. We use cards specifically geared to letting the client know how much we appreciate their business. *The best way to show your appreciation is to give great customer service.* Beyond that, a nice thank you card would be a welcome sight when pulling mail from the box.

I am of the firm belief that many of the holidays we celebrate were created for marketing purposes. That being the case, I see no reason why a service oriented industry such as ours couldn't use those occasions to stay in touch with clients you have, or customers you want. Memorial Day will be here on the 25th of May so you still have time to send a patriotic reminder of the services you provide, and even how they benefit and promote the American dream of prosperity through the ownership of real property.

We mail out an introduction letter from time to time. Our target recipients come from the bar association because in our state, searching titles is done under the direct supervision of attorneys. This restriction applies not only to South

Carolina, but to Georgia, North Carolina, and Louisiana too. For everyone else, you have some creativity available to you for reaching clients and diversifying your services.

Earlier this week the cost of a stamp went up to \$0.44. When business slows, marketing efforts need to increase. In my experience, a consistent effort of sending just 100 cards or letters every month will provide a 1-2% return without fail. If you allocate \$44 out of your monthly marketing budget, I'm confident you'll see consistent and steady growth in your business.

The go-go years are behind us, now we can test our true abilities with growth that is meaningful and sustaining. Have a great month!

Loss Prevention for Abstractors

David Pelligrinelli

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In addition to looking for more orders in the current economic environment, abstractors should be vigilant about preventing losses as well. The two most preventable areas of exposure protection are error claims, and delinquent accounts receivable.

Sometimes when business is slower than previously enjoyed, a business can become less attentive and focused. It is important for abstractors to stay sharp and utilize all of the professional skills they have, to ensure the quality and accuracy of searches. Not only does this reduce the chance of an error claim, but it also sends the message to clients that they are dealing with a professional. Even a minor detail such as typed searches vs. handwritten reports can indicate to a client who they are dealing with. In today's environment, your customer is receiving inquiries from many other abstractors looking for their business, and you don't want to give them a reason to switch over something as trivial as a professional looking typed search.

If order volume is dropping, it is often tempting to take orders from any random new customer that contacts you. However, securing payment from clients is critical, and you really don't have a customer until their invoice is paid. In fact, it is more likely now than ever, that your customers will be having more difficulty paying you, as their financial situation may be less secure. A message on Source of Title this month repeated the idea of requiring prepayment for searches. I can't think of a better time to

transition to this billing method than today. A customer that needs you to finance their expenses is questionable.

Certainly this practice is not common in the industry today, but you'd be surprised how many new customers are receptive to the idea if you require it. In fact, many of their other vendors may be switching to prepaid invoicing, or capping the amount of outstanding receivables, which would make your request not surprising. Everyone has a credit card these days, and abstractors can set up a merchant account in a few days, for very little money. Even PayPal can serve the same purpose.

Unpaid invoices are frequently the most common subject of conversation on industry message boards. Tightening billing standards can help abstractors avoid these losses.

Public Relations Committee

David Pelligrinelli

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In April, the public relations committee continued to promote NALTEA as a valuable industry trade organization. We have placed listings for NALTEA in company directories in locations likely to be frequented by potential clients. A few examples are state Bar Associations, Real Estate Agent trade organizations, lender networks, and property management lists.

In addition, we continue to encourage vendor managers to ask their abstractors if they are members of NALTEA upon contact. This promotes to the non-member abstractors that clients are considering NALTEA membership as selection criteria, and also reminds clients that the association is an excellent source for quality searchers.

On May 1 the first members-only webcast was held, dealing with the subject of environmental lien searching. We enjoyed great member participation, and the attendees of the webcast reported gaining valuable information. Several members took part in the question-and-answer session after the webcast, as well. The archived recording of the webcast will be edited and posted in the members-only section later this month. We are planning the next webcast for the end of May, this month's subject will be marketing of abstractor services. Keep an eye on your email inbox for a private invitation to NALTEA members.

These webcasts are exclusive to association members, and are free of charge.

As always, feel free to contact me anytime if you have questions, or suggestions for subjects of future webcasts.

Board of Directors

Jill Kissell

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Let me start by saying that your Board of Directors serves YOU through NALTEA. We always welcome comments and suggestions of any nature. If there is ANYTHING you would like NALTEA to consider, please let one of us know. If you have any comments or suggestions for website content, benefits, or anything NALTEA can do to serve you better, please let us know! You can contact any of the Directors, Officers, or Committee chairs by visiting the NALTEA website at www.NALTEA.org.

The Board of Directors held their monthly meeting by telephone conference on April 20, 2009. Lynn Hammett was not able to attend, but all other Board members (they being Pat Scott, Vikki Moffitt, Ed Gunther and Dave Pelligrinelli) were present, although Ed Gunther unfortunately had to leave the meeting early. In addition, NALTEA's Vice President, Debi Merrill, and Secretary, Jill Kissell, were also present. Vice-President Debi Merrill chaired the meeting. The meeting began with approval of the minutes from the prior meeting, followed by approval of the Treasurer's Report. The Committee chairs then presented their reports as follows:

Ethics Committee: Jill Kissell reported that there were no new items to review for the Ethics Committee

Education Committee: Lynn Hammett was not present, so no Education Committee report was given.

Membership Committee: Pat Scott reported that NALTEA had gained 1 new member since the March meeting. The Committee is currently working on a list of 500 new contacts for potential members. As of the April meeting, about 100 names on that list had been contacted with, unfortunately, no positive response from any of them. Pat is going to re-work the message that is being delivered to the potential new members in an attempt to garner more positive response.

Public Relations: Dave Pelligrinelli has been working on the development of a NALTEA

directory. The Board discussed the general dynamics of making the directory work, including the number of directories that should be printed initially; the size of the directories; the cost of the printing; the cost of mailing; who should receive free copies of the directory; and how to amend (and how often to amend) when new members join NALTEA. The Public Relations Committee will be obtaining printing quotes to present at the next Board meeting. Dave continues to ask for feedback on this project, so if any members have any comments or suggestions on what should be included in such a directory, please get those comments to the Public Relations Committee.

Publications and Benefits. Vikki Moffitt presented the Publications and Benefits report. This Committee has been working with Jeanne Johnson (who is also a NALTEA member and a member of the Education Committee) to provide a discounted rate to NALTEA members who wish to take Jeanne's online educational courses. The committee also discussed the placement of a notice on the NALTEA Benefits page announcing the webinar on environmental searches that was presented by Dave Pelligrinelli on Friday, May 1, 2009.

Planning & Events: Ed Gunther had to leave the meeting early and thus was not available to give the report for this Committee.

The Board then discussed new business, which included content for the environmental search webinar taking place on May 1, 2009. Old business included continued discussion of website development; advertising on NALTEA's website; and NALTEA advertising on other industry websites; but discussion on most of these topics was tabled in Lynn and Doug's absence and will be put on the agenda for the May meeting. The next meeting was scheduled for May 18th at 6 p.m. edt. and the Board of Directors meeting was adjourned. If anyone has any business that they would like the Board to consider, or any comments or suggestions for any of the committees, please contact any Board member or the appropriate Committee member.

AND DON'T FORGET! All Committees are always looking for help. If you have any interest in serving on a committee, please notify the Committee Chair or any Board member. You can contact any of these individuals by visiting the website at www.naltea.org.

Educational Webcast Held for NALTEA Members

Pat Scott

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NALTEA members recently enjoyed an opportunity to learn from one of our own members in a live, interactive webcast. David Pelligrinelli, a NALTEA board member and expert in the area of environmental searching, conducted the webcast on May 1st, with approximately 20 members in attendance.

Environmental lien searching is an often-untapped source of income among independent title abstractors serving the more traditional roles in the title and lending industries. It usually involves commercial property, and working with environmental professionals to fulfill part of their Phase I ESA (Environmental Site Assessment) responsibilities. The environmental professionals play a wider role in the property owners' compliance with the evolving requirements of CERCLA (Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act). Since the expertise of the environmental professionals often does not include searching property records, says Pelligrinelli, the independent title abstractor has an opportunity to play a role in the ESA process.

Pelligrinelli outlined the history of, and changes to, Brownfield laws (CERCLA) to offer perspective as to the need for public records searches as part of the ESA process. He stressed the importance, also, of understanding the point of view of environmental engineering companies, in order to best communicate and provide them with the information they seek.

The webcast also covered the different types of search products typically requested by the Environmental Professionals and the ways those products may differ from traditional title search products. In the final portion of the webcast, Pelligrinelli answered questions posed by the attendees. Several attendees commented that the information in the webcast was in agreement with their own experience working with environmental professionals over the years.

David Pelligrinelli is president of AFX Corp., a company that works extensively with environmental firms.

Membership Committee Update

Pat Scott

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NALTEA proudly welcomes our newest members, Ted Lannon of Northshore Paralegal Services, Inc., and Dianne Rohwer. We now have 88 active members.

Publications / Benefits Committee Report

Doug Gallant

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I received an interesting e-mail from Robert Franco with Source of Title last week. Someone had asked him for a 25% discount on his SOT subscription. If not, the fellow planned to cancel his subscription and just purchase an enhanced listing. After explaining that he could not offer a discount, Robert found the inquiry came from a NALTEA member. He sent him a note to enter his membership number when he renewed so he would automatically receive a 50% discount on his subscription as well as a 10% discount on an enhanced listing. Keep in mind, the request was for a subscription discount of only 25%.

This as well as several other member only discounts and services are listed in the members only section of the website. I encourage everyone to check the members only section of the website to see if anything there is of interest to them.

Thanks for the suggestions received for improving the website. We would be glad to hear more ideas in the next few months.

The Publications Committee is always looking for your ideas, comments or submissions for the newsletter. Please address to benefits@naltea.org.

The organization welcomes input from the membership. You can contact the board members or the various committee chairpersons at the e-mail addresses found on the NALTEA website at www.naltea.org.