



## The Fundamentals

### How To Run A Real Estate Brokerage: Suppliers

Maureen Farrell, 07.11.07, 12:00 PM ET

Every new business owner needs to know the fundamentals. Forbes.com is breaking down those building blocks by answering eight core questions related to a given industry. Taken together, the information will give budding entrepreneurs a head start on making those first critical steps.

How do I choose suppliers for my real estate brokerage?

Brokers get their listings from a local Multiple Listing Service, a national registry of available homes. Cost: \$1,000 upfront and a few hundred dollars per agent annually after that. All brokers willing to pay have access to that inventory; the key to success is in the marketing.

The rest of your supplies have to do with closing deals and running the office--everything from computers to paper.

So-called tablet computers with detachable keyboards and swivel screens allow users to hand-write notes that can be quickly converted into digital files. Bernice Ross, an Austin, Texas-based real estate consultant, says these computers--made by the likes of Toshiba (other-otc: TOSBF - news - people ), Hewlett-Packard (nyse: HPQ - news - people ) and IBM (nyse: IBM - news - people ), and which can cost up to \$4,000--are indispensable for real estate professionals.

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Then there are database programs that organize contact and property lists--and even gin up catchy e-mail-marketing campaigns. Some titles, such as Top Producer and Agent Office, are Web-hosted and charge monthly fees from \$40 to \$200. Snazzier still is so-called showing software, like ShowingDesk, that tracks the number of people looking at a particular property.

Ross suggests setting up an account on Point2 Agent, a social networking site. (Call it Facebook for brokers.) The easy-to-use software lets you show properties to other Point2 agents while also syndicating listings to Google (nasdaq: GOOG - news - people ), Craigslist and Yahoo! (nasdaq: YHOO - news - people ) Classifieds. Point2 offers both free and paid services.

For general office supplies, Staples (nasdaq: SPLS - news - people ) and Office Depot (nyse: ODP - news - people ) should do the trick. Their prices aren't always rock bottom, but both offer corporate credit cards--and access to credit comes in handy when cash flow is weak.