

A fiddler on real estate's roof

Guest perspective: The challenge with traditions

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By [Marc Davison](#)

"A fiddler on the roof." Sounds crazy, no? But here, in our little village, you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking his/her neck. It isn't easy. You may ask, "Why do we stay up there if it's so dangerous?" Well, we stay because it's our home. And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word: tradition!



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Tradition

In Joseph Stein's original screenplay for "Fiddler on the Roof," the lone fiddler stood as a metaphor for survival through strict adherence to tradition. This noble sensibility is challenged as the play unfolds. Faced with change, Tevye and his people must make a hard decision: stick to tradition or create a new one for the future.

Real estate today faces a similar challenge. The industry is filled with Tevyes standing in defiance of change. It seems that for every voice raised in support of progress and innovation a hue and cry from the village of angry defenders of "tradition" results. A response to my recent article, "[Time for Elvis to Pass the Torch](#)," is a case in point.

Here's an excerpt from the reader:

"While you were drinking and talking too much, the real business of real estate was being accomplished by the people who do it every day. While you were basking in the limelight of your own self-created glow, along with all the important people of the industry who aren't really in the industry, Realtors who ARE this industry were working the stupid old-fashioned way exceeding expectations of clients garnered through recommendations from other clients. While you were interjecting your new ideas for thousands, a million Elvises were doing what the crowd wants: performing service."

This retrogressive resentment towards "those who aren't in the industry" is worn like a badge of honor by too many. It sheds light on why the search for a progressive real estate experience -- from the consumer's point of view -- is often elusive.

Fiddling on the roof

From my vantage point, fiddling on the roof of progressive real estate, I see those who "aren't really in the industry" acquiring consumers first and selling them as leads to those who "are in the industry." I see them building Web destinations and creating a culture of real estate voyeurism among consumers that brings huge benefits to the industry. I see them building products that will save practitioners tens of millions in wasted revenue and time lost due to archaic, manual business practices. I see them rank higher in Web traffic than those who are in the industry. And I see those "in the industry" who partner with them to connect with those who matter most -- consumers.

These days, consumers perform a good 75 percent of the traditional job before they ever meet an agent. The tools consumers use are all Web-based. For those ardent defenders of tradition who refuse to acknowledge or integrate those tools, their role is now arguably diminishing to that remaining 25 percent, which some, as the reader above informed me, perform in a "stupid old-fashioned way" under the delusion that it exceeds expectations.

This is exactly why I bring all this to the forefront. I believe that Realtors should exceed expectations. I believe they should do it at the beginning of the consumer's experience. Not at the tail end. I believe they should work smart and efficient. Not hard and stupid. Is that so wrong?

The Bottle Dance

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A fly in the chardonnay, or rain on a wedding day is not ironic. They're just unfortunate. And so is the defense of old traditions, especially when leading the charge of progress are industry insiders like Dave Liniger, Dottie Herman, Harley Rouda, Chris Crocker, Bernice Ross, Brenda Florida, Josh Sharfman, Joel Singer, Scott Kucirek, Glenn Cohen, Fred Doleac, **David Schubb**, John Pinto, Ira Serkes and so many more that I am leaving out. These people are a breed of new traditionalists whose vision resonates more powerfully than any few paragraphs I could write. These people truly inspire me.

Sunrise Sunset

Elvis faced a changing world in 1964 --the cold war, Kennedy, civil rights and a burgeoning counter culture that he either ignored or didn't get. With each beach movie, the distance between himself and the masses grew. His gurus fed him peanut butter, bananas and Valium. They dressed him in sequins and planted him in the desert where he lived off past accomplishments to an ever-shrinking audience. Over time the king became the jester.

In my last article I compared hardened traditionalists with the fat Elvis, dazed and decadent, playing a Vegas lounge. They'll continue to do business and perform to the remaining 25 percent of non-Web-using consumers that shrink in numbers year after year. That's a lot of people splitting up a tiny pie.

The new traditionalists are smaller in numbers. They understand that real estate, without those who "aren't really in the business," would be no different than the town of Anatevka was in 1905. They are the Perchiks of our time, encouraging change. Without them, Websites, digital signature software, content, news sites, mapping, blogging, listing portals, virtual tours, neighborhood data, IDX, lead generation, e-mail, phone call routing systems, CRM tools, transaction management systems, and hundreds of other innovations wouldn't exist keeping consumers fixated on real estate and keeping real estate attuned to the modern consumer. As a result, these new traditionalists are looking into the future at a huge incoming pie with a big knife and fork.

Matchmaker, Matchmaker

Matchmaker, Matchmaker

Make me a match

Find me a buyer, who's starting from scratch

I'm tired of working stupid and hard

Discounting commissions, in my own backyard

Matchmaker, Matchmaker

Help me to change for I'm longing to be

The envy of all I see.

That's a tradition we need to all get our fiddles behind.

Marc Davison is vice president of [OnBoard](#), a real estate data provider based in New York. Davison previously served as vice president of VREO, a provider of electronic signature and Web site software for the real estate industry.

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