

## Startups

# Resorts try online sales approach

Properties, brokers linked via Resortauthority.com

Denver Business Journal - by **Greg Avery**

Count international resort property sales among the industries that may be transformed by online social media.

Two Denver-area resort marketing veterans started Resortauthority.com in May. The website helps real estate agents worldwide connect their clients with resort properties being sold in faraway, exotic destinations.

Increasingly, resort developers are paying outside real estate agents for referrals that lead to sales, instead of relying on large marketing campaigns targeting buyers directly.

The shift creates a new opportunity for local brokers at a time when their traditional business is suffering, and an easier avenue for vacation home buyers, said Todd Zurcher, co-founder of the site and its Arvada-based parent company, **Organic Marketing Innovations Group LLC**.

“People trust their local real estate agent far more than an international broker they’ve never met,” he said. “And, for brokers, it doesn’t matter where you live, it only matters where your clientele buys.”



Kathleen Lavine | Business Journal

Todd Zurcher (sitting) and James Churches, principals of Organic Marketing Innovations Group LLC, show off two ways to attract attention to a resort property, Estrella Del Mar in Mazatlan. Zurcher and Churches, in the offices of the resort’s developer, Club Acquisition Co., in May launched the website Resortauthority.com as a way to connect developers with real estate brokers.

Resortauthority lets brokers sign up for free. Resort developers pay a fee to join and list properties. Resorts will pay referring brokers fees — typically 2 percent to 5 percent of a sale — and handle the onsite showings and closing logistics.

Most real estate brokers lack the means to show clients listings of properties in exotic resorts. Resortauthority seeks to give a free way to start making money at it, co-founder James Churches said.

“There’s no reason not to do it,” he said. “You can have a presence in this kind of cool, romantic and fascinating area of real estate.”

Zurcher used to handle marketing for the Baja, Mexico, resort of Paraiso Del Mar. He oversaw building a 300-broker online referral network for the resort that generated about \$9 million worth of property sales, Zurcher said.

He and Churches, a writer and resort industry marketer he’d known for years, decided to form the OMI Group resort marketing consultancy last fall. Around that time, a resort developer asked Zurcher to create an online network similar to Paraiso Del Mar’s.

The men realized there’d be a good business in creating such sites, but loathed the prospect of recruiting a new broker network for every new client. They thought it made far more sense to build a clearinghouse network of brokers that many resorts could buy into.

“That was the huge, huge light bulb that went off,” Zurcher said.

About 175 brokers from Honduras, Great Britain, Italy, St. John, Belize, Brazil, South Africa, Spain, Canada, Uruguay, Dominican Republic, Mexico and the United States have signed up.

Resortauthority is in talks with several resort owners to have them start listing properties on the website, Zurcher said. He and Churches expect to attract at least 20 resorts around the world as its network of brokers grows by a few hundred.

Two large resort and second-home projects in Mexico of Denver-based Club Acquisition Co. list properties on the site so far: Estrella Del Mar, Mazatlan, and El Dorado Ranch, San Felipe in Baja.

“Marketing today for the type of product we have is different than it was two to three years ago,” said Ralph Destito, chief marketing officer and senior vice president, Club Acquisition Co. “You’ve got to be in places where the prospects are.”

Reaching out through online broker networks makes more sense as buyers turn more to the Internet to research property purchases. Experienced local brokers who know their clientele are a valuable filter in finding resort buyers who not only are interested, but ready and able to buy, Destito said.

With little more than using word-of-mouth and social media such as Twitter, Resortauthority has grown its membership by three to five brokers a day, Zurcher said.

Resort real estate has been battered like other real estate markets, but the coming retirement of millions of baby boomers makes people across the industry confident of its health in the long run.

“We think the buyers are out there, the demand is out there and the resources are out there,” Churches said. “People just need to relax and let their confidence return. When people are as stressed out as they’ve been the past couple years — stretched as thin as they have been — they’re going to want a sanctuary.”

## **Details**

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