

Space: The final frontier of the high-tech house hunter

RPM software shows real estate from the foundation to the firmament

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EDMONTON - Andy and Sam Prochazka have linked local real estate listings with satellite images to create online maps of every home for sale in every Edmonton neighbourhood -- along with arterial roads, schools, parks, and shopping centres.

The twin brothers started their RealPageMaker company in 2002 to create RPM software. It gives realtors and clients up-to-the-minute access to listings that the Edmonton Real Estate Board also provides through mls.ca.

They added three in-house software developers, three sales agents -- and online listings in the Calgary and Vancouver markets.

The newest enhancement starts with the Google Earth data bank of high-resolution images of most of the Earth's surface. A user can zoom in from a perspective high above the planet to a close-up view of any continent, country, province, city, or neighbourhood.

You can see your own home, and count the cars on the street.

Most home buyers already use the Internet as part of their search, Andy Prochazka says.

With RPM, linked to Google Earth, a realtor or home-buyer client can view any preferred neighbourhood, with superimposed icons that locate every listed property.

"Buyers start by deciding the amount they can afford," Sam says. "Then they look by area."

RPM can show all the listed homes for sale in any area -- and can sort by price range, size or style.

By viewing an image close-in, then backing away to see more of the surroundings, a client gets a good sense of the neighbourhood context, Sam says.

"Property searchers will never need to ask, 'does this house have southern exposure?' 'does the property have good tree coverage?' or 'is this house near a busy commercial area?' " he says.

"Now, they can see for themselves without leaving their computer."

An RPM image also reveals the view from the property.

And it can help a busy shopper to plan an efficient route for a tour of several homes. By clicking on any icon, the user can see listing details and interior photos of the particular property.

The Prochazkas sell access to RPM for \$49.99 per month to realtors who use it themselves and enable free access by their clients.

"We sell to realtors but our product is only competitive if buyers want to use it," Andy says.

Because RPM is Internet-based, "we can change the system and upgrade everybody's software at the same time," he says.

RPM is used by 2,800 realtors in Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver -- where the image bank includes properties throughout the lower mainland and Sunshine Coast areas.

The Prochazkas hope to offer RPM in central-Canadian cities by year-end.

RPM, with the Google Earth link, retains the original feature of giving clients access to listing information almost immediately after a property is listed.

"In this market, properties disappear quickly. With RPM, the realtor and client get a big head start," Sam says.

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CREDIT: Greg Southam, The Journal
Sam , left, and Andy Prochazka own RealPage Maker. The company makes websites for realtors. Their latest innovation is an integration with Google Earth, so listed homes can be located on satellite images of the neighbourhood.