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Homebuying takes a (web) page from world of investing

City brothers' Net-based software makers lets realtors' clients compare price trends by neighbourhood

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EDMONTON - Investors playing the stock market can chart the performance of companies on websites that crunch numbers into easy-to-read graphics.

So why, asked Sam Prochazka, 28, and his identical-twin brother Andy, wasn't there anything like that for homebuyers?

"We thought what the public needed was trending tools," said Sam, CEO of RealPageMaker, an Edmonton-based real-estate software company.

"They need to get an intuitive feel of what's happening in the market."

On Wednesday, the entrepreneurs unveiled the latest version of their Internet-based real-estate program, RealPageMaker 3, that

CREDIT: John Lucas, The Journal

Twin brothers Sam, left, and Andy Prochazka demonstrate their new real-estate computer program at Enterprise Square in downtown Edmonton.

gives prospective buyers a bird's-eye view of listings plotted on a Google map of a city block or neighbourhood.

The software also pulls a snapshot of real-estate trends for that block or neighbourhood using real-time statistics.

"People will be able to see what actually happens for the first time. You wouldn't buy a stock without seeing the trend of the stock," Sam said.

The 12-employee startup, started by the two University of Alberta grads in 2003, sells yearly or monthly subscriptions for the market-analysis tool to real-estate agents and brokers.

They, in turn, link to it on their websites for use by clients. To see how RealPageMaker works, log on to http://preferredgroup.ca/.

"RPM 3 gives so much more information than has been classically available that when it's released, it could have an impact on the market," said John Carter, an Edmonton Remax real-estate agent.

Equipped with an interactive map, RealPageMaker 3 lets users zoom in on an area and the site will turn the latest available data from the Multiple Listing Service into charts showing inventory, average and median prices of active listings, average days on market, listed versus sold, and other trends.

Users can look at a chart showing average and median prices for downtown condos in the last 10 weeks, for example.

The Prochazkas have access to real-time MLS data through a third-party data-user agreement with the Realtors Association of Edmonton.

While other upstart housing-search websites, such as Toronto's housing123.com, have been shut down after run-ins with real estate boards, RealPageMaker uses MLS data under contract and it allows users to search by map.

One limitation: Information on homes sold isn't on the site because the association doesn't release that data, Sam said.

RealPageMaker 3 will be available on about 2,000 real estate agent and broker websites in Edmonton, Calgary, Fraser Valley and Vancouver. The company is also planning to expand into three U.S. markets.

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