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Strategic Planning Report for Central Mississippi MLS (CMMLS)

October 19-20, 2017

Facilitator: Matt Cohen



Executive Summary

The group met for a day and a half to participate in a strategic planning session. The purpose of this strategic planning session was to determine what strategies may be desirable to meet the organizations' strategic needs and guide new tactics and action plans to be developed and executed by MLS leadership and staff over the next few years.

Facilitator Matt Cohen, from Clareity Consulting, began with a presentation provided national and outside perspective by presenting an **MLS Trends Update** (slides provided under separate cover). This presentation included discussion of national advertising portals and their positioning between subscribers and consumers, as well as discussions of initiatives such as the broker-led Upstream project, NAR/RPR's Advanced Multi-List Platform (AMP) which may create a new marketplace for MLS "front ends", and the Broker Public Portal (an attempt to provide an alternative to Wall Street profit driven national listing portals), the MLS Consolidation trend, and MLS risks from NAR's "D.A.N.G.E.R. Report" and "MLS 2020 Agenda".

The facilitator also presented the results of a **member survey** performed the previous weeks. The full report has been provided under separate cover. High level conclusions from that survey are as follows:

- Overall satisfaction is good – having less than 15% rate an organization (or a product) negatively is a good sign. There are opportunities for improvement that are described in this report, and CMMLS should strive to have the majority of respondents rate it "Excellent" instead of "Good".
- While appraisers are only a small part of the subscriber base, it is worth noting that they are the least satisfaction segment, with 28% rating CMMLS overall negatively. Also, 39% of appraisers rate data accuracy negatively and 31% rate Paragon negatively.
- Product satisfaction is mostly positive. The largest opportunity for improvement is Paragon Tax and HomeSnap, followed by Market HeartBeat.
- While communications and training were rated highly, awareness of product capabilities needs to be improved as a lack of knowledge drove some dissatisfaction and awareness of products could be improved, especially Paragon Community, ShowingTime Market Heartbeat, and ListHub syndication.
- 79% of respondents favored MLS regionalization – either at the state-wide level or at least merging with Vicksburg. Some concerns were raised with the idea of regionalization – those objections would need to be pre-positioned if CMMLS proceeded with exploring regionalization.

CMMLS leadership should be very pleased with the overall positive result of this benchmarking survey.

The planning group created a **SWOT analysis**, outlining the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats for the organizations:

- *Strengths* excellent staff, leadership, support, and participation, as well as the financial strength of the organization, awareness of new technology, and ability to change and adapt to member needs.
- *Weaknesses* (and internal threats) include lack of meeting participation, mobile tools and consumer website, and data issues.
- *Opportunities* were identified: improve satisfaction by communication / education, growth through MLS consolidation, and adding new services.
- *Threats* include hacking, interest rate hikes, and Zillow.

The planning group developed a **mission statement**: for the MLS:

To empower, support, and educate our subscribers by providing innovative products and services that enhance their real estate business, and to facilitate cooperation and compensation.

Current initiatives were discussed, including:

1. Improving data accuracy by tying developments to specific geographies
2. Launching a new version of current public facing website.
3. The new building construction.

The planning group **prioritized the following new strategic initiatives** above others, and the body of this report contains extensive notes about tactics the group considered possibilities for executing each initiative.

1 MLS Regionalization

Create a regional MLS that provides the best possible products and services at the most reasonable cost across the region.

2. Improve MLS Services

Encourage adoption and best use of products by providing education, increase educational resources.

3. Improve MLS Data Accuracy

Improve reliability of data by increasing compliance efficiency

4. Subscriber Communications

Increase awareness about products and services as well as the value of MLS by getting the message out to participants and subscribers.

5. Improve MLS Products

Improve tools available to subscribers

Following are recommended **next steps** for following up on the planning activity in order to ensure that CMMLS get maximum value from the planning exercise:

1. The staff should create action plans using the “Goal Assignment” forms provided in this report (or using similar forms) based on the results of the strategic planning session and the boards of directors should provide input on those plans and formally approve the resulting documentation.
2. Discussions should occur between MLS and software vendors to determine willingness, costs, and timelines to make improvements asked for during the survey and planning processes.
3. Member communications should be crafted and disseminated to ensure that members understand that their voices were heard, and that the organization is taking specific steps to improve products and services based on that feedback.

4. Leadership should discuss the resourcing of each project on an ongoing basis to ensure there is a common expectation of how the scope of work, resources, and time needed to accomplish each goal are being balanced. Directors and staff must maintain communications regarding progress.
5. Additional major subscriber benchmarking surveys should be performed at least annually to track improvement.

It was a pleasure to facilitate this strategic planning meeting and Clareity looks forward to being an ongoing resource for CMMLS as it executes this plan.

SWOT - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

“The best way to predict the future is to invent it.”

-Alan Kay, Apple Computer

Strengths of CMMLS:

- Excellent Staff
- Leadership
- Support
- Enforcement of listing data
- Flexibility – willing to change to adapt to member needs and change
- Participation level
- Communication
- New tools – ShowingTime, HomeSnap, etc.
- Awareness of technology
- Financial strength

Weaknesses of CMMLS:

- BuyInMississippi
- Commercial Listings
- Data issues
- Mobile Paragon (especially being able to make price / status changes on phone); prefer an app
- Inability of understanding how users need to use technology
- Unclear distinction between Association and MLS
- Lack of participation in meetings (50 people show to meetings)
- Location in state and ability to merge

What do you think is **THE SINGLE** biggest external threat to the continued success of CMMLS in 2017-2019?

- Hacker / Security breach
- Zillow / Trulia
- Interest rate hikes

What do you think is **THE SINGLE** biggest internal threat to the continued success of CMMLS in 2017-2019?

- Resourcing. Keeping focus on providing product and innovation while working on building.
- People don't understand the cost of doing business (regarding dues, another building)

What **Opportunity** do you think exists for CMMLS in 2017-2019?

- Positive press – tell story
- Growth / market share by mergers, consolidation
- Coming off implementation of ShowingTime / HomeSnap – opportunity to add additional services.
- Improve satisfaction by communication / education.

What was **THE SINGLE** biggest success of CMMLS this past year?

- ShowingTime
- HomeSnap
- Expo
- Lot purchase for new building.

What was **THE SINGLE** biggest failure of CMMLS this past year?

- Selling the building
- HomeSnap – lack of people knowing how to use it. Not knowing how clients are using it. Not focusing on training; HomeSnap doesn't provide it much.

The Mission

The group developed the following mission statement:

To empower, support, and educate our subscribers by providing innovative products and services that enhance their real estate business, and to facilitate cooperation and compensation.

Critical Success Factors

'Critical Success Factors' are signposts that provide us with directions to the vision...

Exercise: Establish, Discuss and Rank the CMMLS Critical Success Factors.

Where does CMMLS need to put more effort beyond what it does today, and establish a special strategic project?

Initiative	Votes
MLS Regionalization	15
Change / improve MLS Services	8
MLS Data Accuracy / Compliance	7
Subscriber Communications	5
Change / improve MLS Products	4
Innovate / Promote Public Web Site	4
Upstream Preparations	2
Lower Service Cost	2
AMP	1
Decision Making Capabilities	0

Strategic Issues, Current and New Initiatives

Following are notes and tactical suggestions for executing on strategic plans:

1. MLS Regionalization

- Proactively approach other MLSs in the state – all boards.
 - Educate on the issues being solved.
 - What are the positives for associations?
 - What are the positives for subscribers?
 - What are their needs?
 - What their fears?
- A wider regional MLS (cross states) may be a simultaneous approach.
- MAR level survey of ALL members re: interest in regionalization (and fears).
- It's not about takeover – “stronger together” / “better together” forming a new MLS.
 - Sell the benefits (quotes)
- Engage with MAR to facilitate the meeting? With a facilitator.
- NAR can provide funding?
- Forget about data shares
- Improve own products and services; land and commercial sales; use as a platform to grow together? Be careful making changes before mergers, because more changes will happen then.

2. Change / improve MLS Services

Improve Education

- On-site training at offices
 - o Team to assist staff
- Reaching out
- Evenings and weekends – some people have full-time jobs (controversial)
- Lunch and learn (appraisers do this)
 - o Appraiser specific training
- Black Knight does “train the trainer” – send subscriber staff members to it.
- Offer local “train the trainer” on specific topics or products
- Education on products like ShowingTime and HomeSnap
- Classes on rules and regulations; respect for fellow Realtors
- Classes (lunch & learn) sponsored by affiliates (in exchange for a few minutes to speak)
- Video training; live and on-demand (possibly affiliate sponsored / produced?)
 - o Short classes
 - o YouTube channel / Vimeo account
- Closed FB page – that could be used for subscribers to answer each other’s questions about products etc.

Automatic drafts

- Note: LAMPS integration has been discussed; not successfully. RAMCO can process automatic drafts but is a system with a learning curve.

3. MLS Data Accuracy / Compliance

- Inaccurate information being entered
 - o Increase policing to previous levels
 - o Matt suggests using an automated data checker tool of some type
 - o Appraisers should put square footage into MLS listings
- Look into what Memphis is doing to leverage appraiser data
- Encourage more subscriber reporting of issues
- Consider: broker staff approval before going active (on a broker by broker basis)
- The biggest issues are:
 - o Square Foot
 - o Closing costs
 - o Features
 - o Legal / Parcel ID
 - o Tax information
 - o Leasehold fee (marked no when it should be yes, amount of 0 when there is a higher amount)

4. Subscriber Communications

How do we get people to read “The MLS Notebook” and other announcements:

What?

- More “sizzle” in the message – focus on saving time, money, not missing out, “control”
- Case studies of success using products / services

How?

- Text messages
- Short videos
- App with popup announcements
- Social Media (Facebook? Twitter?)

Communicate survey results and plan to address issues

5. Improve MLS Products

- Auto-population of ZipForms via MLS Connect
- Get updated agreements re-signed for RETS Feeds / IDX.
- Mobile. Publishers field mobile apps that consumers like to use. CMMLS needs to field competitive products and get the word out.
 - Release new version of website
 - CMMLS also has Homesnap
 - Driving subscriber adoption. Getting subscribers to share it.
 - New Paragon client collaboration / new mobile version to be released in 2018
- ShowingTime reports – consider site license? Research cost.

Strategic Initiatives, Objectives and Goals

Following is a tactical, goal oriented, breakdown of each initiative:

MLS Strategic Initiative 1 – MLS Regionalization

Objective: Create a regional MLS that provides the best possible products and services at the most reasonable cost across the region.

Goals:

- 1-1 Determine initial potential participants / region
- 1-2 Determine interest in initial meeting
- 1-3 Explore external funding (MAR / NAR)
- 1-4 Hire facilitator
- 1-5 Research for first meeting
- 1-6 Initial meetings
- 1-7 Develop business plan for ratification
- 1-8 Execute the plan

MLS Strategic Initiative 2 – Improve MLS Services

Objective: Encourage adoption and best use of products by providing education, increase educational resources.

Goals:

- 2-1 Education: Develop more short product-specific education
- 2-2 Education: Train the trainer (inc. Black Knight and other products)
- 2-3 Education: Schedule more lunch and learns (sponsored?)
- 2-4 Education: On-site training at offices
- 2-5 Education: Video training
- 2-6 Evaluate feasibility of implementing recurring billing.

MLS Strategic Initiative 3 – MLS Data Accuracy

Objective: Improve reliability of data by increasing efficiency

Goals:

- 3-1 Implement automated testing tool
- 3-2 Work with Paragon to (like Memphis) leverage appraiser data
- 3-3 Encourage more reporting by participants and subscribers.

MLS Strategic Initiative 4 – Subscriber Communications

Objective: Increase awareness about products and services as well as the value of MLS by getting the message out to participants and subscribers.

Goals:

- 4-1 Communicate survey results and plan to address issues
- 4-2 Develop benefit-oriented communications materials about products and services
- 4-3 Leverage Council of MLS “Making the Market Work” marketing program
- 4-4 Develop marketing plan to leverage new materials
- 4-5 Use additional channels: social media, video, text message, an app with notifications?

MLS Strategic Initiative 5 – Improve MLS Products

Objective: Improve tools available to subscribers

Goals:

- 5-1 Auto-populate MLS data into ZipForms via MLS Connect
- 5-2 Get updated agreements re-signed for RETS feeds and IDX
- 5-3 Improve consumer-facing tools: re-launch website, HomeSnap with an eye toward adoption.
- 5-4 Evaluate site license for ShowingTime reports.