

**mls.ca is changing**

On June 30, the new REALTOR.ca portal will be launched. It will replace the existing mls.ca once the test period and re-branding project are completed. The new website will be called REALTOR.ca to drive home the point the listings and services on the website are provided by REALTORS®. You'll also see new graphics, and new search options for Web visitors.

While the new website is launching June 30, the existing mls.ca and sia.ca websites will continue to operate with the latest information from members from that date. This "parallel" presentation means that for a period of time consumers can pick the existing site, or the new REALTOR.ca. At a later date, everything will switch to the new REALTOR.ca and anyone using mls.ca or the French language equivalent sia.ca will be automatically re-directed to the new site.

Since CREA already owns the domain, and mls.ca is one of the most popular real estate websites in Canada, CREA and the MTC wanted to ensure any changes weren't a detriment. According to CREA, mls.ca averaged 3 million unique visitors a month on the existing site through 2007. With REALTOR.ca, it will be the first time the same URL or web address would be used in English and French, so a bilingual presentation was required on the landing page.

The new site is now more REALTOR®-centric, and offers consumers a number of options including the introduction of interactive mapping provided by Microsoft Virtual Earth. On REALTOR.ca, once someone has used the quick search or selected a province from this map on the residential splash page, they'll enter the world of interactive mapping. Consumers can use the interactive tools on the top left hand side of the map to navigate to a specific region or neighbourhood. Consumers can search for properties within a mapped area. However, because the zoom will only go so low, they won't be able to manipulate the map to locate properties where there may not be permission to display address. When a property address can be displayed, a pin or icon will appear on the interactive map. If the listing broker or Board has indicated do NOT display the address, then this message will appear with the new thumbnail.

One nice feature is that the search criteria field is located at the left of the map so users can refine their search without having to go anywhere else on the site. In addition, the search criteria are not tied to the MLS zones of the local board which will eliminate the consumer's confusion with Out-of-Board listings.

REALTOR.ca still features a map on the homepage – the one thing both consumers and REALTORS® said was most important. A form of quick search has also been re-introduced, but the new design includes more REALTOR® related information and news about real estate in Canada. As part of the MTC's marketing strategy, the re-branded website and the interactive mapping features were launched at the same time. So consumers visiting the site are presented with a new design, new branding, and major new enhancements on the website all at once.

Visitors entering the site from using any of the three URLs will be greeted by a message announcing the re-branding. This re-direct message will be in place for at least 30 days after the launch. CREA also plans to conduct a website user survey over the summer to determine consumer reaction to the changes and the interactive mapping feature.