

# REALESTATE

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# TECHNOLOGY SUCKS

...But It Doesn't Have To

HomeSmart International Takes  
Integration to a Whole New Level

Centralized  
Services

Websites

MLS

Automated  
Recruiting

Keyless Entry

Virtual  
Reception

Automated  
Agent Marketing

Call Capture

CRM

Broker  
Management

Paperless  
Transaction  
Management

# Technology sucks. *by Paige Tepping*

Everyone, at one point or another, has had this thought. For most, it's because some system or tool isn't working properly, doesn't do something it should, or (even worse) costs too much. For every one person that loves the new program you just added, one person wants you to switch back to your previous vendor, and another one wants you to choose something completely different. Selecting the "right" suite of tools is a never-ending game of tag, and some days, all you want to do is call timeout!

And, this doesn't even begin to touch the financial or legal side of technology. An additional—yet often overlooked—problem with having multiple systems is that you also wind up with multiple databases, contracts and fee schedules, all of which creates an enormous tangled web, locking you into your current tool sets, or buying your way out of costly contracts.

In an industry filled with so many technology options for so many different purposes, one challenge remains: Programs are rarely designed to truly work together. At each and every industry conference, attendees can find rows upon rows of technology vendors selling widgets, software, systems, tools, and more, all promising to "streamline your business." There are literally hundreds of companies in the marketplace that claim to have solved the technology conundrum. Yet, there are few real estate companies able to effectively launch and market an integrated, proprietary platform on which brokers and agents can operate—in fact, HomeSmart International believes it is the only franchise to ever truly do so.

From transaction management to agent websites and everything in between, HomeSmart International believes it has won the technology game. By building an in-house technology company to create, maintain and continually improve its proprietary, end-to-end platform, HomeSmart is able to provide one integrated system for brokers, enabling agents to access and use the systems at no additional cost. According to HomeSmart International, the company has taken control of its technical future and refuses to be held hostage by contracts, the latest and greatest tech startups, or anything else in surrounding spaces that may impact the real estate industry. The company has created an environment where it has the ability to assess the needs of consumers, agents and brokers, carving its own path through the tech maze.

## Tech and Real Estate Get Equal Billing

"We function as much as a Silicon Valley software development company as we do a real estate franchising

company," says Matt Widdows, HomeSmart International founder and chief executive officer.

When Widdows created the integrated, end-to-end technology platform on which all brokerage operations and agent business can run, he did so because there simply wasn't anything in the marketplace that could offer everything he believes brokers and agents need to be able to effectively service consumers.



**"We function as much as a Silicon Valley software development company as we do a real estate franchising company."**

- MATT WIDDOWS

Founder & CEO, HomeSmart International

Prior to becoming a successful real estate agent, Widdows developed a software company in the medical industry, which he later sold. His desire to "find a better way" is the driving force behind everything HomeSmart does.

"I founded HomeSmart because I needed change as a real estate agent and no one else in the industry offered what I was looking for," says Widdows. "So, I built a system for myself and ultimately parlayed that technology first into a brokerage management system, and now, a franchise management system."

Since its inception, HomeSmart International has operated solely on the company's proprietary, end-to-end technology. Yes, you read that correctly—no third-party vendors, no outside systems. Widdows believes so firmly in the company's technology ecosystem that he's invested in a deep bench, and will continue to invest in the development arm of the organization, to best meet the needs of brokers, agents and consumers. Today, more than 16

years later, Widdows' unique concept has attracted nearly 11,000 agents to more than 94 offices in 15 states.

"We don't believe in technology for technology's sake," says Ashley Bowers, president and chief operating officer at HomeSmart International. "Technology is a means to provide a consistent and excellent customer service experience for our brokers, agents and consumers alike."

### **A Truly Unique Tech Offering**

Nowadays, almost every real estate company boasts technology as a differentiator. So, what really makes HomeSmart's offering more unique than any other? At HomeSmart, broker/owners get eight different technology systems rolled into one platform. That's right—one login, one URL, one system, which feeds data to and from each of the other systems. And, because the technology is built, sustained and updated in-house, there isn't an additional incremental cost to add more agents to the system. In fact, HomeSmart agents pay nothing to get the end-to-end technology...and brokers don't, either. It's all included for all HomeSmart brokers or agents, anywhere in the United States.

"Our ability to scale technology platforms in-house is what enables us to provide everything to agents and brokers for free," says Widdows. "We aren't paying per-user fees to outside vendors, so we're able to provide access to all agents and brokers, and our adoption rates are through the roof."

One-hundred percent of HomeSmart brokers and agents are on the company's transaction management system, perhaps making it the only franchisor that is completely paperless in all brokerage offices and with that level of adoption.

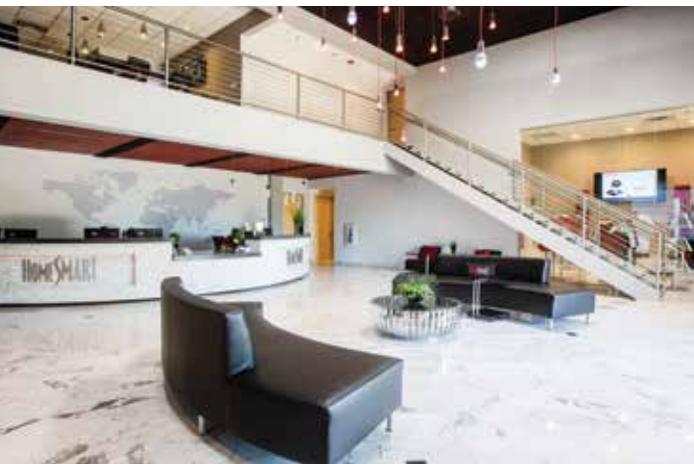
Because the technology drives consistency and quality service across the nation, it enables HomeSmart to provide centralized services from its corporate office in Scottsdale, Ariz. For instance, an agent in New York or Chicago is on the same system as an agent in Portland or San Diego, ensuring that the consumer in each location gets a consistent experience when they select a HomeSmart agent. HomeSmart's technology is oriented for the sole purpose of providing incredible customer service to consumers, agents and franchisees.

### **Simplifying Services for Brokers**

In early 2015, HomeSmart International launched its Centralized Services division, providing a menu of services to franchisees at a much lower rate than brokers would normally pay if they were to staff up and provide these services themselves. Today, services in this division include recruiting and marketing, agent support, agent retention initiatives and virtual reception, with other offerings scheduled to become available in 2017.

"Through Centralized Services, we are able to show the broker what to do and then take it a step further and even do it for them," says Bowers. "The purpose behind this is to free up the franchise owner from some of these time-consuming activities to better focus on providing leadership and guidance to agents, helping them grow."

Over the last 15 months, the recruiting arm of



*In 2015, HomeSmart International moved into its brand new, state-of-the-art World Headquarters, which features a gym, game room, zen lounge, video/photography studio, multiple training facilities, and much more inside an ultra-cool 38,000-square-foot space.*

# TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS BUILT TO SUPPORT YOUR BUSINESS

From a brokerage standpoint, having access to integrated technology means having the ability to scale and grow affordably. Likewise, to agents, the technology HomeSmart provides cuts operating expenses and saves time by having everything that is needed in one place, for free.



**REALSMART BROKER** – RealSmart Broker is the central hub from which the brokerage operates. It centralizes paperwork, broker-to-agent communications and operations regardless of whether a franchise has one office or 20. Its paperless transaction system allows for maximum efficiency by giving 24/7 access so broker/owners can quickly track and manage productivity. This guarantees smooth transaction review with a high level of accountability.

#### Key Features:

- Transaction Management
- Education
- Recruiting
- Broker Website
- Accounting
- Agent Services
- Broker Review

**REALSMART AGENT** – RealSmart Agent is the central hub from which all agent business is conducted. In this one system, agents can access all listing information, transaction documentation, business-planning goals, custom marketing materials, web-sites, and much more. This one login gives agents access to everything they need to run and grow a successful real estate business.

#### Key Features:

- Custom virtual tours
- Buyer home search
- Personal agent websites
- Listing websites
- Search engine submission of listings to 2,000+ websites
- Custom YouTube video for each listing
- Automated listing flyers
- Transaction management
- Broker communication
- Product catalog

### SMARTCALL

- **IVR MLS Integration**
- **MLS Phone Search**
  - Caller ID for lead generation
  - MLS information by text
  - Property availability for agents
  - Read description of property to customer
- **Phone System Auto Attendant**
  - Agent directory integrated with RSB agent roster
  - Auto-transfer to agent preferred phone
  - User definable touch-tone directory
  - After-hours directory
- **Centralized SmartReception (Virtual Reception)**
  - Proprietary centralized receptionist for all offices utilizing the service
  - Remote notification of visitor arrival
  - Two-way video and voice communication
  - Integration with SmartAccess for remote door unlocking/locking
  - Scheduled coverage with HomeSmart Centralized Services for when live receptionists are out to lunch or out of the office
  - Video banner advertising for recruiting, affiliates, etc., remotely managed

### CENTRALIZED SERVICES

- **Centralized Agent Services (Agent Support)**
  - Answer incoming agent questions
  - Technology support for agents
  - Remote/webinar training for agents
- **Centralized Agent Recruiting & Marketing (Recruiting Support)**
  - Marketing creative
  - Contact center - outbound calling to recruits and existing agents (retention)
  - Appointment setting
  - Email marketing
  - Video creation
  - Benefits explanation to recruits
- **Centralized SmartAccess (Remote Keycard Entry)**
  - Honeywell keycard access control
  - Integration with RealSmart Broker for agent access card management
  - Integration to SmartReception for remote door unlocking/locking
  - Full reporting of user access and auditing

### SMARTSITES (Agent Website)

- Agent-branded website
- Full IDX-enabled with powerful consumer search
- Customer relationship marketing (CRM) tool
- Comparative market analysis (CMA) tool
- Drip marketing system
- Lead capture from consumer visitors

### SMARTTOOLS (Automated Marketing Tools)

- **SmartFlyer** (Automated custom listing flyers)
- **SmartTube** (YouTube property videos for each listing)
- **SmartGallery** (Custom listing websites)
- **SmartTour** (Custom buyer tours)
- **SmartSearch** (Easy buyer searches)
- **SmartSES** (Automatic search engine submission of listings to 2,000+ websites)

HomeSmart's Centralized Services division has set more than 7,000 appointments and hired close to 500 agents to 31 franchises within the HomeSmart family. Since launching the program, two-thirds of all HomeSmart franchisees have leveraged the company's Centralized Services at varying levels. At the heart of the recruiting engine for HomeSmart is a new, fully-staffed call center, which manages all outbound recruiting calls and scheduling for the individual franchisees using the service.

"Streamlining these services for our franchisees positively impacts their brokerages by helping them grow at a faster rate while also saving money on hiring employees for these task-oriented positions, which we are better staffed for," explains Widdows.

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Founder & CEO, HomeSmart International

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In recent years, HomeSmart International has garnered much attention and many accolades for growth and future-forward plans. To date in 2016, the HomeSmart brand has increased its agent count by a net-positive 10 percent and grown its franchise base by 26 percent, with several additional brokerages slated to open in the fourth quarter of the year. Historically, HomeSmart has bucked against the tradition of the real estate industry, always thinking outside the box and looking for new ways to innovate. It's that same unique approach that has taken HomeSmart International down a less traveled path toward an end goal intended to revolutionize the way the real estate industry thinks about the integration between service and technology.

"Practicing real estate, owning a brokerage and providing a consistently amazing customer service experience doesn't have to be as hard as everyone makes it out to be," says Widdows. "No other company can provide the same quality systems and tools we do while also jumping in to help brokers grow and manage success in so many aspects of the business."

Given the technological advances HomeSmart International has made to propel the industry forward, it's obvious why agents and brokers nationwide are jumping on board to exceed goals, systemize the real estate business and provide high levels of service to consumers. **RE**

*To learn more about HomeSmart International, please visit [HomeSmart.com](http://HomeSmart.com).*

*For more information about the real estate technology landscape, please visit [RealEstateTechSucks.com](http://RealEstateTechSucks.com).*

## THE NUMBERS DON'T LIE

▶ **Inc. 5000®** – HomeSmart has held a place on the prestigious list of the fastest-growing companies in the United States for several years. In 2016, the company **ranked No. 611 out of 5000** other companies in all industries, representing a 642-percent, three-year increase on the list.

▶ **223 percent increase in agent growth** over the last five years.

▶ **Entrepreneur® Low Cost Franchises®** – HomeSmart has ranked for the last three years for being an affordable franchise option for brokers.

▶ **RISMedia's Power Broker Report** – Three HomeSmart franchises were ranked on RISMedia's 2016 Power Broker Report for their success in 2015: HomeSmart Phoenix/Denver/Palm Springs (No. 9 in transaction sides and No. 14 in sales volume), HomeSmart Evergreen Realty (No. 318 in transaction sides and No. 151 in sales volume), and HomeSmart Realty West (No. 447 in transaction sides and No. 362 in sales volume).

▶ **Tools 4 School by HomeSmart** – Each year, HomeSmart actively participates in numerous charitable outreach projects. This past summer, the company raised more than \$35,000 in multiple states to provide backpack kits and school supplies to more than 3,000 underprivileged children to prepare to go back to school ready to learn.

▶ **HomeSmart Phoenix was ranked No. 1 Residential Real Estate Brokerage** by Phoenix Business Journal.

▶ **HomeSmart Utah** grew from **zero to nearly 200 agents** in just three-and-a-half years.

▶ **HomeSmart Realty West (Carlsbad, Calif.)** grew to 450 agents in four-and-a-half years.

▶ **HomeSmart Professionals Real Estate (Rhode Island)** went from **zero to 120+ agents** in just over two years.

▶ **HomeSmart Connect Real Estate (Chicago, Ill.)** expanded from **five to 145+ agents** in two-and-a-half years.

▶ **HomeSmart Realty Group (Salem, Ore.)** joined HomeSmart in 2014 with no agents and **just surpassed 145 agents** to become the largest office by agent count in the market.

▶ **HomeSmart Evergreen Realty (Orange County, Calif.)** recruited **365+ agents in four years** under the HomeSmart brand, and is now at more than **1,100 agents with seven offices**.

▶ **HomeSmart Phoenix** grew by **more than 1,000 agents in 2015** and ranked as the No. 1 residential real estate brokerage in Arizona for the last several years.

# Conquering New Areas with a Different Model

by Gabrielle van Welie



**Mark Farrow**

Broker/Owner

**Don Sturgeon**

Principal Broker/Owner

**Jim Sparkman**

Principal Broker/Owner

HomeSmart Realty Group  
Salem, Ore.

**Region served:** Mid-Willamette Valley and Portland Metro area

**Years in real estate:** 43 years combined

**Average time on market:** 100 days

**Average sales price:** \$243,000 in the Mid-Willamette Valley

**Number of offices:** 2

**Number of agents:** 154

**How does HomeSmart help you in your day-to-day business?**

HomeSmart helps us in so many ways. The biggest support we receive as a franchisee comes from franchise services and the Centralized Services team. Centralized Services has taken an active role in our recruiting process and recently supported us in our Agent Services department. Through our agent services hotline, our agents are able to reach a capable customer service professional and receive the support they need. This has been simply amazing for our organization.

**Which HomeSmart system do you find most beneficial, and why?**

The HomeSmart systems provide so many benefits to our agents. Through the HomeSmart platform, we're able to provide an end-to-end proprietary system that helps them run their business from one place. RealSmart Agent provides them with a paperless transaction marketing system, personal website and other automated marketing tools. These are all products they would have had to get through third-party providers if they were associated with a different real estate company.

**What is your main strategy when it comes to promoting company/market growth?**

We recognize the need for promoting growth in today's digital marketplace; therefore, we focus on social media marketing for promoting the growth of our organiza-

tion and brand. For recruiting, we've been successful through our weekly email campaigns and phone touches with agents in the marketplace. Through these campaigns, we focus on promoting the culture of our organization, highlighting the fact that agents can keep more of their commissions when associated with HomeSmart Realty Group. As an organization, we've made community involvement a priority. We also use this in our marketing. We're constantly looking for agents who share our passion for community involvement.

**What is the biggest challenge when it comes to working in your region?**

When we opened our office in Salem, we had to compete with brokerages that have been in our community for many years. Our model was different. Many agents thought it was too good to be true; others couldn't imagine working remotely and not having a desk at the office. This was in spite of the fact that they admittedly spent very little time at their office desk. As time went on, and more agents joined us, other agents in our region saw that the model and the systems really are as good as advertised.

**What would you say makes a good broker?**

A good broker is available to their agents when they need them. In addition to being knowledgeable, they offer sound advice and take the time to educate and train their agents.

For more information, please visit [www.homesmart.com](http://www.homesmart.com).

## Putting Agents First

by Lesley Grand

**Roger Lee**

Executive Broker

**Abe Hamideh**

CFO

HomeSmart Realty West  
Carlsbad, Calif.

**Region served:** San Diego

**Years in real estate:** Roger, 16; Abe, 5

**Number of offices:** 3

**Number of agents:** 430

**Your firm is experiencing significant growth. To what do you attribute this growth?**

**Roger Lee:** We came into the market in 2011 just before it started climb-

ing, so timing is first and foremost. Another factor that's led to our growth is the fact that we're a hybrid, offering our agents a 100-percent commission model coupled with a full brokerage model and a full technology package. An agent can sign up with us and have a turnkey real estate presence without spending money piecemealing.

**Abe Hamideh:** One of the major reasons we've grown exponentially in such a short time is because we have the best system there is in real estate right now. And then there's our culture. Roger and I treat everyone like family. We know everybody, and we're always available for them. As our recruiter says: The 100-percent commission gets them in the door, but it's our technology and support that keep them here.

*How do you stay ahead of the competition?*

**RL:** By catering to our agents. In a traditional brokerage, it's rare that the broker gets back to an agent quickly; however, we take pride in answering their calls and emails the same day. Agents can always call me with any question they may have.

**AH:** For me, retention is the most important thing. Once agents are here, we need to take care of them. Our service and support has to be the best. We're not only affordable for them, but we also have their backs.

*What do you think your agents would say is the best thing you do for them?*

**AH:** Not only do we always bring new ideas to our agents through speakers and roundtable discussions, but we also send out emails on a quarterly basis asking for their feedback. We're truly committed to communicating with our agents and helping them when they need it so that they continue to feel invigorated.

**RL:** We're firm believers in education. In fact, we offer three to four classes a week on various topics, including contracts, how to handle objections and how to grow your business.

*Congratulations on your first-ever ranking in RISMedia's Annual Power Broker Report! What went into being recognized in this year's survey?*

**RL:** Our fee structure enables agents to work hard and be well-supported by our company, while reaping the financial rewards of their hard work without feeling like they're being nickel-and-dimed by the brokerage. Over the last couple of years, we've also recruited experienced, top-producing agents

to our company, and the reputation we have locally has enabled us to grow dramatically.

**AH:** We're changing lives and helping agents achieve their dreams. clients and team members.

*What strategies do you utilize to stand out to clients and achieve customer loyalty?*

The key is to be extremely responsive and communicate positive messages so that your client is never left in the dark. A true report card for an organization is the long-term loyalty of clientele. Those who build that rapport will enjoy long-term success. Consumers need agents to guide them through the almost limitless sources of information they're exposed to.

*For more information, please visit [www.homesmart.com](http://www.homesmart.com).*

## Seamless Organization Leads to Faster Closings

*by Gabrielle van Welie*



### **Bill Flemming**

President/CEO  
HomeSmart Connect Real Estate  
Arlington Heights, Ill.

**Region served:** Chicagoland  
**Years in real estate:** 30

**Number of offices:** 2

**Number of agents:** 151

**Favorite part of your job:** Growth (designing/opening/growing offices), meeting new agents and leading the company.

*What is the most unique way you have marketed a new listing?*

We recently had a number of properties in the same area and wanted to service all of the sellers with an open house on the same weekend, but we didn't have enough agents to service seven or eight listings. So, three of us each selected a home to sit and made signs for the others that read: "Agent on Call – Dial 847-454-1700. We will be onsite within 10 minutes to open the property for you to view." We ended up selling two of the homes that weekend.

*What is your favorite time-saving tool that you use on a weekly basis?*

DocuSign. I even sign agents up to our company

using this tool. It's my favorite by far.

*What strategies do you have in place to successfully reach out to first-time buyers?*

Social media is by far the best tool to hook buyers and sellers today. I consistently mix my personal postings with fun and unusual real estate pictures on Facebook because I want my friends and family to look at something I've posted, and show it to others or repost it themselves.

*How does your company stay flexible and current?*

Staying flexible and current begins with our online services. With our online platform, there is truly nothing that an agent is required to come into the office for. In addition to all contract documentation being processed online, agents can make remote deposits on their own for earnest money, and commissions are paid via ACH. We also have the lowest fees in our marketplace. This means our agents' personal income per sale is substantially higher than they see at most local franchise competitors. Our basic plan for an agent is just \$39 monthly with a \$395 transaction—no splits, no annual fees, etc. It's like they're running their own business. We simply oversee everything to make sure it's all done in accordance with local laws and traditions. I love the HomeSmart System. It really is "real estate made easy."

*For more information, visit [www.homesmart.com](http://www.homesmart.com).*

## Keeping Clients Engaged and Connected

*by Zoe Eisenberg*

### Bill Telford

Principal Broker  
HomeSmart Advantage  
St. George, Utah



**Region served:** Utah  
**Years in real estate:** 40+  
**Number of offices:** 4  
**Number of agents:** 180+

**Average sales price:** With our offices being spread throughout the state, our sales prices differ. For instance, the average sales price in our Northern Utah market is around \$276,000, while it's closer to \$260,000 in Southern Utah. We're basically in line with state averages, but we're starting to list and sell more higher-end homes, which will raise our

average sales price over the coming year.

**Top tip for thriving in today's market:** Recruit, train and retain your agents. We're always looking for talented, energetic and professional agents with high levels of integrity. Our agents and our employees are truly a real estate family. We care about our people.

**Best time-saving trick:** Plan your day and work your plan. Set goals and prioritize them to assist you in achieving your objectives and to follow your business plan. If you don't have a business plan, create one. Keep your objectives and your business plan at the forefront of your daily and weekly tasks to accomplish your yearly objectives, which will save you time and money.

*What are the current market conditions in your area, and how have your agents had to adapt to meet them?*

Overall, the real estate market in Utah is very healthy and active. This type of market is creating a lack of inventory, so our agents are working harder and smarter to find the right home for their buyers. This type of market also creates listing opportunities for our agents, and many times they're prospecting for listings to match the needs of their buyers. Our agents have also had to learn how to work with multiple offers and how to best handle these offers to meet the needs of their buyers and sellers.

*How do your agents work to keep potential clients engaged and connected?*

We teach our agents to listen to their clients to truly understand their needs, objectives, goals, desires and aspirations first and foremost. In addition, we train our agents to build a referral-based business by being the benchmark of customer service in every aspect of their business. They provide legendary service through their dedication to doing more than is asked or expected.

*Your team has seen an abundance of growth. How do you stay ahead of competition?*

We strive to not only be on the cutting-edge of technology and offered services, but to be the company that actually cuts the edge of our industry for others to emulate. Our goal and mission is to be the wind beneath the wings of those we work with, assisting them to soar to new and greater heights of success in their business and personal lives. Our commitment is simple: be the best and enrich the lives of others.

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