

Company changes client-realtor relations

By **MARIANNE HORTON**

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It can be addictive. For some, it's an obsession. As the Houston real estate market continues to boom, real estate Web sites such as www.har.com lure potential home buyer with interior and exterior photos of houses, write-ups about upgrades and details about neighborhoods.

And then, there's the Harris County Appraisal District Web site, where typing a simple address can lead to everything from a home's appraised value to its most recent renovation.

Yes, in the age of the Internet, the Realtor-client relationship is changing. No longer do home buyer need a key to see a home; they need a mouse. Often, clients know more about a neighborhood than the Realtors themselves, said David Houston, a River Oaks-based Realtor.

"Why should the Realtor automatically get 3 percent (commission)?" he asked. "The market is transparent, and buyers and sellers are aware of that."

Three months ago, Houston founded New Leaf Real Estate. Instead of automatically paying a real estate agent 3 percent, home buyer can earn points off his commission rate just by doing a little legwork. He encourages his clients to research a home and become familiar with an



David Houston, founder of New Leaf Real Estate

area before making the first home visit

"Based on the number of home visits, your rebate increases or decreases," Houston said.

Those who see five homes or less, earn 10 points. Those who see 10 homes or less earn one point. After 10 homes, the program goes into full service, or 3 percent, mode.

Houstonian Eric Khan recently used New Leaf to purchase his home.

"What interested me is that fact that for sophisticated buyers and sellers, the value proposition by New Leaf is great," he said. "We researched online and narrowed it down to two or three homes. This

experience saved me money and time."

Less time spent, however, does not equate to less quality, said Houston.

"If we took out 10 clients on a full-service level, perhaps over the next year, four of those would close, and we've made zero," he said. "We've paid gas and lost money. But instead, we're able to focus our energy into what we do best, negotiating."

In turn, he said, the money a client saves can be put toward bidding higher on a home and winning.

For information about New Leaf, call 713-820-4017 or visit www.newleafre.com.