



SURE CLOSE

2005 COMPUTERWORLD HONORS CASE STUDY

FINANCE, INSURANCE & REAL ESTATE

THE LEADING PAPERLESS TRANSACTION MANAGEMENT PLATFORM FOR THE REAL ESTATE, CLOSING AND MORTGAGE INDUSTRIES PROVIDES BREAKTHROUGH SIMPLICITY FOR THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND MANAGEMENT OF REAL ESTATE FILES. [20055201]

A Search for New Services



SUMMARY

SureClose® from Stewart Realty Solutions (SRS) is the leading paperless transaction management platform for the real estate, closing and mortgage industries. SureClose provides breakthrough simplicity for the digital transformation and management of real estate files. SureClose makes listing, sale, closing and/or loan files, and all of their documents online and available 24/7 for review and management enterprise-wide. SureClose delivers a turnkey paperless office solution for real estate agents and brokers, lenders, title/escrow/attorney services and MLS organizations. SureClose is the proven, secure transaction management platform that's helped satisfied customers manage more than 800,000 transactions and nearly 8 million documents online.

Robert Carrigan,
Chairman of the Chairmen's Committee

Ron Milton,
Vice-Chairman of the Chairmen's Committee

Dan Morrow,
Chief Historian

APPLICATION

In 2001, Stewart Title formed Stewart Realty Services, a service center established for the development, distribution and support of SureClose. For three years Stewart focused on the engineering of the platform and deployment within its title agency network.

On January 7, 2004, Stewart Realty Solutions (SRS), a wholly owned subsidiary of Stewart Title, was incorporated in Texas. Upon its inception, SRS assumed the management of SureClose with a strategy directed towards creating a market awareness of the benefits of a Web-based transaction management system. At the same time, SRS envisioned SureClose becoming the real estate industry's standard for transaction management systems.

As SureClose became a standard business application, Stewart's dependency on the technology increased. By mid-2003, SureClose was a mission-critical technology. On January 30, 2004, Stewart Realty Solutions acquired the assets of RealtyAssist, Stewart's partner in developing the transaction management technology.

Stewart Information Services Corp. is a technology driven, strategically competitive, real estate information and transaction management company providing title insurance and related information services through more than 7,800 policy-issuing offices and agencies in the United States and numerous international markets. Stewart delivers via e-commerce the services required for settlement by the real estate and mortgage industries. Stewart also provides post-closing lender services, automated county clerk land records, property ownership mapping, geographic information systems, property information reports, flood certificates, document preparation, background checks and expertise in tax-deferred exchanges. More information can be found at www.stewart.com.

Goals

Stewart Title Company, under the direction of Stewart Morris, Jr., made a commitment to transform our operations to a paperless environment with the ultimate goal of enhancing the real estate transaction process. For years, Stewart has capitalized on technology as means of getting closer to the paperless vision. In March 2002, Stewart began its initial roll-out of SureClose within its title operations. The integration of AIM® for Windows®, Stewart's title production application, with SureClose allows for seamless transfer of data and documents to SureClose.

With Stewart's focus on a paperless transaction, the features within SureClose continue to expand. In October 2004, SureClose implemented the eClosingRoom™, providing electronic signatures of documents in a secure environment.

Today, with more than 800 offices using SureClose, Stewart has enhanced its communication and

documents delivery, recognized and continues to achieve improved processes and productivity gains and improved the customer experience. SureClose is Stewart's best marketing tool.

Methods

SureClose delivers the transaction management platform on a standardized Microsoft® tool set comprised of SQL Server 2000, IIS, ASP, COM and Visual Basic®. The application is delivered under an ASP model, with all software and hardware hosted centrally with SureClose's mission-critical environment in San Diego, CA.

Scope

While many companies are focused on business survival strategies, Stewart envisions a future that blends time-saving technology and magnificent service from inspired professionals. In a world that demands instant access, 24/7, SureClose responds with proven technology backed by the strength of a financially-stable company.

SureClose provides users with centralized communication, management and accessibility of property listings, purchase and sale agreements, loan documents and title/settlement transaction files. This digitized format of transaction files, when combined with 24/7 online access, provides exceptional customer satisfaction by allowing users to access, view and download their transaction documents whenever and wherever they choose. The future is now with SureClose.

Achievements

The installation of SureClose within Stewart's operations has resulted in more than 800 offices utilizing the application, more than 800,000 real estate transactions online and more than 8 million documents electronically-archived for future retrieval.

SureClose users experience operational efficiencies, reduced costs and improved communication and delivery of product, resulting in an improved closing experience.

The addition of e-Signature improves the customer experience by allowing documents not requiring notarization to be reviewed and signed in advance of the scheduled closing.

BENEFITS

The traditional methods of processing a typical real estate transaction involve numerous parties with a multitude of ongoing responsibilities. SureClose allows all parties associated with a real estate transaction to have an active role from listing through closing and beyond. As a result of automatic notifications, parties remain informed and can communicate with others in the transaction in a secure, centralized Web environment. A typical closing of a real estate transaction includes the review, understanding and signature of a multitude of legal documents. With SureClose, documents can be reviewed in advance of the closing, creating a better closing experience for all involved. Additionally, those documents, typically delivered in a paper format, can now be provided on a single CD at closing. The convenience of 24/7 self-service provides a new and enhanced experience for the homebuyer and seller.

Stewart is realizing considerable cost savings by reducing our need for off-site storage while speeding up the retrieval of documents. What traditionally took hours, sometimes days to retrieve archived documents, now can be accomplished in a matter of seconds with SureClose. Those documents remain in an electronic archive format, providing a easy access by the consumer whenever he or she may need them.

The integration between SureClose and AIM, Stewart's title production application, provides increased operational efficiencies by eliminating duplicate keystrokes on order entry. Our industry-leading integration solution reduces the time on the order process.

Additionally, courier, overnight, mailing and faxing expenses are reduced with the use of SureClose since all documents can be placed online and delivered via the platform.

IMPORTANCE

In a recent survey conducted by Adams Morgan Group, LLC on transaction management systems in the closing process, results showed an overall savings of \$94.09 per file. The study compared the

traditional closing process to one using an integrated transaction management system and included personnel salaries, mailing costs (courier, shipping and faxing) and costs of inbound and outbound calls.

An integrated transaction management system, like SureClose, reduces personnel time, overhead costs such as phone calls and faxes, and shipping costs such as courier and overnight charges. In addition, an effective transaction management system can improve customer service by improving communication and providing a magnificent closing experience.

ORIGINALITY

Stewart Realty Solutions was the first to provide a transaction management system to the real estate and title industries. While other systems were in place in other industries, no one saw the potential for such a valuable communication and service tool as Stewart Realty Solutions.

Some of the firsts for SureClose include:

- Customized Security Profiles
- Customizable templates
- Online PDF and mail-merge forms
- Customized notifications
- Integration with title and escrow production system
- Customized branding feature
- e-Signatures
- File and document archiving

These have now become real estate industry standards for all other transaction management systems.

SUCCESS

After three years of SureClose implementation in more than 800 Stewart agent operations, Stewart Realty Solutions is surpassing expectations. Successes from field results include reduced phone calls, resulting in fewer interruptions and no misplaced files or documents. Productivity has increased by allowing multiple departments/branches to multi-task on the same file simultaneously. Additionally, costs associated with fax, courier and overnight delivery of documents were eliminated in some cases.

Since 2002, more than 870,000 total files have been stored online in our secure environment, 502,670 of those were in 2004 alone. From January to December of 2004, title documents filed in SureClose have increased 69 percent. Also in 2004, SureClose averaged 37,600 new title files per month, with 45,000 new title files in January 2005 alone.

However, the most impressive success experienced by SureClose is the almost 8 million total documents online and 47,000 distinct logged-in users.

DIFFICULTY

It is important to realize that a transaction management system is not simply a “plug-and-play” computer software application. An effective, successful deployment requires an office to rethink its workflow process entirely. Implementing an integrated transaction management system like SureClose requires 12 to 18 months of preparation, planning, and most importantly, buy-in from every individual in the office. Due to this, acceptance and adoption of SureClose was the largest challenge faced. Despite a corporate initiative to get all Stewart affiliate offices on SureClose, which improved installation figures drastically, adoption was the primary concern. Having technology and using it are two different issues. The main difficulty was getting people to change years of workflow practices to take advantage of this new, more efficient tool to increase office productivity. In the end, Stewart Realty Solutions is overcoming these difficulties, resulting in more than 800 offices installing SureClose, more than 800,000 transactions completed by using SureClose, and more than 8 million documents scanned into the system.

