

BY ROBERT KELLEY

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Going the extra mile is where the 40 real estate agents of the Platinum Group Realtors clock a lot of time.

"We are constantly fine-tuning our machine and offer value-added services not found with other real estate agencies," says Mike MacGuire, one of the company's seven current owners.

One of those extras is providing a "home stager," someone from the Platinum Group who preps a house to get it ready to put up for sale.

And there are many more.

"We'll pay to have a home cleaning service come in either before the house goes on the market or when the seller vacates the house. We'll hire a handyman service to fine-tune areas that the homeowner might not be able to. In some cases, we'll go as far as renting a storage unit for a couple months to improve the overall appearance of the home," MacGuire says.

"A real estate company has zero power to make buyers magically appear. Our company does have the power to make a home as attractive as possible to draw potential buyers."

The reason the Platinum Group places so much emphasis on the appearance of a house is that more buyers are shopping for homes via the Internet.

"The new Internet buyer is not using the Internet to purchase a house, but to eliminate houses by pictures alone," says MacGuire.

So if real estate agents aren't paying attention to how a home is being represented online, the home gets eliminated by many potential buyers, he says.

That's why the Platinum Group has become the first in town to use the online technique called streaming video, a sequence of moving images.

"I have quit using virtual tours because they have a fish bowl effect, distort the room, exaggerate clutter and diminish lighting," MacGuire says.

The company also has invested in a high-quality camera to take the best possible photographs of all the company's listed properties.

"We insist on taking our own photographs. Buyers aren't walking through 30 homes any more. They are physically walking through eight to 20," he says.

The Platinum Group Realtors is a relatively new Colorado Springs firm, initially formed in January 2005 by eight longtime Colorado Springs real estate brokers who



Photo by Bill Sommer

The Platinum Group Realtors strive to go the extra mile

previously had worked for other agencies.

"We all knew each other before starting the company," MacGuire says. "There has always been this crew of agents that respected one another and liked doing business with one another. We used to get together once in a while and share ideas, and talk about what is working and how are your clients getting better served. Then, finally we said, 'Why don't we do a company?'"

The partners have 116 combined years of experience in the industry.

In a little over a year since first forming, the group has found its niche in the real estate market, logging 940 transactions and \$240 million in sales last year.

In Colorado Springs, the Platinum Group has the distinction of having the largest percentage of full-time professionals with at least 15 years of real estate experience.

"If you hire one of us, you

get the whole Platinum Group Realtors," MacGuire says, adding that more than 80 percent of their clients come from personal referrals given by satisfied buyers and sellers.

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"The reality is that the consumer, whether they are a buyer or seller, doesn't hire a company to sell or buy. It's always an individual. But we got together and decided to share responsibilities. We don't

compete against one another for our clients. Ultimately, the customer wins," MacGuire says.

"Many of the listings I take are homes that have already been on the market two, even three times in a row. I tell the seller all you've done in the past is change the sign in the yard. It didn't do anything to sell the house. It's got to be price, location or condition — and if I can't do something about that there is a problem."

Usually he can.

The Platinum Group focuses on what clients want — access to information quickly and easily. One feature that has helped transactions go smoothly is having an in-house financial expert from Wells Fargo.

"That person can answer questions from both the buyers and the sellers in a low-pressure environment," MacGuire says.

Unlike agencies that capitalize on buyers' and sellers' lack of knowledge about the industry, the Platinum Group works hard to not do that.

"The most important thing is for the consumer to know what their agent is providing for them. If you poll consumers, they want a real estate agent involved in the transaction, but they also want to know what they are getting for their money," he says.

"Real estate is one of the easiest businesses to get into and one of the hardest to be successful at." ■