

# In the Press...

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## Novahomes offer positive slant on RICS figures

The February Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors' (RICS) house price survey revealed that 64.1 per cent of surveyors had reported price falls. Only one month has been worse than this; June of 1990, when 64.5 per cent reported price falls.

This is the seventh month in a row that the RICS have reported price falls by their members. The Council of Mortgage Lenders also reported 49 per cent fewer mortgages than in August last year and for lower values – making a 52 per cent reduction in the amount of borrowed money available for housing.

Mark Savill, director of Novahomes Ltd, added a positive note to falling house prices: 'These figures show what the rest of us now know as fact. The housing shortage of 2007

was not really a housing shortage at all. The reality was an over supply of cheap money that artificially stimulated demand and fuelled house prices. Now that the money has gone the house prices are falling again.

'For many agents this is calamitous – for those whose primary motive is to make profit from selling mortgages this market will be undeniably tough. For those agents who are used to selling a house from the first advert these will seem like hard times indeed. For some of us we will see the re-emergence of a market we know and love; a market where the seller who has the best presented house that represents the best value for money attracts the best buyer. A market where good estate agency is what sells houses.'

## PROPERTYFINDER.COM ACQUIRES HOTPROPERTY

The REA Group and News International announced on 9 April that their jointly held business, PropertyFinder Holdings Ltd, has acquired Sherlock Publications Ltd, the operator of the UK's sixth largest property website, HotProperty.co.uk, for £5.6million.

HotProperty.co.uk currently boasts 1,300 paying estate agency customers who advertise 170,000 listings. The deal cements PropertyFinder.com's position as the second largest competitor in the UK portal market. The PropertyFinder.com and HotProperty.co.uk websites will run in parallel, with estate agencies having their listings appear on both sites for the subscription price of just one of the sites.

Once the sites are linked, over 5,500 subscribing agents will automatically advertise their listings to over two million unique visitors on PropertyFinder.com and over 400,000 unique visitors on HotProperty.co.uk.

PropertyFinder Publications, publisher of the *London Property News* magazines, which reach over 250,000 homes each month, will take over control of *HotProperty*, *Renting* and *Overseas*, the print publications of Sherlock Publications Ltd. These have a combined monthly circulation of 120,000.

Simon Baker, managing director of the REA Group said, 'Since Gillian Kent took over as chief executive at PropertyFinder.com, we have really turned up the heat in the UK property portal market. This acquisition is a win for estate agents already advertising on PropertyFinder.com and/or HotProperty.co.uk because they will have all their properties listed on both sites, for the cost of one subscription. The result for

estate agents will be more leads at no extra cost.

This is also a win for consumers. Sellers and landlords will now have hundreds of thousands

of more potential buyers and tenants see their properties. And home hunters will now see more listings on the site of their choice – either PropertyFinder.com or HotProperty.co.uk. The sites have a different look and feel and appeal to different types of Internet user, but all the properties will be available to all of them.

'The acquisition of HotProperty.co.uk adds significant numbers of new agents and consumers to the PropertyFinder.com business at a very good price.

'As UK estate agents focus their marketing budget on quality, value-for-money Internet sites, PropertyFinder.com (and HotProperty.co.uk) is well positioned to deliver more leads at a lower cost per lead.'

Managing director of HotProperty, Shawn Luetchens, commented: 'HotProperty is excited about becoming part of the REA Group and the immediate benefits it will have for our existing customer base and of course our users as well. We anticipate a very successful future for the new PropertyFinder.com partnership.' ▶



Gillian Kent

## Hipstar

### HIPSTAR ENHANCE SERVICE

As the full nature of the Credit Crunch unravels, companies in the front line of property services are feeling the full force of the slow-down. Now is the time when the most adaptable businesses come to the fore.

Hipstar have been enhancing their service offered to agents, incorporating new proactive account management services delivered by their new support team. This will help agents manage their HIP business and minimise administrative work, while still maintaining a quality service to win the instructions. Therefore the price of the HIP must be right.

**So, how important is price versus service to your business on a scale of one to five?**

#### 5 – Very important

Agents are now offered a market leading rate with HIPs from as little as £199 + VAT\* when using the competitively priced Hipstar conveyancing service.

#### 3 – Important

Hipstar continue to drive down costs and they have reduced their headline rate for an electronic HIP to £275.00 + VAT, providing a competitive price while still enabling agents to generate additional income with volume commission overrides.

#### 1 – Not important

For an agent operating in the top end of the property market, the price of the HIP may not be important when positioned alongside the range of services offered. Hipstar HIPs are offered at a net cost allowing agents to add a margin to generate additional income for their business.

In a competitive environment, agents may need a competitive price. Pricing options, marketing packs, toolkits – no wonder Hipstar agents are winning their instructions. To find out more about these exciting enhancements call the Support Centre on 0845 4600141 or email enquiries@hipstar.co.uk.

\*The package includes an electronic version of a regulatory HIP delivered under strict service levels. Full payment of £275.00 + VAT will be taken at order with £76.00 refunded on completion.