



GUY KING

Doing the unexpected

What are property websites doing to make themselves stand out from the crowd?

Comments?

© 0044 (0)20 8332 4613

✉ editor@opp.org.uk

It's always been the Holy Grail and it was only a matter of time before someone came to the party holding it aloft: a Google-style property search engine worthy of the comparison. Check it out for yourself, it goes by the name of Globrix.

Daniel Lee, CEO, and three colleagues have worked full-time for two years to create the technology, and the marketing budget comes from media group News International. The site challenges the traditional model used by Rightmove, Propertyfinder, Primelocation and Findaproperty in three ways: Globrix lists properties for free; agents do not have to upload properties because Globrix sources the properties automatically and the information is therefore up-to-date; when users click on properties in Globrix they go straight through to the agent's website.

If agents want to stop Globrix crawling their site they can do so with a simple line of code, but it is hard to imagine many companies staring this gift horse in the mouth. For agents there is no catch and many who were growing concerned at the escalating dominance of the well-established search engines will be delighted. Users will also benefit from Globrix's usability and the wide range of criteria from which to search, including price, region, outside space, swimming pools, parking, eco-friendliness and period.

"It is often a political battle," says Lee, when I ask him about the challenges he has faced rolling Globrix out internationally. "Each country has a different system and agent association to work with. Then there is the language barrier. Eventually we will have a Globrix for UK buyers in France and a French Globrix for French buying in the UK, and so on."

Inspired by Globrix, and comparable sites such as Trulia and Nestoria, I asked the industry to tell me about its most innovative new websites. The following, for me, are the most exciting.

Surveying the field

Like Globrix, a site called PropertyPortalFeeder has noticed that agents are tired of having to dedicate staff to upload properties onto other company's search engines. PropertyPortalFeeder takes this hassle off your hands for about £40 per month.

Karen Kicks from GlobalPropertyGuide told me that her website is the "number one investors guide to buying residential property abroad, with information on rental returns, capital

growth, costs of buying, legal aspects and up-to-date reports on the markets". My first reaction was 'here we go, another estate agent pretending to be something it's not on the internet'. But in this case, my scepticism was misplaced: GlobalPropertyGuide is a well-sourced, well-referenced, genuinely global site well worth a bookmark. While you're at it, stick a bookmark on OverseasCafe, home of good overseas property articles and a proficient alert system.

Definitely worth a mention is HomeCheck, where you can buy a range of reports (each priced at between £10 and £40) for a particular UK address, including crime, schools, amenities, planning applications, environmental reports and flood risks. A similar website covering Spain, Florida and Bulgaria would be a site to behold!

It's also worth checking out Propertyshowrooms.com/search-index for an interesting new feature that produces pie charts for

Each country has a different system and agent association to work with, and there is the language barrier, but eventually we will have a Globrix for UK buyers in France and a French Globrix for French buying in the UK, and so on

Daniel Lee, Globrix

you. What have been the most searched for countries across the world in the last three days? What property type has been most in demand over the last month? You stipulate the criteria, get your pie chart and eat it.

Next up is Zoopla, which allows users to generate information about every address in the UK and from that data produces price estimates, so you can find out what the Joneses paid for their house and what it's now worth.

Amongst agents, one of the most impressive sites is DamacProperties.com, which updates unit availability every 30 minutes. It also has an online credit card facility for securing property with a deposit.

New to TheMoveChannel.com website are live auctions from the comfort of your own home via video streaming, something that Direct-Auctions has been offering for several years. Top websites often use good filters to help users navigate the content, and TheMoveChannel.com/property/all (top right hand corner) also provides a nice example of this. Video tours are also now an attractive feature on overseas property sites and TotalityRiviera does this well.

And when it comes to maps, search engine Zoomif is doing some terrific things, and on a smaller scale so too are Bonnin-Sanso and Vladi-Private-Islands, which also has for sale some gorgeous islands from where you can one day retire and let your great new website do the hard work for you.

Which is, after all, what we all want!

The Holy Grail | A Google-style property search engine worthy of the comparison has always been the ultimate goal

opp