Illinois Realtors get new safety tool to screen potential clients

The Mainstreet Organization of Realtors (MORe) in Illinois, has become the latest association to provide its members with new digital safety technology.

MORe has inked a multi-year agreement to make the background-check tool Forewarn available to all 17,000 of its members. The software makes it easier for Realtors to vet strangers before deciding whether to show them homes.

Entering a phone number into the Forewarn system, available by website and mobile app, pulls up a comprehensive report on any person associated with it.

Users can verify the identities of prospects, cross-check them against crime databases and validate information provided by them, such as financial data. The system can also fetch a person's, property and vehicle ownership history and show their tenure with a particular phone number.

"We felt it was important to provide our members with a proactive tool like Forewarn to help them stay safe and be productive," said Mike Gobber, president of MOre, in a statement.

"Realtors meet with potential clients every day, and Forewarn will allow our members to get instant reports about the individuals they meet with."

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Another safety tool that some associations have provided to their members is Real Safe Agent. It makes it easier for agents to share information on prospects, pair up with agents for showings and issue drop-in alerts to nearby colleagues.

Serving as one the latest reminders of safety risks to Realtors, a man who briefly abducted an agent during a showing was recently sentenced to 38 years in prison.

While technology can help agents minimize risks, no “app in existence will excuse agents from following best safety practices,” said Realtor Phil Faranda. Faranda is the president of Beverly Carter Foundation, an advocacy group named for an Arkansas Realtor who was murdered while showing a remote home.

Ways for Realtors to stay safe include hosting open houses with colleagues, developing an eye for verbal and non-verbal body cues and leaving at the first sign of sketchy behavior. Read more in Inman’s Essential Guide to Agent Safety.

Forewarn appears to be useful primarily because it allow agents to uncover red flags, such as arrest warrants, or establish that an inquirer has “no digital footprint,” which itself might be reason for suspicion, Faranda said.

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