

ILLINOIS

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Group plans new trail with cyber-convention

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Who says a convention has to be all about sweaty handshakes and rubbery chicken dinners?

The REALTORS® Commercial Alliance—a division of the National Association of REALTORS®—hopes to start a new trend for conventions without the travel next month with an online-only commercial real estate convention.

Over the seven-day convention attendees will have access to guest speakers via web cast, interactive presentations by exhibitors and networking through chat rooms.

The National Association of REALTORS® will still have its two annual conventions, so this event is meant to try something new for the commercial division says Bobbie Albrecht, manager of communication for the REALTORS® Commercial Alliance.

“This can’t take the place of anything that we offer,” she says. “But it’s something new to introduce people to our commercial services.”

The idea, she says, came from a drive to try something new that will make people take notice of the organization.

For the convention, the commercial alliance will be working with the Boston-based Real Estate CyberSpace Society, a company founded by John Peckham III. Peckham’s company has conducted online-only conventions mostly for real estate organizations since 2002. The idea emerged after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, when people were wary of traveling.

“There was a lot of fear at that time, and the convention business was going down quite a bit,” he says. “This took off, especially as more and more people are used to being online.”

In addition to national conferences, Peckham has been working with local and statewide groups. He has been branching outside of the real estate industry lately, working with the International Geospatial Association, which works with geographic data.

Peckham gives an organization the choice of paying him to use the licensing for his software, or hiring him to run the conference and handle the marketing.

His most recent conference in March drew 40,000 attendees from 27 countries, he says, along with 234 exhibition booths.

People, overall, were happy with the event, he says.

The upcoming commercial alliance conference may not reach the same attendance levels, as Peckham’s. There have been 3,000 pre-registrations so far, Albrecht says, along with 20

exhibitors. She expects a lot of last-minute registrations for both attendance and exhibitions.

Attending the convention is free under Peckham's business model. Those who register will have access to exhibitors, other attendees and the content from the speakers. The exhibitors will pay a fee to be included. Sponsorships will also bring in revenue.

"You can't beat free," he says.

The event will be held from June 6 to 12 and is free to attend. Go to www.commercialsource.com for more information or to register.