

Entry Name: Michigan Housing Locator

Category: Special Achievement

HFA: Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA)

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) recognized the need for an easily accessible list of affordable rental housing within the state of Michigan and led the way in achieving that goal with the implementation of the Michigan Housing Locator. The Housing Locator:

- Assists state agencies with helping low income residents find housing.
- Assists with housing concerns during a disaster relief situation.
- Markets properties with MSHDA mortgages and tax credits to current and potential state residents.
- Becomes a resource for rent comparable data.
- Becomes the primary state source for affordable rental housing.

MSHDA partnered with the Michigan Housing Council, Property Management Association of Michigan, and the Michigan Disability Rights Coalition to find a possible solution to the need for an easily maintained and updated database of rental housing within the state of Michigan. Rentlinx, LLC, an Ann Arbor, Michigan based company, had a portion of our solution and the potential to help achieve the rest of the objective.

Solution

Rentlinx offered an interactive database accessible through the Internet for entering rental property information along with pictures and documents related to the property. The entry process was accessible after a simple account setup and online prompts assisted owners through the entry of their property information with a step-by-step process. The database organized the data entered and provided simple search prompts through an Internet website. As a result, the www.MichiganHousingLocator.com website was created to adapt this useful database to meet the state's objectives. (A screen shot of the website is attached as supporting material).

The Michigan Housing Locator went live on December 1, 2006 and has experienced extraordinary growth over the past 20 months. By offering the website as a free marketing tool for rental property owners throughout the state, the housing locator has been driven by the market demand for rental housing and by its usefulness as a tool for the marketplace. When the website went live, only 1,095 properties representing 74,336 units were registered in the database by property management companies already working with Rentlinx. As of July 31, 2008, the total number of properties had increased to 13,487 properties housing 248,738 units and continues to grow. The Michigan Housing Locator has displayed 1.5 million property views over the past 12 months and during June 2008, the average daily activity by users was:

- Average Visits / Day: **1,362**
- Average Time Spent: **8.5 minutes**
- Average Pages / Visit: **11.5**

*A month-to-month progress report of the Housing Locator's growth is on page three (3).

MSHDA assisted with this growth through strategic marketing once the website was live. Various state agencies that had an expressed interest in helping find families housing were contacted and made aware of the new service, including the Michigan Departments of Human Services and Community Health. A radio campaign was launched to help alert the public in major cities that this resource was available. MSHDA employees were continuously kept in the loop and encouraged to spread the word as they performed their daily duties with community action agencies, housing contractors, and other service agencies throughout the state. Local

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Public Housing Agencies (PHA) in the state were also alerted to the website resource and informed of its capabilities and over 13,000 Housing Voucher landlords were notified of the website.

In July 2008, a modified search was added to the website to assist Housing Voucher programs with their rent comparables searches. This new and very unique feature creates a useful tool and allows the PHA community within the state to pool their resources in compiling and sharing rent comparable data by directing potential landlords for voucher holders to the website.

Functionality

The Michigan Housing Locator provides:

- Searches of registered properties by location, rent amounts and/or any descriptive word placed in the keywords search field.
- Free easy access to property registration for owners.
- Free and easy access to rental property searches for current and prospective state residents.
- Updated rental housing information available 24 hours per day and 7 days per week.
- Rent comparable searches, which help Housing Voucher programs throughout the state and help evaluate markets for development.
- Property tags for MSHDA and other housing agencies to track their loan properties.
- Renter accounts allow users to save their favorite property or properties, which helps service agencies summarize a housing list for their clients.

Summary

When and Why:

The idea began in 2005 to address the need for a list of affordable rental housing units in Michigan specifically from the need to compile a quick list of housing for Katrina disaster victims wishing to relocate in Michigan. The MichiganHousingLocator.com went live on December 1, 2006.

What it has accomplished:

The creation of an online database of rental housing units throughout the state. This useful tool provides a centralized resource for all agencies within the state (government, nonprofit, and for-profit) to assist the public in finding affordable housing in Michigan.

Why it is meritorious:

The website provides a free marketing tool for the rental housing industry, which allows the state and local PHAs to collect real time data about the rental housing markets across Michigan. The market driven website uses minimal state resources to maintain and provides Michigan residents with an accessible economic tool unlike any previous method of resolving the collection of affordable rental housing data in Michigan.

The rent comparability search provides an excellent resource for those administering Housing Voucher Programs in Michigan and significantly reduces the collection time for rent comparable

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data within close proximity to voucher program units. The free unlimited Internet access allows the PHAs in Michigan to pool their resources in collecting useful rent comparable data.

Additionally, the website provides an active up-to-date listing of available rental housing data along with property owner contact information in case of a disaster. This contact information can be used in a disaster situation to solicit donations of housing in addition to informing the rental housing public of the latest information related to current rental housing needs.

Demonstrate how the entry is responsive to the judging criteria:

The Housing Locator website has an impact on the state residents by allowing free easy access to affordable housing information within the state. The locator assists properties with MSHDA loans to receive more public exposure and lease up their vacant units. The locator assists not only various MSHDA programs (Asset Management, Housing Vouchers, Supportive Housing, and Marketing), but reaches out to all public housing agencies in the state and other state of Michigan Departments for the organization of their affordable housing needs. This tool is free through the Internet and is being utilized by any and all public and private agencies that need to use the information. The more people who use the tool, the greater its benefits to Michigan's economic recovery.

Michigan Housing Locator Statistics

Month-YY	Properties Listed	Property Increase	Units Listed	Unit Increase	Web Leads	Property Views
Dec-06	1,212	117	81,208	6,872	24	1,736
Jan-07	1,784	572	98,806	17,598	167	12,581
Feb-07	2,695	911	119,184	20,378	457	37,912
Mar-07	3,335	640	134,457	15,273	731	62,445
Apr-07	3,796	461	147,999	13,542	782	69,191
May-07	4,346	550	167,010	19,011	717	52,028
Jun-07	4,839	493	172,637	5,627	637	51,352
Jul-07	5,270	431	177,556	4,919	1,072	59,321
Aug-07	5,714	444	181,717	4,161	858	59,597
Sep-07	6,315	601	185,586	3,869	860	64,523
Oct-07	7,246	931	191,706	6,120	1,202	82,840
Nov-07	7,904	658	200,833	9,127	976	84,397
Dec-07	8,494	590	211,854	11,021	720	71,112
Jan-08	9,482	988	220,912	9,058	1,386	115,374
Feb-08	9,969	487	222,751	1,839	1,562	117,718
Mar-08	10,571	602	228,682	5,931	1,795	154,279
Apr-08	11,280	709	232,464	3,782	1,824	172,662
May-08	11,894	614	236,869	4,405	1,948	181,964
Jun-08	12,580	686	241,309	4,440	2,073	178,359
Jul-08	13,487	907	248,738	7,429	2,073	200,906

Web Leads – E-mails exchanged by prospective renters with owner's listing on the website.
Property views – Number of listings where a website user views the property details.

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Screen Shot of Michigan Housing Locator (Supporting Material)

