



CATHERINE DOMINGUEZ / SAN ANTONIO BUSINESS JOURNAL

Luis Garza, research analyst with Grubb & Ellis, uses data to publish forecasts and analyses that help with brokers in their sales.

## iBroker

From instant rental rate information to detailed mapping and analysis, today's technology allows brokers to have crucial data at their fingertips

BY CAROL SCHLIESINGER

**S**mart phones and tech advancements are simply jaw-dropping today, with myriad tools and costly functions.

But in the year after the iPad's launch, can all these cool widgets turn convenience into dollar signs for commercial real estate brokers?

Luis Garza is a research analyst with Grubb & Ellis and oversees the research and studies for the firm's Central Texas markets. Garza works with a proprietary database used to aggregate, analyze, interpret and report on economic and CRE trends that impact all levels of the local and national markets.

With the data, the firm publishes internal and external quarterly forecast reports. Garza also acquires and verifies market data related to properties, company listings, comparative listings, tenants and comparable lease and sales transactions.

Without technological advancements it would be practically impossible for Garza to do his job competitively, he says.

"Technology is always evolving. As a company we have to keep up with technology in constant ways and improve our resources," says Garza. "We have some of the best grass-roots level research in the industry. Specifically we're in most of the major markets. We've got a proprietary database, called G2. That is really the central brain

of where we collect and analyze our information."

Asked whether technology is a key tool in helping CRE professionals emerge from the downturn Garza says: "Absolutely," he says. "Any little thing that can set you apart in the clients' mind it's going to go a long way," adds Garza.

### Numbers talk

Technology and research are fundamental for commercial real estate clients looking for factual information. Many clients rely on it and don't feel comfortable making a transaction unless they have the statistics and the information on which to base their decision.

The problem: There are so many new and innovative analytical products that it's difficult to choose a few and stay focused. That's where professionals — like Garza — come in. Since he deals with the avalanche of data every day, he helps brokers and customers from being overwhelmed or misguided.

Clients often don't understand how to interpret the information, and Ernest Brown, managing officer with Grubb & Ellis, says hiring a broker can help them understand and interpret the data. Some functions allow the broker or property owner to track individual investor's activity, such as the number of times visited the Website, pages visited, number of downloads and individual activity of each investor.

"That type of information is phenomenal because then you know who is more interested," adds Brown.

Most GIS and mapping tools include flood maps, demographics, traffic patterns, existing inventory, competition, which all contribute to informed decisions for the client.

Brown adds that cell phone apps help look up facts and information from anyone's cell phone. Satellite positioning allows a person standing outside a building to instantly retrieve building statistics.

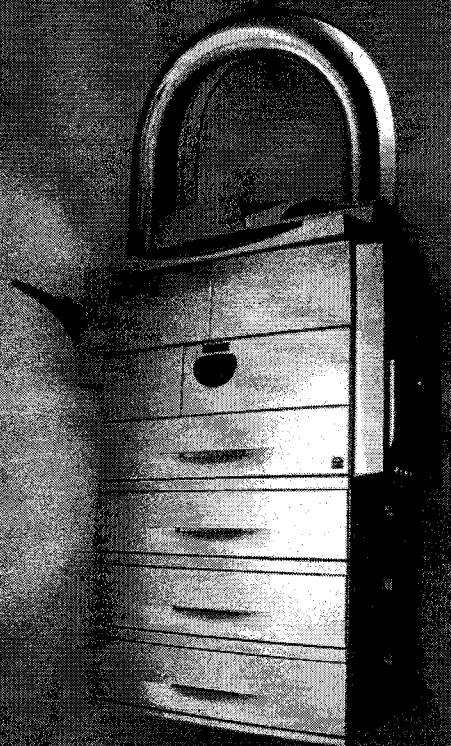
"You could be driving a client around and the client says 'Hey, tell me about that property.' That's really powerful, real powerful," says Brown.

Companies have to spend time doing homework before investing in a software package. It's important to make sure it won't burden brokers with so much in-house work that they don't have time to show clients properties.

"People have become inundated with  
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## TECH: Personal relationships still key to the dealmaking

### FROM PRECEDING PAGE

building systems that they now have to spend 25 percent of the day maintaining. They're taking themselves out of the market to maintain a system. Lots of pros and cons," says Brown.

### The human factor

Lindsey Tucker, senior vice president at Transwestern, says she uses her iPad more every day, in clients meetings or prospect tours.

But clients want results, and Tucker knows that.

"The iPad won't close the next deal for a client; however, it communicates you are making an extra effort to sell their product to produce results," says Tucker. "You and your actions represent your client: showing creativity and desire to learn new technologies can be a positive characteristic in your client's eyes. The iPad is a good tool to show that."

How important is it for CRE professionals to become up-to-speed on every itool?

It's not critically important, but depends on what line of work you're in, says Brown.

"For some clients technology is not useful to them, they want to pick my brain, get my recommendation, my advice. They want me to do analysis and talk to them about the pros and cons," he adds.

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Lindsey Tucker  
Senior VP, Transwestern

Nothing will end up replacing personal relationships between clients and brokers, says Todd Gold general manager with NAI REOC Partners. The increase of programs and apps will only be tools designed to perform an action for a person. And while technology is embraced throughout his firm, Gold says, money is not made from the tools, but from the unique people who use them correctly and listen to their clients.

### Big picture

While tools and gadgets are popping up all over the market, Gold says people need to consider the big trends, Internet accessibility, remote capabilities and going digital, adding that in his office — except for copies of leases — everything is digitized to prevent paper clutter.

With so many options out there, new technology slows down many investment decisions, says Gold.

"When there's one financial analysis tool, that's great. But when you have six, and each one is going to take you a couple of hours to investigate, now you're looking at spending a couple of days just to make comparisons," he adds.

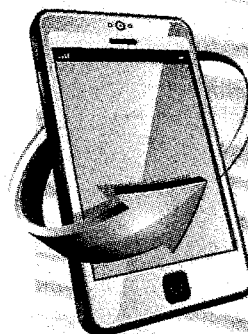
From a technology standpoint there are a lot of new applications that make companies and brokers more efficient, says Kevin Roberts, general manager at Transwestern.

"Cloud computing is a way for client and brokers to have real time information available to both parties and can even view the same document being changed," adds Roberts.

Looking at the next five years, Gold says the amount of info professionals can access will increase. Remote access will become second-nature, where one can open an iPad and access the Website in the client's office and even take a virtual tour of your destination before you arrive.

"All of it is here to stay," says Brown.

CAROL SCHLIESINGER is a San Antonio freelance writer.



### Commercial Real Estate Technology Tools

**1. Costar** - A commercial real estate version of MLS that provides information such as space for lease, property for sale, fully-leased inventory, property and market analytics, key tenants, competitor activity and more. Requires paid subscription. Website: [costar.com](http://costar.com)

**2. Real Capital Analytics** - A portal with a database and software that provides a wide range of market information for properties and portfolios worth \$5 million or more. Subscription based. Website: [rcanalytics.com](http://rcanalytics.com)

**3. LoopNet** - One of the most utilized websites for searching CRE. Free for users and funded by real estate firms who advertise their properties on the site. Lists more than 780,000 commercial properties for sale and lease. LoopNet operates the largest and most heavily trafficked commercial real estate listing service online with more than 4 million registered members and 1.5 Million average monthly unique visitors. Website: [loopnet.com](http://loopnet.com)

**4. Smartphones and PDAs** - Zillow Real Estate apps are made for iPhones, iPads, Androids and Windows at [zillow.com](http://zillow.com); eFastInfo is a new app that allows brokers to list everything instantly. Website: [eFastInfo.com](http://eFastInfo.com); and ESIGNControl, a new Apple iPhone application from Smart Mobile Solutions. Available now from the iTunes® store, ESIGNControl enables you to use your iPhone to track, view and control documents sent for electronic signature.

**5. LandVision** - Because real estate is all about location, it's important to perform your research, analysis and decision making from a spatial perspective. LandVision™ is a rich mapping solution that gives you access to comprehensive property and geospatial data, powerful analysis and visualization technology, and collaboration features in an intuitive online tool. Website: [digimap.com](http://digimap.com)

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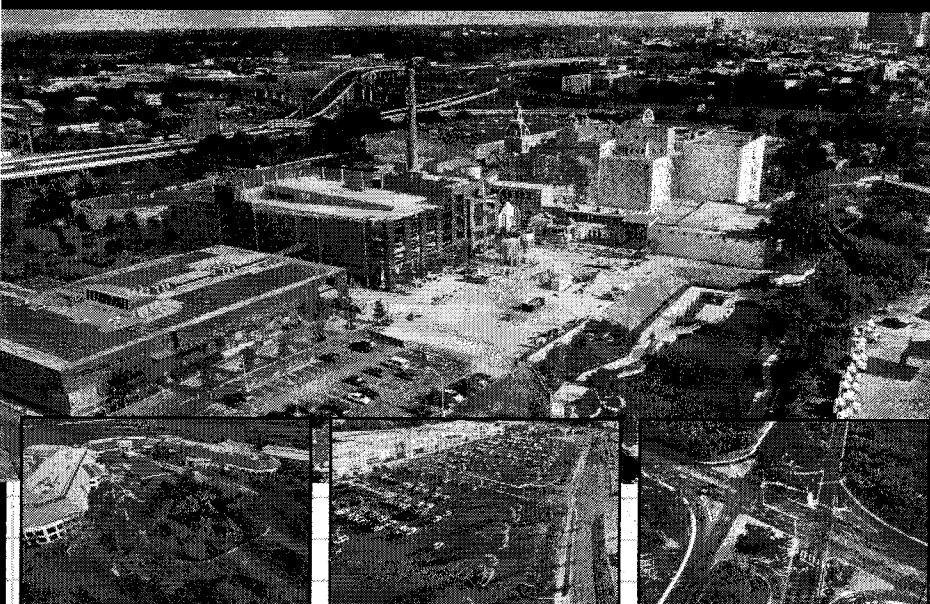

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