

NorthstarMLS Announces Security Initiative

October 27, 2008: NorthstarMLS has recently taken important steps to face a challenge that is prevalent in our entire industry – that of data security – and we wish to share information about this initiative with you, our subscriber. NorthstarMLS made it possible for you to access the MLS system from any computer with Internet connectivity. As a result, your ability to communicate with clients increased ten-fold. However, with this convenient method of access comes a big challenge – specifically protecting our valuable MLS data from misuse and theft.

While hackers are an ongoing challenge for the entire technology industry, our biggest threats are people and companies who shouldn't have access to the MLS and are logging in with passwords they have either been given or have obtained through other unauthorized methods. Often, real estate professionals do not realize when they give out their login to one trusted person or company, that person may tell another, and eventually scores or even (in some documented cases) hundreds of people gain access. Even if a member never shares their password, it can be stolen or guessed. That risk can be somewhat reduced by using a very complex password and changing it often – but that's difficult to do for most users, doesn't fully solve the problem either, and typically results in the user writing the password down. Because of password sharing and theft, MLS organizations and MLS vendors have estimated between 10 and 25 percent of user logins are not legitimate dues paying members of the MLS.

Limiting access to the information behind the MLS login is important for many reasons. First, there is a lot of sensitive information stored within the listing, including showing instructions that in the wrong hands can lead to burglary and other crime. Second, many of our members now store personal information about customers and clients in the MLS in the form of contact management and prospecting applications, and that information can be misused by someone else logging into your account. Third, as MLS organizations around the country explore integration options with transaction management systems and other data sensitive systems, the MLS becomes the front door to a host of consumer and financial information protected by federal legislation. The need to protect this information is urgent!

In the near future, NorthstarMLS will be implementing a proven security technology that has been in use by millions of people in the private industry and government for over a decade. This solution was researched at length by Clareity, a well-respected real estate consulting company. Several MLS vendors, including our current MLS vendor, are implementing this solution. In addition, this technology is being supported by many well known third party software vendors such as Wyldfyre and eNeighborhoods.

As this security initiative moves forward, NorthstarMLS will provide you with more detail information about how it will work, and how we as MLS members can appropriately protect access to the sensitive information entrusted to us.