

Mortgagebot Launches an 'Orbitz' for Mortgage Loans

BY SCOTT KERSNAR

MEQUON, WI - Leveraging its deep integration with 250 of the 700 lenders on its system, Mortgagebot here has launched a direct-to-consumer site, Mortgage Marvel.com, to give mortgage shoppers the initial information they are looking for by having them anonymously input just three pieces of information: loan amount, property value and ZIP code.

When search results are returned, those shoppers are able to get a detailed and accurate list of closing costs as part of the anonymously generated rate-and-fee quote. If they want to transact immediately, shoppers can hit the submit button to the lender they select. Twenty minutes later, an accurate GFE is sent out to them.

Mortgagebot said the launch is timed to capitalize on the prediction that the Internet will be the dominant mortgage origination channel within five years now that 70% of prospective borrowers shop online for mortgage rates and fees.

Mortgagebot president and CEO Scott Happ told National Mortgage News that it is no longer sufficient for mortgage rate-and-fee portals to display sample rates because borrowers will expect the "same pure transparency around fees and closing costs" they get with airline sites like Orbitz and Travelocity "where you can actually take advantage of what you see. What we have done here," he said, "is create the first genuine mortgage shopping site where the rate-and-fee information is real time and actionable."

The site is designed to enable community banks, thrifts and credit unions to compete directly with mortgage-rate portals such as Bankrate and LendingTree, he said. "The problem today," said Mr. Happ, "is that consumers can't get easy,

convenient and anonymous access to instant, relevant and fully disclosed loan rate and fee comparisons without spending significant time online and without revealing large amounts of sensitive personal data."

Mr. Happ said the Mortgage Marvel launch will be in the beta phase "well into 2008" following a two-year planning and implementation process. To cater to local markets, he said, "We are actually building in a new parameter in January that will allow mortgage shoppers to establish a radius variable: 'Show me all the lenders that have a brick-and-mortar presence within a mile of my home or office.'"

During the beta phase there is no charge to Mortgagebot users to be integrated with the site, Mr. Happ explained, but his goal is to make Mortgage Marvel a household word. "Ultimately, as we determine the acquisition costs to bring consumers to the site, we will ascribe some price to it. But we have a profitable growing business, and this is designed to make our clients more successful."

This is actually the second launch of the Mortgage Marvel site. "We acquired the URL nine years ago," recalled Mr. Happ. "But we didn't have the critical mass then to take advantage of it." Back in 2000 the company first launched Mortgage Marvel to let consumers "obtain real-time comparisons of rates and fees from leading online mortgage lenders" by aggregating E-Loan.com, iOwn.com, mortgage.com, QuickenMortgage, Microsoft HomeAdvisor and mortgagebot.com on one site. The idea, Mr. Happ explained at the time, was to give consumers the full benefit of a transparent shopping environment in order to bring the Internet channel to maturity.