



POWERFUL, PROFITABLE CONNECTIONS

How Top Firms Are Finding Their Best Resources Within The Realty Alliance

By RISMedia Staff

Clockwise from top left: Michael Scarafle, Carolina One Real Estate; Lacey Conway, Latter & Blum; Leesa Rispoli, Coldwell Banker D'Ann Harper; DeAnn Golden, BHHS Georgia Properties; Steve Brown, Crye-Leike REALTORS®; Matt Rand, Howard Hanna; Sheryl Chinowth, Chinowth & Cohen; Robin Sheakley, Sibcy Cline REALTORS®; Helen Hanna Casey, Howard Hanna Real Estate Services; Phil Soper, Royal LePage; Casey Bryan, BHHS Florida Properties Group. Center: Craig Cheatham, The Realty Alliance (top); Pat Shea, Lyon Real Estate.

Leaders of top full-service brokerages provide resource after resource for their salesforce and staff day after day. But who supports these leaders? Who supplies them with their next great idea? Who furnishes insightful analysis and critique of that new program they are considering launching? Who gets them key intel from the front lines across all other markets? Who delivers proven solutions to the challenges they are facing?

For the more than 50 companies that comprise The Realty Alliance (TRA), the answers are simple. The organization, founded 27 years ago through the merger of two “mastermind” groups, has become a go-to source for keeping leaders of some of the largest brokerages fresh with the best, tested ideas for staying on top. This fusion produced an entity of unmatched professionalism.

And the group is in a rare mood to expand in 2024 to add to the already large pool of great ideas and to allow more extremely large firms to benefit from the powerful exchange. Member firms generally exceed \$750M in volume or 6,500 transactions annually.

“Nothing has supported our growth and success like The Realty Alliance,” says Lacey Conway, CEO of Latter & Blum, which is based in Louisiana but has significant operations in Texas and Mississippi as well. “We can point to significant, tangible, positive impact on our bottom line as a result of our participation in TRA over the years. And in challenging times like these, our small investment pays even more important dividends.”

The ‘Who’ Matters

Members of the network tie its unique value proposition to being the only industry group that connects leaders of the most successful large-scale, full-service real estate companies across all brands and ownership groups.

“One could easily be a bit star-struck upon stepping into a gathering of The Realty Alliance,” says Craig Cheatham, president and CEO of

the organization. “And to see these stars actually aligned—not just leaders of the largest firms on the planet, but people whose names are literally on the door. In addition to the giants in our industry, we also have the next generation of leaders already actively participating, making it a comprehensive assembly of all the best and brightest.”

Operating such large companies creates challenges and presents opportunities smaller firms do not experience, Cheatham explains. Connecting with similarly sized organizations delivers solutions top brokerage leaders cannot find elsewhere.

“Built on the personal relationships created by bringing together the best operators in the industry, The Realty Alliance combines advocacy, a practical understanding of high-level industry issues and real-world actionable items that I can take back and implement at my company,” says Michael Scarafale, CEO of Carolina One Real Estate, based in South Carolina. “This combination makes The Realty Alliance’s value proposition not duplicated by anyone else.”

“These talented women and men run large, complex businesses like ours, and can understand our operational and strategic challenges,” says Phil Soper, president and CEO of Royal LePage, the largest real estate company in Canada.

Creating a Next-Level Exchange

A deep level of trust within The Realty Alliance means greater depth of sharing and a willingness to go above



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and beyond to assist fellow members, which further leverages the high level of expertise among those developing solutions and strategies for their peers.

Large firms need to drill deep into the issues to receive value, and typical industry conversations remain too general to be helpful. However, The Realty Alliance has developed specific formats, for both in-person and virtual discussions, that bring out timely, relevant and practical intel and strategies participating firms can implement in order to “move the needle” on profitability.

COVER STORY



Helen Hanna Casey of Howard Hanna Real Estate and Mike Pappas of The Keyes Company are representative of the top-level leaders from top-level firms who participate in the organization.

"I have never attended an event of The Realty Alliance that did not have direct, positive and immediate impact on our company, thanks to the meetings they organize," says Casey Bryan, president of Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Properties Group, based in Florida. "We consider our membership in TRA to have direct, positive impact to our company operation and financial success."

"I've known businesspeople who dismiss idea-sharing peer groups for being unstructured gabfests," says Soper. "But The Realty Alliance meetings are well-organized, with just the right mix of conference-style expert presentations and formal, moderated and highly confidential small-group gatherings. The balance is excellent."

"For the many years I have been in the real estate business, and in all the meetings I have attended, The Realty Alliance provides by far the most top-notch quality of experience at every meeting," says Sheryl Chinowth, founder and CEO of Chinowth & Cohen, REALTORS®, based in Oklahoma.

Where Struggles Meet Solutions

A key to the difference in the ex-

changes within The Realty Alliance is an environment that encourages vulnerability. Posturing is absent when these leaders gather. Only by sharing struggles and failures do they come away with meaningful solutions.

"If leaders are looking for transparent conversations and collaboration, The Realty Alliance is the right spot," says Heather McColly of McColly Real Estate, based in Indiana. "Members aren't afraid to say, 'We have struggles, here they are, let's talk solutions.' To me, that's extremely valuable for growth."

"The transparent and brutally honest feedback I got from my 'Forum' on some of my biggest challenges was invaluable," explains Rod Messick, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Homesale Realty in Pennsylvania. "Many of us are working on similar challenges, and the idea sharing on those issues was on point."

"The learning opportunities from format to content are unparalleled in my experience as a real estate professional," says Tom Simmons, broker/owner of Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate The Good Life

Group in Nebraska. "Craig and his team artfully place just enough structure to guide the conversation while providing an environment for organic and spontaneous information-sharing that, in my estimation, is incredibly beneficial."

'Forum' Format Delivers Tangible Results

Over the years, the network crafted its own framework for its intimate discussions modeled from a system utilized by the Young Presidents Organization (YPO), a worldwide network of chief executives across all industries. TRA's format places each member company in a "Forum" led by specifically trained peer moderators who keep the discussion focused and productive. The small-group dynamic ensures each participant leaves the Forum meeting with his or her questions answered, and challenges addressed. Hand-wringing is not allowed. Discussions focus on what participants can control and on increasing profitability, growing marketshare, improving efficiency and reducing expenses. Forums also separate competitors, allowing more than one firm in a market to belong.

"The 'Forum' groups alone are priceless," explains Pat Shea, president and CEO of Lyon Real Estate in California. "Members are remarkably transparent in sharing both their challenges and opportunities. Subsequently, they are generously rewarded with advice from the best, brightest and most experienced leaders in our business."

In an industry known for having a large number of meeting opportunities from which to choose, members of The Realty Alliance find TRA events deliver like no other event.

"I only need to attend The Realty Alliance twice each year to stay up to date on everything going on in the industry and to keep our business on track with the latest opportunities,

strategies and technologies,” says Matt Rand, president of Howard Hanna in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

“While there are so many demands on our time, I can say that I prioritize the TRA meetings first in my calendar for three years out, as the return on investment and the return on opportunity is worth its merit,” adds DeAnn Golden, president and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Georgia Properties.

Curating Communities Beyond CEOs

Setting The Realty Alliance apart from all other industry networks is the way the organization supports so many departments and affiliated businesses, not just the leaders at the top of the real estate organization. Member firms are large enough not only to have employees assigned to various functional areas, but also to have multiple staff members in those departments. TRA members generally have whole marketing departments, full-time professional development directors, multiple recruiters as well as financial and human resources teams. Add to that affiliated businesses such as mortgage, title, insurance and property management.

“We’ve learned so much from other members that has been transformational for our businesses,” says Rand. “And this goes well beyond just real estate brokerage and each department within that side, but also in mortgage, title and insurance.”

Brokerage leaders beyond the CEO enjoy curated communities comprising those who fulfill their specific role from companies who operate at similar scale and with business models that deliver high levels of support to their agent salesforce.

“The Realty Alliance has been an invaluable partner to our learning and development team, recognizing that in large firms, the role of directors

of training, learning and development is pivotal,” explains Jeffrey Scott Stanton, senior vice president of learning and career development at Douglas Elliman, based in New York. “Through this network, TRA has played a crucial role in elevating Douglas Elliman’s commitment to excellence, providing a platform where collective insights and innovations propel our training initiatives to new heights.”

“More than 20 years ago, when I was launching my career in management, I was so fortunate to be able to attend TRA training, recruiting and marketing meetings, and to this day, I consider it some of the best training, insight and exchange of ideas I have experienced,” says Golden. “As my career progressed, I was able to help other departments participate in a multitude of areas of focus that TRA offers, from IT, recruiting, CFO, HR and all of our affiliated businesses (mortgage, title, property management, insurance, etc.)”

Supporting Each Business Line

Affiliated businesses have been an important part of the market dominance of TRA members, and The Realty Alliance’s support of each of these business lines sets the organiza-

Curating Communities

In addition to supporting those at the top level of each member brokerage, TRA curates intel- and idea-sharing communities for the following department and affiliated business leaders:

- CFOs/COOs
- Marketing
- Recruiting
- Training
- Human Resources
- CIOs
- Property Management
- Mortgage
- Title
- Insurance

tion apart from other industry groups.

“Joining forces with The Realty Alliance is a symphony of collaboration where industry players come together to share ideas, support one another and cultivate growth in a uniquely non-competitive space,” says Morgan Detvay, director of property management for Rental Management One, a subsidiary of Real Estate One, based in Michigan. “It’s not just about growing businesses; it’s about building a community where success is a shared melody, and the crescendo is



COVER STORY



Deep relationships that span decades are typical in the group, such as that of Jim Litten of F.C. Tucker and Bill Raveis of William Raveis Real Estate.



Ted Dentice and John P. Horning of Shorewest, REALTORS® engage in a "Forum" discussion with Michael Saunders of Michael Saunders & Co.



Pat Riley of Allen Tate, REALTORS®, and Harold Crye and Steve Brown of Crye-Leike, REALTORS® listen to a peer share details of a successful program.

the collective rise of all involved. The Realty Alliance is without question the very best resource for our property management business."

Throughout each year, The Realty Alliance facilitates vigorous discussions among leaders from affiliated title companies, mortgage firms, in-

surance agencies and property management operations. While industry associations dedicated to each of those industries serve as a resource for these leaders, no other organization connects them with others who share the common situation of being affiliated with a large residential real estate firm.

Leveraging Group Buying Power

From its earliest days, The Realty Alliance was designed to facilitate group buying power, leveraging the group's size and strength to secure more favorable pricing and terms from key providers than even large companies could secure on their own. Some of these programs deliver savings (or even revenue) to the brokerage itself. Other times, each firm's agents enjoy the savings. A new program set for 2024 will save customers and clients of TRA firms money directly, as well.

"Above and beyond the positive financial impact we received from The Realty Alliance's regular programs, the discounts and revenue shares TRA negotiated on our behalf more than covered our dues investment," says Joan Docktor, retired president of

Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Fox & Roach, REALTORS®, covering multiple states in the Northeast.

"The Realty Alliance programs have consistently delivered a tremendous return for our company," says Shea.

Messick concurs. "After only one meeting with The Realty Alliance, it was clear our investment would yield amazing results," he reports.

The Voice for Large Brokerages

While brokerage leaders are busy running their companies, they often need an advocate at the table when decisions are in play regarding real estate policy and practice. The Realty Alliance provides them that united voice and ensures their experience, expertise and insight are included in the process.

"Having the collective influence and intel of TRA has been invaluable for our company," says Robin Sheakley, president of Sibcy Cline, REALTORS®, based in Cincinnati.

"Membership in The Realty Alliance is about more than the long list of benefits we receive," adds Michael Zagaris, CEO of PMZ Real Estate in California. "It is also about each major firm's opportunity to work together to advance our industry."

The business case for belonging to TRA is strong. Each benefit, applied across the large scale of eligible firms, nets real, positive impact to the bottom line.

"When I was invited to join TRA, I committed to myself to give it a try for one year," says Bill Riss, the now-retired owner of Coldwell Banker Bain operating in Washington and Oregon. "It was one of the best decisions I made for the success of our enterprise." **RE**

Firms interested in learning more about The Realty Alliance and the process for applying for membership should reach out to Craig Cheatham at Craig.Cheatham@TheRealtyAlliance.com.