



# Syndication Resource Guide

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*Updated March 2017*

## Introduction

The purpose of this reference guide is to provide our Participants (brokers) and Subscribers (agents) the information they need to manage online advertising through syndication. Syndication comes in many forms, both MLS and Non-MLS sponsored. This guide will inform you of the risks and rewards of syndication, MLS sponsored syndication options, and the other syndication options available outside of the MLS.

### *What is Syndication?*

Syndication is a method for Participants to authorize distribution of their listing data to consumer portals hosted by 3<sup>rd</sup> parties. Syndication allows a Participant's listings to appear on national portals such as Zillow, Trulia, Yahoo!, Front Door, and Hot Pads.

MLSSAZ has a dedicated syndication partner, ListHub Syndication, that manages our syndication service. ListHub works with the MLS to obtain a data feed and, per the Participant's instructions, will distribute listings to real estate websites. From 2011 to 2015, the Point2 Syndication service was available to our Participants. In 2014, Point2 merged with ListHub to form a single syndication service.

### *Is Syndication the Same as IDX?*

No. Internet Data Exchange (IDX) and Syndication are two different programs. IDX (or Broker Reciprocity) is a program that will allow Participants to display listings from other brokerages on their own office and agent websites. Simply put, IDX is the program that manages the listing search utilities on internet displays owned and operated by offices and agents.

Although IDX and Syndication may seem to be similar, the two concepts have one key difference. IDX is a program that is created by the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR). NAR gives MLSSAZ a strict set of guidelines on participation in the program and the display of the listings. These guidelines are monitored and enforced by MLSSAZ. The rules of IDX cannot be modified and do not apply to online displays that are not owned and operated by other MLS Participants or Subscribers.

### *How are Listings Syndicated?*

There are many ways listings are syndicated. The most common way to syndicate listings is through an MLS sponsored syndication service. MLSSAZ has partnered with ListHub to provide syndication services. As of April 2015, MLSSAZ has also established a direct syndication agreement with the Zillow Group to power the Zillow Group websites. MLSSAZ also has a direct agreement with realtor.com

Several non-MLS sponsored syndication services exist. Many franchisors will syndicate listings on behalf of their franchises. Brokerages that are not affiliated with a particular franchise may choose to directly syndicate listings to certain websites. Website providers, virtual tour companies, and online advertising/magazine publishers may also provide syndication services.

### *Participant Decision*

It is important to understand that all advertising, including syndication, is the decision of the Participant and the Participant is ultimately responsible for all advertising for all properties in their brokerage. If you are an agent and presented with an opportunity to syndicate, remember to get permission from your broker.

## **MLS Sponsored Syndication**

MLSSAZ has partnered with ListHub for syndication services. Each syndication service provides Participants with the option to syndicate office listings, which sites to syndicate to, and optional reporting and additional subscription services.

### *The Concept*

The working of MLS Sponsored Syndication is relatively simple. MLSSAZ has established a partnership with ListHub to offer syndication services for our Subscribers as a free Subscriber service. If the Participant/broker would like to have listings from his/her office syndicated, they would create an account on the ListHub website.

Once the office broker has created an account with ListHub, they can select which channels to enable.

### *ListHub*

ListHub syndication network sends listings to internet channels that power real estate websites. With ListHub, Participants can opt into any of the available network channels. ListHub Syndication service is a free service for all MLSSAZ participants. ListHub has additional subscription services for participants and their subscribers. To create an account and learn more about the ListHub network, go to [www.ListHub.com](http://www.ListHub.com).

ListHub provides a Scorecard service that will summarize offerings of a particular channel. The scorecard displays information about the channel, features of the listing display (including if Open Houses are displayed), and the terms and conditions if you choose to syndicate your listings to that particular channel. To view the ListHub Scorecard, visit <http://publ.com/OIRZRho>.

ListHub employs policies to help ensure the accuracy of the data that is distributed

### *ListHub's Real Estate Network*

National real estate franchise websites that are not operated by a local brokerage, like those belonging to Century 21 or Keller Williams, do not fit into the general model for IDX or traditional syndication. They are real estate search websites that will forward leads to their local franchisees. In the past, these national franchise websites would forward traffic to an approved IDX website based on location.

Many of these franchise websites have given up the model of forwarding traffic and have opted to create a single national search utility for their website. ListHub has created the Real Estate Network (REN) which will allow Participants to opt into national real estate franchise websites like they would any other syndication channel. All leads from websites powered by REN will go to a local franchise owner and not the listing company or listing agent.

### *Point2 Syndication*

In 2014, the Point2 Syndication service was purchased by ListHub. In January of 2015, Point2 syndication services were discontinued.

### *Zillow Group*

Beginning in April 2015, MLSSAZ has entered into a syndication agreement with the Zillow Group to license a Participant's listings to the Zillow Group. The Zillow Group operates the Zillow and Trulia websites. They also provide listing searches for affiliated websites like Yahoo! Homes, AOL Real Estate, and FrontDoor.com.

**MLSSAZ** has created two levels of Zillow Group syndication. First is labeled Zillow Group. This will send your company's Active listings to the Zillow Group for use on their websites. Second is Zillow Group Enhanced. The enhanced feed will send all Active, Pending, and Sold listings for your company to the Zillow Group websites. Please select which one you would like for your company. Please do not select both.

### *REALTOR.com*

MLSSAZ has a long standing relationship with realtor.com that allows our members to have listings posted on realtor.com. realtor.com is not controlled by ListHub syndication. The realtor.com control is available in the Export options in the flexmls listing maintenance module.

## *Questions to ask before enabling syndication or selecting an Internet Channel*

Do these sites represent me and my listings in an acceptable way?  
Is the display of the listing and my contact information acceptable?  
What website publishers have I enabled and am I happy with the return I am receiving?

### **Non-MLS Syndication**

When syndication takes place outside of the MLS, Participants and their Subscribers need to take extra care that the listing information is accurate and up to date. In cases of Non-MLS Syndication, MLSSAZ will not be able to assist should any problems arise.

It is also important to know what sources are distributing your listing data beyond the MLS. Franchise organizations, virtual tour companies, website developers, and magazine/online publishers are just a few of the most common sources of Non-MLS Syndication.

### *Franchise Syndication*

Franchisors may have a separate syndication program that is activated for all of its franchisees. Typically the franchisor already has a back office software platform or transaction management system that contains listing information that is separate from the MLS. It is from this software that listing information will be syndicated automatically. It is important to keep back office software up to date to ensure accurate data is sent.

Currently, ListHub syndicates on behalf of many franchisors, Keller Williams, Assist-2-Sell, and Realogy franchises are just a few.

### *Direct Broker Syndication*

Some Participants have opted to syndicate without the help of the MLS. In this case, the Participant would set up a data feed directly to internet channels of their choice and maintain that data feed outside of the MLS. It is important for the Participant to be sure that all listings are up to date to ensure accurate data is sent.

### *Third Parties*

Your listings may be distributed through a variety of third parties. Does your website developer syndicate your listings on your behalf? Many website developers

indeed re-distribute your featured listings. It is common practice for virtual tour companies to re-distribute your listings as well.

If you place a classified ad for your listing, there is a chance that the classified publisher will have a deal with internet channels to accept those ads.

The lesson here is to be aware that these practices are common and to be sure to keep all your advertisements up to date. Agents, don't forget to receive broker permission to syndicate listings.

### *Direct Input*

The final method of adding listings to syndication websites is by direct input. The direct input method requires an individual to input each listing to each website directly. Direct input also requires individual maintenance of each listing on each website. Direct input is generally considered to be the most unreliable way of listing syndication.

Although it is not technically syndication, Craigslist is a topic for online marketing. Some web services, like IDX or Virtual Tours, may post your listing on Craigslist. It is important to remember if your listings are going to Craigslist so they can be manually updated or removed.

## **Syndication Risks & Rewards**

Listing syndication can be a way to increase exposure of your listings on the Internet. Listing syndication could expose your listing to potential buyers.

Listing Syndication can also come with considerable risks and challenges. Are your listings being portrayed in a manner to which you are comfortable? Are syndication channels abiding by state and local advertising laws? Are you and your agents paying to receive leads from your own listings?

### *Things to Know*

#### **Know Your Rights!**

What rights are you giving up when you choose to syndicate? Each syndication channel has a Terms of Use or End User License Agreement (EULA) available that will dictate their use of your listing data. The Terms of Use may indicate whether Derivative Works can be created and what those Derivative Works may be. When syndication is managed by ListHub or MLSSAZ, no syndication channel is allowed to use the listing data to create a new product to sell back to agents and brokers, syndication channels may use the data to enhance their public offerings, like creating an estimate of value for a property or continued use of property images after the property is off the market.

#### **Are You Getting Exposure?**

While it is required for the all channels on the ListHub network to give credit to your office for the listing content, the level of exposure of the listing office and agent will vary. Check websites to see how your office and agent name appears and if contact requests will go to you.

Some syndication channels will require you to claim your listings to get the leads. In the case of claiming listings, the listing office is noted somewhere in the body of the listing information. Often, links to contact other agents will be in a more prominent location at the top of the page until the listing is claimed by the listing agent. Each syndication channel will have their own way to claim your listings.

#### **Where Are Your Listing Really Going?**

Syndication channels are prohibited from sending your listings to third parties, but syndication channels may have several business models. A syndication channel may have several sites that they power. This comes in two forms. Powered By Sites, and Powered By Widgets/APIs. A powered by site is when an entire website's real estate search feature is powered by a syndication channel. For example, Yahoo! Homes is powered by Zillow. A Powered By Widget is when a real estate website will have a widget embedded inside the main page. Trulia Widgets are on several sites. Either way, your listings are not sent to these third parties.

#### **Enhanced Listings/Upsells**

While most syndication is free to agents and brokers, some channels may have a

premium package that may be for sale in the form of enhanced listings, premium placement, or additional advertising.

### Re-Syndication

Syndicating your listings through a third party may result in the idea of re-syndication. Re-syndication is the when an online publisher sends your listings to other websites. An example would be advertising in a printed magazine that also includes your listing on the magazine's website. The publisher would then re-syndicate your listing to another website. Always check your advertising contracts for additional websites that they may be re-syndicating to.

### What About Accuracy?

Data accuracy is a big concern. Are your listings outdated? Are there duplicates? Generally speaking, if the MLS is the source of listing data, it will be accurate. MLSs work with listing syndication services like ListHub to ensure that the listings are timely and accurate. In most cases, inaccurate listing information is coming from one of the Non-MLS Syndication services.

Many studies have shown that the MLS, Franchises, and Offices have the most accurate data. In most cases when listing information is out dated, it is coming from sources outside the MLS, office, or franchise.

### Duplication of Efforts and Listings

Syndication can come in many forms and you may be duplicating your efforts, which can ultimately take more time and effort to maintain and keep track of. Duplicating your channels can also end up with multiple copies of your listing on the internet, making it difficult to trace the source if there is a problem. If you decide to use multiple syndication methods, consider reducing duplication by not selecting the same channel through multiple syndicators.

## **Should I Syndicate My Listings?**

Listing syndication is ultimately up to the MLS Participant of each office. The Participant needs to assess whether listing syndication fits within their advertising strategy. If syndication fits in with an office's marketing and advertising strategy, ListHub has partnered with MLSSAZ to offer syndication services to your brokerage.

While MLSSAZ cannot tell you what the right move is, we hope that this document will give you the necessary resources to make an educated decision. The topic of syndication is always in motion and can change frequently. As the topic changes, this document will be updated to reflect the current status.

## Glossary of Terms

**Channel** - A public (non-agent/broker) website to which syndicators distribute data; Portal. Not regulated by MLS rules. Zillow, Trulia, and Front Door are examples of Channels.

**Aggregator** - A term used to describe an entity that compiles and stores listing data.

**API (Application Programming Interface)** - A set of rules and specs that allow communication from one software platform to another.

**Derivative Works** - Use of information from a data set to create additional products. Re-Purpose.

**EULA (End User License Agreement)** - Governs use by the individual user on a particular site, product or service.

**Enhanced/Featured Listing** - Added content or premium placement provided as an up-sell to agent/broker by Publisher.

**Extended Network** - A shared search experience on a public website other than an original channel; Data doesn't leave control of the original channel, but remains resident in the original database. Framing; Powered by.

**Framing** - Surrounding the property search of Site A with the branding of Site B; data does not leave the control of Site A. Extended Network; Powered by.

**IDX (Internet Data Exchange)** - Website owned by an agent/broker wherein other brokers have given approval to each other to advertise listings. IDX sites are regulated by MLS.

**ListHub** - One of the syndicators that are available through an agreement from MLSSAZ. [www.ListHub.com](http://www.ListHub.com)

**MLS Sponsored Syndication** - Method by which the broker can instruct the MLS to distribute his/her listing data to outside websites other than IDX and VOW.

**Non-MLS Syndication** - Method by which the broker can distribute his/her listing data to outside websites without the assistance of the MLS.

**Opt-in vs. Opt-out** - In either instance, the broker is given the means to indicate his/her own choice as to the display of his listing data on a given national website/channel.

Opt-in - the Participant chooses to participate;

Opt-out - all Participants' listings are included unless the broker actively prevents it.

**Point2** - A syndication that was discontinued in 2015.

**Portal** - A public (non-agent/broker) website to which syndicators distribute data; Channel; Publisher. Not regulated by MLS.

**Powered By** - Provider of information for a website; host or developer of website; property search of one national website framed to the branding of another.

**Publisher** - National website operator; Channel; Portal.

**Re-Direct Link** - Link to the property detail page of the listing agent/broker's IDX site.

**Re-Purpose** - Other use than the explicit purpose for which it was provided, often unauthorized; Derivative works.

**Re-Syndication** - When a publisher to whom listings have been syndicated forwards that content to another, typically for display on another website.

**Syndication** - Syndication is a method for Brokers to authorize distribution of their listing data to consumer portals hosted by 3rd parties.

**Syndicator** - Companies that aggregate listing information to be sent to various internet channels. ListHub is an example of a syndicators.