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**Top Producer systems**

A softening U.S. housing market hasn't hurt Top Producer Systems Co., a Richmond company that produces Market Snapshot and other software embraced by U.S. residential brokers.

Top Producer's software helps brokers maintain a competitive edge even in a soft market by delivering the information needed to serve clients, said Craig McDougall, Top Producer's director of sales and operations.

The company's sales are climbing, partly as real estate software continues to establish itself.

"When the market is going soft, we don't see a big drop," McDougall said, noting that a downturn often prompts some brokers to invest in software in an effort to increase performance.

Top Producer's ascendance in the market recently merited a mention in the New York Times.

The numbers tell an equally rosy tale.

Top Producer's revenues rose to \$30.1 million last year from \$23.7 million in 2004, and company sales have Top Producer's revenue topping \$40 million in 2006, though exact figures won't be available till February 22. That's up from \$30.1 million in 2005 and \$23.7 million in 2004. The rising sales have been good news for hiring, too. Top Producer now employs 313 people, up from 236 in 2005. It also has 35 consultants.

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**Catching a bug**

Real estate people can't help but be fans of bricks and mortar, so no doubt Cressey Development Group hopes to catch people's attention with something different: a short video series for its 152-unit Donovan development in Yaletown.

Vancouver director Roger Evan Larry partnered with Cressey to produce the five-part series, which Cressey hopes will raise awareness of Donovan through what the press release calls "a kind of virtual word of mouth that many companies covet as part of their sales strategy." The production cost is undisclosed, but both Cressey and Larry invested cash in the endeavour.

Whether the videos will be as successful as similar so-called "viral" marketing efforts used to promote Jones Soda Co. and other consumer products is another question, Vancouver retail analyst David Gray said.

"I applaud some people taking some risks and being creative, but I would really like to know how they're going to measure success," he said. "These things generally work better for mass items where you're trying to cut through a lot of clutter. And you know, maybe that's the case with condos, too – there's a heck of a lot of them going up."

Attracting attention was a key goal of the videos, said Cressey vice-president Hani Lammam. And, had Larry not been shooting his latest film Crossing at the time, such an initiative would have been too expensive for Cressey to consider as a marketing tool.

The result, however, was a "cost-effective" piece that has doubled hits to the Donovan project website. Whether that translates into sales will be difficult to determine, Lammam said.

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