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## Real-estate firm adds sales data to Web site

**By Elizabeth Rhodes**

*Seattle Times staff reporter*

Your neighbors asked an arm and a leg for their house. Now that the "sold" sign is up, the burning question is: Did they get it?

Come Monday you'll be able to find out as Bellevue-based John L. Scott, one of the Northwest's oldest real-estate firms, brings to its Web site sales data about individual homes, including the final price, address, property detail and a photo. The company believes it is the first in the nation to offer the information more quickly than public-records searches.

That data will be made available as soon as a property closes through the Northwest Multiple Listing Service, which on Monday becomes the first MLS in the country to provide that data to member firms. John L. Scott has been working for weeks to make it available almost instantly.

Earlier this week the company became the nation's first residential real-estate company to offer Web-site visitors Microsoft Virtual Earth aerial tours of properties for sale.

John L. Scott celebrates its 75th birthday by moving forward into Internet marketing.

The company, says Chairman and CEO Lennox Scott, intends to keep market share in an industry challenged by Web-based reduced-fee newcomers.

"It's a natural balance," said Scott, 54, the grandson of the firm's founder. "Tradition is all about relationships and providing great service. Technology provides buyers and sellers with information that helps them make that transaction."

These newest additions follow a pattern. In 1995, the John L. Scott Web site, [www.johnlscott.com](http://www.johnlscott.com), was first in the Northwest to put all the Puget Sound area's for-sale homes online. The company took heat for that from those who felt the information should be funneled through individual firms and their agents.

Then came a host of other Internet features including virtual tours, interactive mapping, financing and



KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES  
Lennox Scott, chairman and CEO of John L. Scott Real Estate, inherited the family business at age 23.



KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES  
Lennox Scott with portraits of his father, W. Lennox Scott, left, and his grandfather, company founder John L. Scott.

neighborhood information.

Today John L. Scott spends \$2.5 million a year on its site, which gets more than a million user visits and more than 6 million page views a month.

The firm has 132 offices in Washington, Oregon and Idaho, and last year it grossed more than \$17 billion in sales.

Its 1931 beginnings were more modest.

A recent émigré from Scotland, John L. Scott took a detour to Seattle on his way to San Diego and never left. In little time, he'd founded his own real-estate firm. In 1975, he sold it to his son, W. Lennox Scott.

"He was an intellectual guy who ran a very disciplined office," associate broker Bob Flynn recalled of the son. "On Monday, you had to give him a report of how many homes you'd inspected, how many you'd shown to customers and how many you'd sold."

W. Lennox Scott brought that commitment home by frequently inviting agents to dinner. They talked sales strategy, and his young son, Lennox, soaked it up. By the fourth grade, he was painting company signs; by 18, he had his real-estate license.

After graduating from the University of Washington business school, Lennox Scott was on a path to head the family business — and more quickly than anyone had planned. In 1977, his father died suddenly, leaving 23-year-old Lennox to inherit the firm. Three years later, he became president.

"When he took over the company as a very young man, there were a lot of doubters," recalled Jack Johnson, president and CEO of the Northwest Multiple Listing Service. "He has proven to be someone who has done a tremendous job of running this family business."

Like his father, he's a stickler for professionalism and excellence and has "a high threshold and high expectations" for agents, Scott says. That means college education, a commitment to full-time work and advanced training in an industry seen as accommodating dabblers.

After a decade as president, Scott moved to extend the brand. Today, 41 offices are company-owned; the rest are franchises. A couple of years ago, he turned over day-to-day operations to Joseph Spencer and took on the role of official visionary, or chairman and CEO.

It's a role he's embraced with passion, Johnson said.

"He really understands the industry and the changes that are going on and the impact of those changes," he said. "Obviously his motivation is to keep his company in the forefront and stay in business."

Scott believes that will come by using technology to help buyers and sellers make sound decisions.

But he's convinced that even with the Internet and its ability to offer discount services, the public will continue to need full-service real-estate agents.

"Our job is to give advice, to negotiate and partner to help them complete a successful transaction," he said. "Add in emotions on both sides, the details of getting the transaction complete, state laws and disclosures — it takes a professional, especially in a market like we're in."

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