

Environment and Consumer Choice

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9th October 2006

The purpose of this short presentation is to highlight what is how the consumer is obtaining environmental information about their home and why this is influencing the consumer choice



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What have others been doing-The Law Society

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**"In every transaction you must consider whether contamination is an issue"
"In purchases mortgages and leases solicitors should..."**

1. Advise the client of potential liabilities associated with contaminated land.
2. Make specific enquiries of the seller.
3. Undertake independent site history investigation e.g. obtaining site report from a commercial company.
4. "In commercial cases,...."Advise independent full site investigation.
5. Consider use of contractual protections and the use of exclusion tests
6. Advise withdrawal, and noting advice.
7. Advise on environmental insurance



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Sources of Internet Data

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In 2005 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published *"Neighbourhoodson the Net"* which highlighted 33 sources of property based information. In the context of the UK there are at least 9 key websites offering geodemographic, property, environment, policy and research information. This excludes Government Departments such as the ODPM.

Of these the main sites offering environmental outputs are:

- www.homecheck.co.uk
- www.environment-agency.gov.uk/maps (What's in my backyard)
- www.old-maps.co.uk

Others with mainly geodemographic data include

- www.upmystreet.com
- www.checkmyfile.com
- www.ourproperty.co.uk
- www.chavtowns.co.uk
- www.craptowns.com
- www.neighbourhoodstatistics.gov.uk



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Finding Data from the Internet

9th October 2006

The Environment Agency website offers an increasingly sophisticated examination of environmental data.

The its data covers the areas of practice of the Agency but excludes the contaminated land regime operated by Local Authorities and historic map information

It is also postcode generated



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Relying on free Internet based searches-is it safe?

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The principle Environmental website is offered is called Homecheck which is operated by Landmark Information Group. It aggregates data from the EA and includes Historic data.

Currently the site produces about 20,000 "reports" a month of which 80% are "unique" e.g. they're individual persons.

The remaining 20% of reports are for:-

- Solicitors
- Architects
- Surveyors
- Banks
- Other Financial Institutions

The problem is its postcode related. As a result it can produce absurd results. There is a disclaimer making it clear its not for commercial use and cannot be relied upon



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Using the internet to find free historic data

9th October 2006

Historic Mapping can be obtained from Landmarks "Old Maps" website which is jointly owned with the Ordnance Survey.

It is possible to download the first edition of the Ordnance Survey free of charge but this is the county series and does not provide great detail.

It is however possible to acquire a full set of archive maps and to have these delivered as a PDF file. There is no interpretation of the data



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Not forgetting Google Earth!

9th October 2006

Using 3D satellite imagery Google Earth presents an opportunity to overlay free aerial photography with mapping and in time other data by optimising the search engine.

Google Earth uses both Aerial and satellite images taken over the last 3 years to provide layers of data. It doesn't cover all towns and cities in high resolution but it does cover the whole planet.

It is free at the moment but recently a commercial version was launched



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Using modern mapping to ascertain historic land use

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The growth of consumer demand

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Sources of Internet Data

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- Over 70% of all residential transactions have acquired a formal report including an opinion as a matter of course. This is at a cost of £45 including VAT to the consumer
- Over 1.4 million reports have been produced from one source alone in the last 4 years
- The Internet can provide a wealth of data which is freely available and to ignore its presence would be reckless
- Web based searches come with a serious health warning as to reliability and reliance
- Significant numbers of professionals rely on them nonetheless
- Clients and consumers expect more from their professional advisors



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Concluding thoughts

9th October 2006

"If there is one main 'conclusion'....it is that software based information is very much 'out there' and is being used to sort places and the people who live in them in particular ways. Not only this, internet based neighbourhood systems are becoming ever more sophisticated and the ability to move between different geographies at different degrees of detail is becoming easier as both the software and the associated websites are constantly improved"

Neighbourhoods on the Net, Joseph Rowntree Foundation July 2005



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