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**Working in the housing sector during a time of pandemic - by
Richard Hogan**

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CATIC

When the year 2020 started, who would have predicted where we would end up? It was just February when we began to hear about a strange new virus coming from China. That virus hit the United States very hard starting in March. Most of us in the housing sector began to do our jobs remotely. At first, we thought we would work remotely for a few weeks. But a few weeks stretched into months and months.

The first hard issue we began to deal with were multiple recording jurisdictions closing. The state of Vermont made the decision to shut down real estate for a period of time. Many towns in Vermont are just beginning to open now in the middle of June, but most other recording districts throughout New England found a way to keep going during the pandemic. The closure of the recording jurisdictions was particularly hard on the homebuyers who, because no title searches could be performed and because no recordings could be made, ended up not being able to buy the home that they wanted.

The second hard issue we began to deal with was an avalanche of refinances. In many ways the year 2020 is beginning to feel a lot like the refinance mania days of a decade ago. Every day we are scrambling to close real estate transaction with an unbelievable volume.

I am very proud about what we in the industry were able to accomplish. The vast majority of refinances and home purchases were able to go forward during this pandemic with a combination of technology and extremely hard customer-oriented work by all of our employees. We in the title industry were not the only ones who are scrambling to meet customer's expectations. I spoke to many lenders who were amazed at what their teams were able to accomplish by focusing on what the customer needed and getting work done every day. I hope in the years to come everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge.

I think what this teaches us about our industry is that we are very resilient and focused on our customers. These changes that have been made during the pandemic will likely continue into the future. It is very clear now that we need to embrace new technologies to give the customers what they want.

I also want to touch upon some of the societal changes that I have observed over the last few months. I see so many more people outside, taking walks, gardening, biking, and so on. It's very clear to me that nature provides a very important healing element to all of us. I also see a lot of families playing together outside. I hear things that I used to when I was young, such as a family member declaring "car coming!" so that they can move out of the street to let a car pass and then begin playing ball again. That's something I really haven't seen since I was a kid. I also notice that neighbors speak to neighbors more often now with more meaningful interactions. We crave that human connection, which is very difficult to achieve during a time of social distancing.

What will the future look like in our industry? It will be interesting to see how that question is answered. In my view we're going to see much more technology being used to support our

customers' expectations of a real estate closing. Well, we certainly will see a lot of change in the future, but one thing that will remain the same is our focus on our customers.

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