

VisualHOMES® Support for Customer Self-Service Strengthens Low-Income Housing Delivery

Technology-driven customer ecosystem launches new era in total solutions management

(Washington, DC, August, 2008) – VisualHOMES®, a leading North American software solutions vendor for agencies managing low-income housing, announced today new modules for its flagship housing platform that signal improved support for landlords and housing applicants, creating a simpler, more accessible process for putting low-income tenants into safe, compliant and affordable homes.

“While the buzzword among some providers has been self-service,” said Mr. Raj Bhaskar, chief executive officer of VisualHOMES, “we’re looking beyond that. We want our platform to take the worry out of the application process for low-income housing, and the risk out of filling empty properties for landlords. Doing this can help people find good housing, faster than ever. That’s always the goal.”

The concept is holistic, explains Mr. Bhaskar. “The pieces of the market fit like an ecosystem, with landlords, agencies and low-income families all wanting a simpler, faster, lower-risk way to work together. VisualHOMES feeds the landlord’s need for updated cash flow reporting and qualified tenants. And, we feed applicants’ need to easily track the status of their housing application.”

VisualHOMES clients using its new portals include the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (Minneapolis, MN), the Dallas Housing Authority (Dallas, TX), the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem (Winston-Salem, NC), the Marin Housing Authority (Marin County, CA), and the District of Columbia Housing Authority (Washington DC), among others.

Mr. Bhaskar continues, “The central part of the ecosystem is of course the agencies we serve. Our portals let them save operationally. In the past, agency staff had to field too many phone calls, handle lots of outgoing and incoming mail, and budget too much for postal expenses. Now, landlords and applicants can handle their own business online, which our clients appreciate.”

Mr. Bhaskar emphasizes, “Just as importantly, in our view, is that our portals let agencies create a level of access through the Web that advances their public service mission to be more responsive to their communities.” With free online access available at most public libraries and many municipal buildings from coast to coast, housing agencies now in effect have thousands of virtual front doors open to their communities, Mr. Bhaskar said.

VisualHOMES

8601 Georgia Avenue
Suite 708
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Tel: 1.800.295.3301
Fax: 301.588.3986
info@visualhomes.com

www.visualhomes.com

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Using the portal, property owners register online and are given privileged access when their accounts are activated through VisualHOMES. "A client staff person can activate a property owner account just by checking a box on the landlord's record. The property owner accounts are secure, sure, but we make it really easy for agencies to manage that security," said Mr. Bhaskar.

The online portal is straightforward for applicants to use as well. Applicants for low-income housing create an account and fill out an application online. The application will need to be verified by agency staff, but the self-service portal begins a virtual paper trail, making it faster and cheaper for agencies to assess and later improve internal processes, providing better service to constituents.

With thousands of applicants often vying for just a few hundred available units, not everyone will be satisfied, Mr. Bhaskar notes, but by automating the process, updating status online, and letting applicants take more control over their fates, VisualHOMES lets agencies make the best of a challenging situation, explained Mr. Bhaskar. "Thinking about what an applicant feels when they're applying for low-income housing, it's stressful. By helping agencies to get it right, and letting applicants track their application, we help everyone avoid a lot of that anxiety," said Mr. Bhaskar. The automation process also reduces staff stress within an agency by streamlining what often is a paper-bound, labor-intensive application review process.

"We also hope that making property owners more comfortable with providing vouchers housing will help close the gap and get families off the street. It's not just giving property owners access to data, it's helping them understand and manage the risks, and helping to convince them that these low-income tenants are worth betting on."

VisualHOMES believes that community integration is key to its success as a company, explains Mr. Bhaskar. "Our national user conference brings together people using our software in the United States and Canada. That's one community whose power we can tap to make our solutions more responsive, faster to implement and more innovative. In exactly the same way, bringing together the community of property owners, applicants and agencies can create tremendous social, economic and governance power. When we make it easy for these stakeholders to manage and create value for themselves, we're using technology to build better communities. Ultimately, it's the power of community that will make VisualHOMES a more relevant and effective tool for our clients," says Mr. Bhaskar.

About VisualHOMES®

VisualHOMES is the leader in public housing software solutions, providing the most proven and complete software solution for public housing, Section 8 and financial accounting management in the industry. Public housing and redevelopment authorities, Departments of housing and community development, non-profits and related agencies of all sizes have been successfully using VisualHOMES' Windows-based solutions in real world, mission-critical operations across the continent for nearly a decade. The company's unmatched experience and commitment to responsive service have made it the leading national provider of public housing software solutions.

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