



MLS & ASSOCIATIONS

Employee death prompts 'Drive Focused' campaign at NorthstarMLS

'There's no going back': MLS urges agents to avoid distractions on the road after administrator is rear-ended

BY ANDREA V. BRAMBILA ★

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Key Takeaways

- MLS campaign brings awareness to distracted driving, but agents have a mixed track record when it comes to resisting their cellphones.

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A year ago, MLS administrator [Hubert "Hugh" Skanes-Cady](#) died after a distracted driver rear-ended him while he was stopped on his motorcycle at a highway construction zone. He was 57.

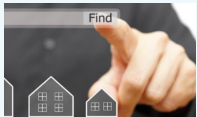


[Hugh Skanes-Cady](#)

In his honor, Skanes-Cady's employer, Minneapolis-based NorthstarMLS, created the "Drive Focused" campaign to bring attention to an issue that doesn't always spring to mind when it comes to agent safety, despite the [considerable amount of time agents spend in their cars for work](#): distracted driving.

In a series of videos, the MLS emphasizes the impact that a car accident can have, whether it's the agent who gets hurt or is the one who ends up hurting someone else.

"There's no going back. Choose to drive focused," one of the videos says, while showing a devastated driver approaching a hit bicyclist.



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In another video, Mark Cady, Skanes-Cady’s husband and partner of 29 years, describes the repercussions of his husband’s death. Skanes-Cady, also known as Hugh Trimble, left behind a large family, including five grandchildren.

“My life was devastated. My life was turned upside down because someone driving could not pay attention to the road,” Mark Cady said.



The Drive Focused campaign urges real estate professionals and others to [take a pledge](#) to:

- Put away the phone while driving.
- Pull over and stop if a call or text cannot wait.
- Avoid all distractions and Drive Focused.
- Not make any exceptions when it comes to safe driving.

“While stopped at a red light, I was rear-ended at 65 miles an hour by a texting driver. The impact that that made on my life and my family was long-lasting,” said Deb Greene, a local Coldwell Banker Burnet agent, in another campaign video.

“At the beginning, it was loss of vision, loss of hearing, loss of throat functionality, inability to sit upright, walking. It’s now been 11 years. I still have doctor appointments. I still have physical therapy.”



“The choices you make behind the wheel can have a lasting effect. Please, focus. And stop distracted driving,” she added.

NorthstarMLS has created materials that are available free of charge to Realtor associations and others that are interested in running the campaign in their own markets, the MLS said. In addition to the videos, the materials include posters and [blog content on topics such as hands-free driving](#).

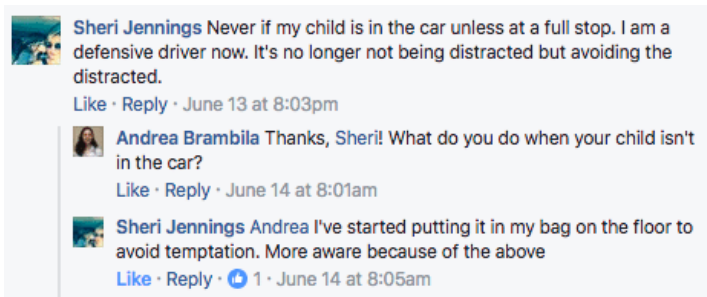
How smartphones can help — and hurt

Agents have a mixed track record when it comes to resisting the allure of the cellphone while driving.

Some take a zero tolerance approach: “I can’t show houses if I’m dead. You’ll just have to wait,” wrote Charlotte, North Carolina-based agent Kate McGee in a [Facebook thread](#).

Tucson, Arizona-based agent Emmy Simpson agreed. “I know I am in the minority but my phone is in my purse in my backseat,” she wrote.

Sheri Jennings, an agent in Houston, noted that she’s become a defensive driver — not only to avoid being distracted but to avoid the distracted.



Some real estate pros, however, will admit their own behavior is not what they’d recommend to others.

“My phone is my lifeline. I check at stops, or if I’m on the open road with no other vehicles around. My kids hate it, and my wife chastises me,” wrote Wichita, Kansas-based broker Greg Fox.

“Our state doesn’t allow texting, but no other restrictions. I’ll talk on the phone, I use voice commands and Voice to Text for emails and texts. I will not type text/email while driving.

“I wouldn’t recommend what I do for anyone (and yet I do this). I will pull over or stop to read longer emails, and I should set up my phone to read my text messages to me. If I’m on a long stretch of open highway in Kansas/Oklahoma/Texas, I will sometimes read emails if no traffic around me.”

Red Bank, New Jersey-based broker Deborah Madey said she does check her phone and send texts at stop lights, noting the pressure of being “immediately responsive” as an agent.

respond right away, I will. I will often send a quick text while at a light stating I am in the care and will call in an hour. It's sad that the pressure of "reply within 1 minute" causes us push the envelope. How many of us would wait 30-60 minutes to call if not for the expectation of clients that we respond instantly?

Like · Reply · June 14 at 1:25pm



Andrew Mensch And how would the client feel if the agent who was trying to meet this ridiculous expectation was killed while returning a text... or worse yet, survived a crash where others died? A message that says "I am driving, will contact you when it is safe" should satisfy the needs of a client. This is REAL ESTATE, not brain surgery. Not every client has this unreal expectation.

Like · Reply · 1 · June 14 at 1:30pm



Jim Weix No idiot client is worth killing yourself or someone else. We are real estate agents, not emergency cardiac surgeons.

Like · Reply · June 14 at 5:18pm



Deborah Madey I agree with both of your comments. I do check my messages at stop lights. I do not read or send messages while driving. To me, no it's not worth it. But, the reality is that MANY agents do...and for the reason of trying to be "immediately responsive."

Like · Reply · June 14 at 6:09pm

Inman's own tech reviewer, Craig Rowe, confessed to checking his phone while driving.

"I do it often, and hate myself for it. I've become better at it as of late, and even refuse calls while driving. But there are still a couple of instances each day," he wrote.

"I read recently that states where it's illegal to handle a phone in any way are finding creative ways to catch people in the act: e.g., riding in buses, using large unmarked SUVs, and even posing undercover at crosswalks to watch people checking them while stopped," Rowe warned.

Some agents have figured out how to use hands-free options on their smartphones in an effort to avoid the dangers of distracted driving.

Randolph, New Jersey-based broker associate Andrew Mensch has set an auto-reply on his phone that tells those who send text messages that he's driving and will get back to them. He uses Bluetooth for calls.

San Diego-based agent Aaron Dickinson said he used to check his phone "way too often" while driving.

"But when I bought my latest vehicle with Android Auto built-in, I almost never do now. Voice commands to call, play music and navigate. Big LCD screen up high on the dash. Text messages can be played and you can respond via speech recognition," he wrote.

"Android Auto forces you to use the car's screen and is much more limited in apps such that there's far less to distract you."

Houston agent Ryan Bokros also takes advantage of voice commands. "My phone stays on the dash in a holder, so I will see notifications and only use it via voice commands or through my Apple Watch while driving," he wrote.

Taking the pledge

NorthstarMLS has more than 16,000 members, but several months after launching the campaign last fall, only 1,278 people have signed the pledge. NorthstarMLS spokesman Ryan White doesn't think signatures necessarily correlate to impact, however.

"We were hoping to see more people take the pledge than were we are at now. But we definitely think our message has gotten across," he told Inman via email.

"We've received great feedback in other forms — word of mouth, phone calls, emails, agents telling us they are thankful we did the campaign at different events we've been to, etc. But we really aren't sure why we didn't get more to sign.

"Too busy to click' or maybe they didn't want to submit an email address (even though we clarified it wouldn't be shared) are a few of my opinions on why it's low. We had lots of site traffic, just not people willing to take the pledge, unfortunately."

The goal of the campaign is to encourage everyone to drive more safely and avoid further injuries and loss of life because of distracted driving, the MLS said.

“We wanted to honor his memory, but we also want to do something to help stop tragedies like this from happening. That was our motivation behind creating the Drive Focused pledge site.”

Email [Andrea V. Brambila](#).

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Kevin Foreman · General Manager at INRIX

Great article. Stay tuned for industry announcements

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Cotty Lowry · Realtor/Owner at Keller Williams Realty, Inc.

Thank you Inman News for getting the word out on NorthStar's program. Hugh was a friend and this was a terrible loss for our association. I have taken the pledge and although I slip up once in a while, I now actively work at never using my phone while driving. I hope more of our Minnesota Realtor community will take the pledge.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · Jul 13, 2017 5:19am



Pierce Smith · JF Kennedy University

There go I but for the grace of God.

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Linda DeVlieg · Albuquerque, New Mexico

I'm weary of the feeling that people expect that a text message or an email is a real conversation that needs to be responded to immediately. No quality conversation can be had with fingers. Stop texting and start paying attention to the road. Leave your phone in your bag. Period.

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