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Real Estate Relationship Building in the Digital Age

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By RISMedia Staff

NextHome's Humans Over Houses mantra has catapulted the franchisor to record-setting growth. The company added 135 offices between 2019 and 2021, making it No. 1 in office growth in the National Association of REALTORS®' 2021 Residential Franchise Report. In 2022, Franchise Business Review ranked NextHome the No. 1 franchise in owner satisfaction across all industries.

In this exclusive interview, NextHome CEO James Dwiggins shares with us where NextHome stands today, and where the company is headed as technology becomes an even greater factor in real estate relationship building.



Real Estate magazine: Give us an update on the past year. Where is NextHome today?

James Dwiggins: I recently got back from Orlando, Florida, where we got to celebrate the success of our top-producing agents, teams and offices at our annual conference. NextHome ended 2021 with 36,600 units closed and \$11.9 billion in sales volume. We were also named the No. 1 franchise in owner satisfaction by Franchise Business Review for the second year in a row. Needless to say, we had a lot to celebrate with our members.

We hadn't filled a conference center with this many NextHomies since 2019. The company has grown a lot in the past three years. We ended Q1

with 5,300 members across 575 offices. We had many new brokers and agents in attendance—members who have never experienced a NextHome event before, and we knew it was really important to make them feel like part of the family alongside those we had not seen in a while.

It was great to see so many of our members in their orange outfits breakdancing at our cocktail reception one night, then getting up early the next day to get a first look at our new technology platform, including IDX websites and a powerful smart CRM. You got to see how these high-achieving professionals could effortlessly blend the highest industry standards with pure joy and old-fashioned fun.

This event meant a lot to us, so we had to make it count. For months prior, we did our homework, not just planning for the conference, but also laying the groundwork for all the new initiatives we announced in Orlando.

RE: Speaking of new initiatives, what's in store for NextHome in the future?

JD: Moving forward, we can't be complacent. Challenges are going to come, as they always do. We will be ready by adopting new technology, marketing and education programs.

A big part of skillfully adopting new initiatives is starting with the core of who we are. I am going to sound like a broken record here, but again, it's putting humans over houses. No matter where technology takes us, our approach will always put people at the center. As long as we stay focused on the humans, we can easily adopt the right marketing and technology.

For example, readers of RISMedia likely saw our announcement a few weeks back. NextHome has partnered with Inside Real Estate, and we're bringing the kvCORE platform to all of our NextHomies as an included member benefit. Before moving forward with Inside Real Estate, we asked ourselves how we could use technology to help our members focus on their most important task: connecting with their clients. kvCORE was the right choice—the platform does a lot to nurture connections. It takes the agent's lead-generating work away from a drip advertising



approach, moving more toward an AI-driven intuitive conversation. It lets the technology work the lead generation side of our associates' business so that they can focus on helping people who are ready to buy or sell and who need the skills and full attention of our NextHomies.

A lot of tech sounds great in theory, but ends up killing productivity. It leaves little time to make connections with the human beings you represent. We strive for the opposite. NextHome offers a single platform that has everything agents and brokers need to run a successful business, a single password to remember, a single phone number or email address to save when you need support.

Any new initiative, including this partnership with Inside Real Estate, is going to make the business of our members more integrated, streamlined and, most importantly, client-focused.

RE: Tell us about some of your long-term goals.

JD: Connecting more people with their next home is our long-term goal—it's that simple. NextHome recently launched a website that helps us focus on our goals by bringing these success stories into the spotlight. HumansOverHouses.com helps keep us centered on the reasons why we are passionate about real estate.

We get to read about how Allison and Sergio Tellez went from a 950-square-foot starter home to homelessness before finally moving into their 2,300-square-foot dream home. If not for the persistence of a knowledgeable NextHomie, the Tellez family will be the first to tell you that they would have given up and settled for a lot less. What's more, they connected with that NextHome associate through an online lead.

NextHomies closed a remark-

Persistence, and the right REALTOR®, helped the Tellez family find the home of their dreams.



able \$11.9 billion in volume in 2021. Our business is growing. But what's behind all those numbers is what drives us into the future. The numbers can't really let you hear the Tellez kids laughing or show you the mud on their clothes now that they finally have a big backyard to play in. Their home-buying process occurred because Allison was looking at houses online, and that online lead connected her with a NextHome agent. When we talk about long-term goals and technology adoption, this is what we are thinking about. These are the things that drive us.

Keeping Humans Over Houses at the core of everything we do has successfully guided us forward for years now—and I know it will guide us forward for years to come.

RE: How does investing in your technology stack help you accomplish these long-term goals? Where does NextHome stand on the build vs. buy conversation?

JD: We took a hard look in the mirror and analyzed our stance on build

vs. buy. The answer to that question depends on the character of the "builder." We looked for a company that aligns with our values. We applied the test of "do I want to have dinner with you on a Friday night?" If not, maybe we shouldn't do business together. The leadership team at Inside Real Estate more than passed this test, and their entire staff has been a pleasure to work with during the initial rollout. They also joined us in Orlando for our conference, and it quickly became clear that just like us, their team also doesn't take themselves too seriously.

kvCORE is one of those solutions that helps us focus on putting people first in a lot of ways. Our associates shouldn't be glued to a computer all day trying to find new clients. kvCORE uses intelligent automation to build and nurture relationships with people who are ready to buy or sell. Our members can diversify lead sources and build their pipeline with automated social media posting, landing pages, integrated Google and Facebook advertising, custom text codes and more.

Dwiggins and Inside Real Estate leaders at NextHome's Conference.



The response during the initial phase of rollout has been amazing. We tested the technology with Mary Ann Wilson, owner of NextHome In The Triangle. She said, "Staying close to clients is the key to success for real estate professionals. This robust, user-friendly system enables our agents to strengthen their personal connections with our clients. And with NextHome support delivered through its Member Services team, we can get answers to any questions, big or small. I see kvCORE as the center of our strategy to stay close to our clients."

Thomas Shumpert, owner of NextHome Specialists, added: "Our agents love the fact that they have complete control of their paid lead generation. As a broker, I love the fact that kvCORE has additional options that allow me to run every aspect of the brokerage, from document management to invoicing. There is nothing the system can not do. It's the one-stop shop for our

agents and management team."

And Steven Burch, owner of NextHome Unlimited in Kansas, said: "This allows me to get to the buyer in a quicker manner. It's systematic and streamlined, which means I don't lose the person in the shuffle of all the little tasks I have to do every day. In just one and a half months, I've seen a huge return on investment on leads."

There is a reason why we boast a 70%-plus adoption rate of our NextHome products and services. Over the years, we have built trust with our members when rolling out products. We strive to be transparent about what we plan to roll out next, how new programs will integrate with existing tools, what gaps they might fill, what challenges we might be facing and how members can participate.

RE: What comes next for NextHome on the technology front?

JD: We'll be delivering CORE Present and CORE Listing Machine as an included benefit for all members later this year. This is not a "launch it and forget it" scenario. We are fully invested in a successful, long-term partnership with Inside Real Estate and all the ways these tools can benefit our members. The integration between all the products is only going to make it even easier for our members to focus less on the technology and more on customer relationships.

We are constantly thinking about how to empower our agents to be able to spend their time focusing on relationships, not on adoption of technology. Whatever we do in the future, it will be designed to serve our core goal: putting humans over houses. **RE**

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