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**Helping our Partners develop a sustainable estate agency business**

*epropservices launches online compliance platform*

While the impact of the Coronavirus is creating very difficult and challenging business conditions and a change in the way agents are operating, it is just as important to ensure firms have a risk strategy and are able to demonstrate compliance with all legislation. Some criminals will see this as a potential weakness in a firm’s defences and take the opportunity to ‘strike’. Paul Offley, Group Compliance Officer at epropservices says his aim it to keep businesses safe during this difficult period.

Remaining compliant is a key element of running a sustainable estate agency business, especially with so many financially crippling fines being issued by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to estate agents in the recent times.  Recent research from iamproperty suggests that nearly a third of agents are unsure if they are legally compliant with Anti Money Laundering (AML), which is a sobering statistic.

Offley offers a vital compliance assessment service to both Guild Members and Fine & Country Licensees. This ongoing service has played an essential role in keeping estate agents compliant, however, in order to further enhance the current compliance offering and make it even easier for agents to remain compliant especially with the majority now working virtually, epropservices will also be launching an online risk assessment platform which was developed by iamproperty.

 According to Offley, who has been a key resource in the development of the tool, there were several principle drivers for creating the compliance platform in conjunction with iamproperty. “We know that HMRC has repeatedly committed to increasing formal AML supervision visits to small and medium-sized estate agency businesses. As such, I have worked with many estate agents within our network to ensure that they are prepared and have the required compliance procedures in place. My guidance, along with the online platform will ensure that estate agents don’t find themselves in hotwater with HMRC and at risk of paying hefty fines,” says Offley.

He notes that other drivers include the fact that HMRC has stated that fines have been applied for AML for aspects such as failure to ensure policies, controls and procedures are in place; a failure in due diligence; a failure in the timing of verification and record-keeping and failure to carry out risk assessments. “The government has also made its intentions known by making available £4m in funding to local authorities to crack down on Landlords and Lettings Agents. National Estate Agency and Lettings Trading Standards team also has increased funding and responsibilities,” adds Offley.

He continues that recommendations of RoPA (regulation of property agents) include the appointment of a new estate agency regulator, as well as new codes of practice; licensing for individuals and firms; mandatory qualifications and increased governance.

Ben Ridgway, Group Managing Director at iamproperty commented: “Under the current regulatory environment, it’s never been more important for estate agents to undertake a thorough examination of each and every sale, using whatever tools they can to reduce the impact on their business.”

Ridgway continued: “Our research has shown that almost a third of estate agents were still managing their compliance manually and relying on their instinct to flag concerns with an aspect of a sale. Yet, they are also faced with an increasingly challenging selling market. With this in mind, we are excited to be powering the new compliance platform for epropservices, which is designed to take the hard work out of managing AML compliance.  Now more than ever, estate agents cannot simply rely on their senses when sniffing out suspicious activity.”

“As an organisation we need to support both our Guild Members and Fine & Country Licensee’s, ensuring that they have the tools to be able to operate within the limits of the law and remain compliant at all times. Our inhouse compliance service coupled with the remote compliance assessment will assist in providing business owners with a clear view on their compliance performance, and with my assistance they will be able to review processes, procedures, and training as appropriate,” says Offley.

He adds that the online risk assessment platform will enable users to accurately identify the AML risk of individual customers and record this information. It will also provide a recommendation on the level of customer due diligence checks which the firm should use on individuals, based on the risk assessment outcome. “The platform will include the option to undertake an electronic AML verification which provides evidence on identification, legal ownership, politically exposed person checks and checks against the UK financial sanctions register, as well as provide nominated AML officers with a full audit report, “explains Offley.

Other key features include:

* An annual compliance review of the firm’s website
* An annual Policy review to include AML, Data Protection and Internal Complaints
* Annual checks to ensure membership of all required regulatory organisations based on their operating model
* Monthly Compliance Assessment tasks based on a separate legislative topic each month, so that Compliance does not become a ‘once a year’ activity. Topics will cover all required legislation, as well as monitoring new or changes to existing legislation
* Quarterly compliance review meetings to review performance and discuss concerns
* Support to ‘fill’ any gaps identified by a firm resulting from compliance assessment activities.

Offley says that with his help and the platform, estate agents will have a full 12-month compliance strategy that will contribute to building a sustainable estate agency business. “Having the correct procedures in place will provide estate agents assurance that new legislation has been understood and implemented correctly by their teams, which will reduce both the probability and the impact of a risk materialising. The platform will also provide evidence of due diligence while increasing customer service and satisfaction,” says Offley. “Through our compliance offering we want to help estate agents raise their compliance standards and demonstrate fair treatment of their customers, all the while adding sustainable value to their business.”

For more information about the online risk assessment platform with be on the brands’ Member hubs.

**Editors’ Notes**

**epropservices PLC**

epropservices PLC provides brands, technology services and additional revenue streams to property professionals. epropservices PLC is the parent company to The Guild of Property Professionals, Fine & Country and gogetdigital.