

Winning ways

Well done to the winner of last issue's competition, Rebecca Husband from MFG Solicitors, who assures us our luxury food hamper has found a good home!

Rebecca, a plot sales executive, began working at Simon Bishop & Partners back in 1998. The firm was acquired by MFG in January this year and contributed a wealth of commercial property expertise. As a major regional law firm, MFG have held an account with Severn Trent Searches for some time and order a wide range of commercial and residential reports using our online service.

'I'd like to thank the Searches team for my lovely hamper – I didn't think for a minute I'd win!' said Rebecca. 'I've always been impressed with the service we've received from Severn Trent Searches and now I like them even more!'

Rebecca is pictured with colleagues Simon Cooke and Mike Noble and Severn Trent Searches' Kate Wilkinson.



Same-day searches now available

From 3 April 2006 customers ordering a residential Con29DW search before 2pm can choose to receive their report back the same day.

The new expedited service, which is available for £70.50 including VAT, has been introduced to help you provide clients with urgent searches. Please note that the service is reliant on you providing us with an accurate property address. Certain types of property, like new builds or land, may not be eligible. To find out more or place an order, just call **0115 962 7269**.

Floodsearch to finish

As of 1 April 2006, we are no longer offering the Floodsearch report, as the product has been withdrawn by its provider, Safe-Move. We will however continue to provide Envirosearch, Homecheck and Homebuyer's Review, all of which contain some flooding information. We hope these reports will prove a suitable alternative.

For a complete list of products available, including sample reports, please visit our website at www.severntrentsearches.com.

Win a spring wine hamper worth £200!

Whether you prefer a crisp white or a smooth, juicy red, you'll find plenty to tickle your taste buds in our brilliant wine hamper, specially selected for this time of year.

To be in with a chance of winning, all you need to do is answer the questions below – all the answers can be found in this issue if you get stuck. For each one, write the letter that appears after your answer in the grid. When you're done, rearrange the letters to spell out the name of a search you can order from us.

Email the mystery search, plus your name, the name of your firm and a contact telephone number to us at events@severntrent.co.uk or post your answer to 'Searchlight 8 Competition' at the address below by 30th June 2006. We'll notify the winner in July and will be announcing them in the next issue. Good luck!

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Box 1: What can you take advantage of for just £1 a month for the first three months?

- Home Breakdown Cover (E)
- Homeserve's Plumbing and Drainage Cover (H)
- A brand new Cadillac (R)

Box 2: In 2005, what percentage of enquiries did we answer within the day of receipt?

- 11.2% (A)
- 47.5% (E)
- 65% (W)

Box 3: When might we arrange a site visit?

- When we want to clarify our search findings (C)
- When we're paid a lot of money (P)
- When we fancy a day out (U)

Box 4: Homepackgroup is a consortium made up of Severn Trent Water, Thames Water, Yorkshire Water and...

- South West Water (E)
- Northumbrian Water (H)
- Crystal Waters (G)

Box 5: Which search became unavailable as of 1 April 2006?

- Con29DW (I)
- Floodsearch (O)
- Homebuyer's Review (N)

Prize draw terms and conditions: 1. The winner will be the first qualifying entry drawn at random after the draw closes at 12pm on 30th June 2006. 2. No cash or prize alternative is available. 3. Hamper includes a selection of fine wines. Offer open to over 18s. 4. Employees of Severn Trent Water Limited or any affiliated company or anyone connected with the draw and their families and households are not eligible to enter. 5. Only one entry per household is permitted. 6. No purchase necessary. The draw is open to all UK residents aged 18 years or over. The right to enter the draw does not depend on agreement to being a Severn Trent customer. You can also enter by simply sending your name, address and age in block capitals on a plain piece of paper to Severn Trent Retail and Utility Service, PO Box 6187, Nottingham NG5 1FH before the closing date for entries which is 30th June 2006. Proof of posting is not proof of receipt and responsibility is not accepted for any entry lost, delayed or damaged in the post. 7. All entries are governed by these terms and conditions. 8. The decision of the General Searches Manager is final in all matters concerning the draw. 9. The names of the winner(s) will be available after 30th June 2006 on written application to Severn Trent Retail and Utility Service, PO Box 6187, Nottingham NG5 1FH. 10. The Promoter of this Draw is Severn Trent Water Limited, 2297 Coventry Road, Birmingham B26 3PU.

Box 6: Which of the following is a benefit of our official Con29DW search?

- We accept unlimited liability where data is subsequently found to be inaccurate (C)
- It includes data on local annual rainfall (O)
- You'll receive a free rubber duck for every one ordered (T)

Box 7: Which organisation is currently working on a Positional Accuracy Improvement (PAI) programme to improve the accuracy of its maps?

- The AA (S)
- The Ordnance Survey (K)
- Accumap (E)

Box 8: How can we guarantee the findings in our Con29DW reports are accurate?

- We paid a lot of money for them (P)
- We spent hours looking them up in the local library (V)
- We're a water company, so we actually own the data (M)

Box 9: What does HIP stand for?

- Highly Improbable Purchase (S)
- Homebuyers' Information Pack (D)
- Home Information Pack (E)

SEVERN TRENT SEARCHES

searchlight

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR PROPERTY PROFESSIONALS ISSUE 8 APRIL 2006

**WIN
A SPRING
WINE
HAMPER**



HIPs: firms urged to choose their path

Estate agents, financial companies and even supermarkets are all making the running when it comes to providing Home Information Packs (HIPs). So how can the conveyancing industry make sure it doesn't lose its way?

New research commissioned by Severn Trent Searches in January 2006 shows that only around a quarter of conveyancers are considering providing HIPs – despite being better qualified to assemble the packs than their main rivals.

The research, carried out by Enterprise Planning and Research, questioned 100 legal practices across the Severn Trent Water region to investigate their attitudes towards HIPs. The results indicated a surprisingly low number had planned to provide the packs, believing estate agents and financial organisations were most likely to emerge as providers.

Larger companies are expected to dominate the market and respondents predicted a fairly bleak outlook for smaller firms. One said: 'In the short

term it will be search providers, estate agents and larger chains working in house. Longer term HIPs will be provided by financial institutions, probably even supermarkets.'

This attitude could be rooted in the profession's lukewarm reaction to HIPs themselves. Having carried out a similar study among estate agents, we can see that conveyancers were generally more negative about the packs, feeling more inclined to agree they were unlikely to work well in practice.

Self preservation

Despite the reluctance to take on HIP provision, respondents felt they needed to have some

involvement to protect their business. To counter the threat from large organisations, conveyancers said they would most likely work in conjunction with third parties such as search companies. While only 27% had thought about providing the packs (compared to 49% of estate agents), 38% said they were considering acting as resellers and 23% had considered functioning as an agent between the seller and provider.

In these cases, respondents said they would also like to work in partnership with local estate agents, solicitors and surveyors. Delivery time, cost and ability to provide accurate, up-to-date information were also identified as key factors in choosing a HIP supplier.

70% liked the idea of the packs being delivered to them via a secure website. Almost half found a delivery time of six to 10 working days acceptable, and the majority agreed they expected to pay £700 – £800 for each pack. Homepackgroup – made up of Thames Water, Severn Trent Water, Yorkshire Water and Northumbrian Water – is taking these considerations into account in shaping its own HIP provision. The group is also looking to set up regional panels to ensure a good level of local knowledge.

Next steps

There's clearly a huge opportunity for the conveyancing industry to step in and make sure financial organisations don't take over the market. For smaller firms fearing the impact on their business, forming alliances now is key. By establishing good working relationships with search providers, or HIP providers like Homepackgroup, well in advance of the packs' start date, firms can offer not only their local knowledge and conveyancing experience, but also demonstrate provision of an end-to-end service.

If you've any questions on HIP provision, or you'd like to find out more about Homepackgroup, please call Severn Trent Searches on 0115 962 7269 or visit www.homepackplus.co.uk.

3-month
trial for just
£1

Home and dry

Severn Trent Searches are pleased to introduce Homeserve GB Ltd, who are offering a fantastic deal on their Plumbing and Drainage Cover*.

Providing an emergency response service and up to £6,000 worth of cover for internal and external emergencies, Plumbing and Drainage Cover provides peace of mind for homebuyers and any homeowner who's unsure of the full history of their property. And with around 2.8 million plumbing and drainage emergencies occurring last year, the statistics show anyone can get caught off guard.

We may have already written to your clients with details of an introductory offer – 3 months of cover for just £1. As a valued Severn Trent Searches customer, we'd like to offer the same discount to you.

While you're covered:

- You can call the Homeserve Emergency Hotline, available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
- A plumber will always aim to be with you in 2 hours, and if the emergency is internal and can't be controlled, Homeserve will guarantee you a visit in 2 hours, or your money back
- You'll be covered for up to £4,000 for blocked or collapsed drains outside your home (2 claims a year, each up to £2,000)
- You'll have up to £2,000 of cover for plumbing and drainage emergencies inside your home (2 claims a year, each up to £1,000)
- You'll receive professional assistance – a reliable service offered by local plumbing and drainage engineers
- You'll have no bill to pay (within the cover limits)

Once the 3 months is up, if you're happy to do so, you'll continue to enjoy the above benefits for the equivalent of just £5.41 a month.

To take advantage of the introductory offer, just call Homeserve on 0800 073 1241 quoting reference STJP67.**

* This insurance product is provided by Inter Partner Assistance and arranged and administered by Homeserve GB Ltd, neither of which companies are part of the Severn Trent Group. Severn Trent acts solely as an introducer of the product and of Homeserve GB Ltd to Severn Trent customers and other potential subscribers. Both Severn Trent Retail and Utility Services Ltd and Homeserve GB Ltd are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority. This information can be checked on the FSA register at www.fsa.gov.uk/register or by calling 0845 606 1234.

** To improve service, calls may be recorded. This contract is governed by the law of England and Wales. Homeserve GB Ltd exclusively provides this policy type with Inter Partner Assistance.

PAI means better accuracy

For the last few years the Ordnance Survey has been resurveying rural areas as part of its Positional Accuracy Improvement (PAI) programme, an initiative to sharpen the accuracy of their 1:2500 range of maps. As the programme nears completion, Severn Trent Water has agreed to a monthly mapping update.

To keep any disruption to a minimum, this process will initially be carried out in low-density areas. Please be assured the process won't affect turnaround times for search reports in any way and the only difference you'll notice in future is greater accuracy.



E-asy peasy search delivery

From 3 January our online account holders haven't had to wait for the postman to arrive to get hold of their residential reports – all they need to do is check their email.

If you're an account customer you will have been able to order searches from us electronically for some time. And now you can opt to receive them electronically too. Our e-delivery service was launched at the start of the year and has already proved very popular. It's quick and easy to use and has the added advantage of speeding up the delivery process.

Because it's been developed with help from our customers, you can be confident the system's practical and easy to get to grips with. For example, we've made sure you can order more than one search at a time, and that if you make a mistake it's simple to correct. And unless the property is a new development or a piece of land, in most cases we can carry out searches without obtaining a plan.

If you do need a little extra help, we provide full customer support and can arrange training. You'll also find an online training guide and a list of frequently asked questions at www.severntrentsearches.com.

Existing account holders can get started straight away – just visit our website and enter your login details. Your reports will be emailed back to you as downloadable PDF files, and for extra peace of mind there's an option to have a paper copy mailed to you too.

Don't hold an account yet?

If you order more than 10 searches from us each month you could take advantage of a whole range of benefits including monthly invoicing and a £2 discount on every Severn Trent residential Con29DW report you order electronically. Visit the website to apply online or just give us a call on **0115 962 7269**.

ASK THE EXPERTS

THE SEVERN TRENT SEARCHES PANEL ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS

This issue, we've decided to devote the first part of this column to giving some general information about our service standards and response times. It's something we get asked about quite often and it's a good opportunity to share our latest figures with you.

With a team of dedicated staff on hand to answer queries, our aftersales service is something we're really proud of. In 2005 we answered 47.5% of all follow-up enquiries on the day of receipt, and 79% within one day. In some cases we may need to spend longer getting to the bottom of queries and we often arrange site visits if our records are ambiguous or we need to clarify search findings. We don't charge any extra for this service and, even taking these visits into consideration, we're still able to respond to 97.5% of all enquiries in less than 10 working days.

Q: WHAT IF I HAVE A QUERY CONCERNING A SEARCH, ORDERED THROUGH SEVERN TRENT SEARCHES, WHICH RELATES TO ANOTHER COMPANY'S ASSETS?

A: As long as your search was commissioned through us, we can handle your query and pass it on to the other water company. We'll even chase a reply for you, if that's needed.

Q: DO YOU ALWAYS NEED A POSTCODE TO CARRY OUT A SEARCH?

A: A postcode is very useful as it helps us locate the correct property – although an incorrect postcode can cause more trouble than it's worth! If you're not sure of a property's postcode, we recommend you use our online search facility. Just enter the address without a postcode and leave the rest to us.

Q: WHY ARE SOME METERED PROPERTIES IN THE SEVERN TRENT WATER AREA BILLED BY ANOTHER COMPANY FOR SOME SERVICES?

A: Properties in certain locations on the borders of the Severn Trent Water sewerage region have their water supplied by a neighbouring water company. If a property in one of these locations is metered, the company billing for water provision will also bill for foul sewerage services (if the property is connected) on behalf of Severn Trent Water.

The foul sewerage charge is set at the same unit rate as clean water consumed, as measured by the meter. So it makes sense for the company billing for water to bill for sewerage too, even though these assets belong to Severn Trent Water.

For the same reason, we sometimes obtain water plans and billing information from other water companies when the sewerage is Severn Trent Water's responsibility.

Got a question you'd like us to cover in the next issue? Email us at searches@severntrent.co.uk or write to us at Ask the Experts, Severn Trent Searches, PO Box 6187, Nottingham NG5 1LE.

This newsletter contains information of general interest about the industry and our products, but does not give legal or other professional advice.

Con29DW: beware of imitations

When conducting a drainage and water search for your client, there's no shortage of choice. But only one service can deliver unrivalled accuracy and detail: Con29DW.

Recommended by The Law Society since April 2002, Con29DW provides a comprehensive report on connection status, proximity to local sewerage, location of water pipes and a great deal more. It's our core product and, because we're the data holders for the Severn Trent Water region, ours is the most accurate, up-to-date information there is.

While Con29DW is slightly more expensive than a personal drainage report, the benefits of obtaining the official data completely outweigh the higher price of £42.77 per report (including VAT). As well as the protection of a full guarantee you'll also have the reassurance of an expert aftersales service, with a team of experts on hand to provide prompt, accurate answers to search enquiries.

Only the official search offers guaranteed levels of quality, service and assurance:

Quality

- It's the only report which includes all standard information in line with current best practice
- It provides full-colour, true-copy plans of the water and sewerage networks around a property, which meet all copyright licence conditions
- Where appropriate, it includes cross-boundary and water company-only data
- It provides expert advice on the consequences of a particular search finding

Service

- We return more than 90% of searches in less than 5 days – because we have direct access to water and sewerage company data the supply chain is as short as it can be
- We offer a choice of ordering and delivery methods plus extra facilities for account customers
- We have trained helpdesk staff with access to a wide industry knowledge base

Assurance

- Our search reports are prepared by competent technicians with industry-specific training
- Where data is subsequently found to be inaccurate, we accept unlimited liability

Of course, this is a far from comprehensive list and there are many more reasons to opt for the official Con29DW search. We're happy to discuss these with you further – just call us on **0115 962 7269**.