AN IMPROVED REAL ESTATE SIGNBOARD

Abstract: This invention comprises a signboard for marketing a real estate property which comprises a lockable housing, a fixed display mounted on or adjacent to the lockable housing for displaying a fixed advertisement, a video display unit substantially housed within the lockable housing and adapted to display digital advertisements. The digital advertisements include a countdown timer adapted to display time remaining until an event and a computer processor housed within the lockable housing for controlling the video display unit and a power supply for providing power to said signboard.
AN IMPROVED REAL ESTATE SIGNBOARD

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to signboards and in particular to signboards used for marketing a real estate property.

BACKGROUND

The current devices and methods used for marketing real estate property with signboards are problematic. Traditional signboards may simply state that a property is ‘For Sale’ with contact details of a real estate agent. The more advanced signboards may include a description of the property and even a picture of one of the rooms. Even these more advanced signboards are not a satisfactory means to provide the observer with an indication of what the interior of the property is like. Observers are presently required to make the effort to arrange an inspection of the property without first being given adequate information to decide whether they are interested.

Traditional signboards also do not convey any urgency in an impending deadline. Even with catchwords such as “must sell” or “urgent” impart only a limited sense of urgency to the user. For example if an auction date is presented on a signboard, the casual observer must stop and consider the date in order to consider how much time is left before the property goes to auction.

Prior art devices have attempted to enhance real estate signboards. For example, US 6263601 (Emert) describes adapting a signboard with a light to illuminate the signboard during evening hours. The illumination, whilst increasing the visibility of the signboard, does not give the observer any better indication of what the interior of the real estate property is like. One prior art device described in US 6,624,742 (Romano et al) uses a computer processor to manage interactions with the observer, for example in order to allow for an inspection. The devices described do not suggest a signboard like the one in the present invention.
The present invention seeks to provide a signboard that will overcome or ameliorate at least one of the deficiencies of the prior art.

**SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

According to a first aspect the present invention consists in a signboard for marketing a real estate property, said signboard comprising: a lockable housing, a fixed display mounted on or adjacent to said lockable housing for displaying a fixed advertisement, a video display unit substantially housed within said lockable housing and adapted to display digital advertisements, said digital advertisements including a countdown timer adapted to display time remaining until an event, a computer processor housed within said lockable housing for controlling said video display unit, and a power supply for providing power to said signboard.

Preferably, said event is an auction.

Preferably, one of said digital advertisements includes a virtual tour of said real estate property.

Preferably, said computer processor has a wireless communication module allowing for wireless interface between said computer processor and a user.

Preferably, said computer processor updates said digital advertisements using real estate information downloaded from a remote database via said wireless interface.

Preferably, said video display unit is an interactive video display unit allowing a prospective customer to select options displayed in said digital advertisements.

Preferably, said user may download a portion of said digital advertisements from said computer processor onto a portable wireless device of said user via said wireless communication module.
Preferably, said user is an authorised user that is allowed to update programming instructions and information contained on said computer processor via said wireless communication module.

Preferably, said power supply comprises a battery pack rechargeable via an external power source.

Preferably, said external power supply includes an array of solar power panels mounted external to said lockable housing.

Preferably, said video display unit is an LCD screen.

Preferably, said lockable housing is substantially weatherproof.

Preferably, said lockable housing has an ingress protection rating of at least 55 for dust and splash water.

Preferably, the signboard further comprises at least one speaker capable of providing said prospective customer with audio commentary.

Preferably, the signboard further comprises a proximity sensor adapted to initiate one of said digital advertisements when a person is within a predetermined range of said signboard.

According to a second aspect the present invention consists in a lockable housing for a computer processor and a video display unit, said lockable housing having: a fixed display mounted thereto for displaying a fixed advertisement, said video display unit housed substantially therein which displays digital advertisements, said digital advertisements including a countdown timer adapted to display time remaining until an event, said computer processor housed therein which controls said video display unit, a power supply for providing power to said lockable housing.
According to a third aspect the present invention consists in a signboard having a computer processor and a video display unit, said signboard comprising: a lockable housing, a fixed display mounted on at least one side of said lockable housing for displaying a fixed advertisement, said video display unit housed substantially within said lockable housing and adapted to display digital advertisements, said digital advertisements including a countdown timer adapted to display time remaining until an event, said computer processor housed within said lockable housing for controlling said video display unit, a power supply for providing power to said signboard.

According to another aspect the present invention consists in a signboard for marketing a real estate property, said signboard comprising: a lockable housing, a fixed display mounted on or adjacent to said lockable housing for displaying a fixed advertisement, a video display unit substantially housed within said lockable housing and adapted to display digital advertisements, a computer processor housed within said lockable housing for controlling said video display unit, and a power supply for providing power to said signboard.

According to a fourth aspect the present invention consists in a method of event oriented marketing of a real estate property, said method comprising: providing a signboard having: a lockable housing, a fixed display mounted on at least one side of said lockable housing for displaying a fixed advertisement, a video display unit substantially housed within said lockable housing and adapted to display digital advertisements, said digital advertisements including a countdown timer adapted to display time remaining until an event, a computer processor housed within said lockable housing for controlling said video display unit, and a power supply for providing power to said signboard, generating said fixed and digital advertisements about said real estate property, affixing said fixed advertisement to said fixed display, energising said power supply, installing said digital advertisements onto said computer processor, including setting the time remaining until said event, locking said lockable housing, and stationing said signboard on display on said real estate property.

Preferably, said event is an auction and said countdown timer shows the observer the decreasing amount of time available to purchase said real estate property.
BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A preferred embodiment of the invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawing in which:

Fig 1 is a perspective view of a signboard of the present invention.

Fig 2 is an exploded perspective view of the signboard of Fig 1

Fig 3 is a schematic view of the signboard of Fig 1

BEST MODE OF CARRYING OUT INVENTION

Figs 1 to 3 show a signboard 1 in accordance with the present invention. Signboard 1 is portable and may be stationed for varying lengths of time adjacent a real estate property during the period in which the property is being advertised. In alternative embodiments, signboard 1 may also be stationed in a real estate agent’s storefront window and provide advertising for multiple properties.

Signboard 1 consists in lockable housing 2 which provides security to the components of signboard 1, whilst being stationed at remote property locations. Lockable housing 2 is provided with lockable access hatches 9 in order for authorised personnel to gain access to the components of signboard 1. The penetrations of lockable housing 2, including the lockable access hatches 9, are sealed to provide a dry, protected environment for housed electronic components. Lockable housing 2 further provides a weatherproof environment for housed electronic components and preferably should have an ingress protection (IP) rating of at least 55 for dust and splash water.

Fixed display 3 is mounted to lockable housing 2 and provides a surface for applying a fixed advertisement, which may include information such as the main features of the real estate property and/or the real estate agent’s logo and contact details. Preferably, the fixed display 3 is large enough to accommodate fixed advertisements that may attract potential customers from a distance. The fixed advertisement may also identify whether the
property is 'For Sale', 'For Lease', etc. Fixed display 3 may be of any suitable shape and is preferably rectangular. However, fixed display 3 may have rounded corners or the like or may be of a distinctive shape that may draw an observer’s eye. For example, fixed display 3 may be in the shape of a building or the like.

Video display unit 4 is substantially housed within lockable housing 2. An impact resistant transparent shield 8 is disposed across the viewing screen 10 of video display unit 4 in order to seal and protect it from damage or theft. When signboard 1 is on display, video display unit 4 shows digital advertisements about the real estate property, including a countdown timer 20 showing the amount of time remaining until the property will be auctioned. The countdown timer shows the decreasing amount of time available to the observer to purchase the property before the auction. The countdown timer 20 may create a sense of urgency in observers and thereby raise the prospects of the real estate agent receiving offers from potential buyers prior to the auction. Video display unit 4 also displays a virtual tour of the property, which may include audible commentary, by way of an inbuilt speaker 18 allowing the potential buyer to decide whether he or she is interested in the real estate property without having arranged for an inspection. Alternatively, an additional speaker, not inbuilt into video display unit 4 may be used.

Computer processor 5 is secured within lockable housing 2 and controls video display unit 4. Computer processor 5 may store the digital advertisements by conventional means such as CDROM or hard disk. Computer processor 5 has a wireless communication module 6 that allows wireless interfacing with computer processor 5. An authorised user may wirelessly update information and programming of computer processor 5 to make changes to the digital advertisements. The digital advertisements may also be updated with real estate information from remote databases and transmitted via a computer 11 having a suitable wireless transceiver via wireless communication module 6. Also, the real estate agent may update the digital advertisements onsite via a notebook computer 13 or the like. Such real estate information may include the properties current status, whether an offer has been made, changes in price, etc.

Interested observers may also download portions of the digital advertisement onto one of their portable wireless devices via wireless communication module 6. For example, a user
having a mobile phone 11, personal data assistant (PDA) 12, a notebook computer 13 or
the like, that includes a wireless transceiver using the same protocol as wireless
communication module 6 could download a brochure from signboard 1 that may include a
brief of the property along with the real estate’s contact details.

Power supply 7 provides electrical power to the components of signboard 1. Power supply
7 may consist in a power connection to a pre-existing mains power supply 15.

Alternatively, power supply 7 consists of a battery pack 16 preferably housed within
lockable housing 2 and rechargeable from a variety of external power sources. The
external power sources may include an extension cable to a mains power supply 15, and
may also include an array of solar power panels 14 mounted external to lockable housing
2.

In a not shown preferable embodiment, video display unit 4 is an interactive unit, allowing
users to select options displayed in the digital advertisement to navigate through the
available real estate information. Video display unit 4 may include a touch sensitive screen
or alternatively may utilise a pointer secured externally to lockable housing 2 to register
the user’s selection of available options.

In a further not shown preferable embodiment, the screen of video display unit 4 is impact
resistant and suitable for prolonged exposure to weather. In this arrangement, video
display unit 4 is substantially enclosed in lockable housing 2 and sealed to the periphery of
the viewing screen of video display unit 4. This embodiment is conducive to touch screen
versions of video display unit 4.

In another embodiment, shown in Fig 1, signboard 1 can also additionally have a proximity
sensor 19 mounted externally to lockable housing 2 and signals computer processor 5 when
a person is within a predetermined range. Computer processor 5 may then initiate a
particular digital advertisement. The proximity sensor embodiment may be used to reduce
unnecessary power consumption by shutting down video display unit 4 when no observers
are nearby. This embodiment may also be used to initiate a particular attention getting
digital advertisement.
In another not shown preferable embodiment, the digital advertisements may continue for a period after a given real estate property is sold. Advantageously, the digital advertisements may direct observers to alternative, similar properties still available. The real estate agent may determine the selection of alternative properties advertised. Alternatively, the observer may select a group of properties, based upon which parameters are most important to the observer, for example, similar price range, similar features, or location.

In another not shown preferable embodiment, the signboard 1 further comprises an attachment means that is adapted to allow the signboard 1 to be mounted to a fixture on a building. The attachment means comprises a lockable bar member that is adapted to be securely fastened around a fixture on a building before being locked into place. Alternatively, the signboard 1 may simply be fastened to a wall of a building using conventional means such as screws or the like. In these alternative embodiments the feet portions as shown in Figs 1 and 2 may be removed in order to mount the signboard 1 to a building.

The foregoing describes only a preferred embodiment of the present invention and modifications, obvious to those skilled in the art, can be made thereto without departing from the scope of the present invention.
CLAIMS

1. A signboard for marketing a real estate property, said signboard comprising:
   - a lockable housing,
   - a fixed display mounted on or adjacent to said lockable housing for displaying
     a fixed advertisement,
   - a video display unit substantially housed within said lockable housing and
     adapted to display digital advertisements, said digital advertisements including
     a countdown timer adapted to display time remaining until an event,
   - a computer processor housed within said lockable housing for controlling said
     video display unit, and
   - a power supply for providing power to said signboard.

2. The signboard as claimed in claim 1 wherein said event is an auction.

3. The signboard as claimed in claim 1 wherein one of said digital advertisements
   includes a virtual tour of said real estate property.

4. The signboard as claimed in claim 1 wherein said computer processor has a wireless
   communication module allowing for wireless interface between said computer
   processor and a user.

5. The signboard as claimed in claim 4, wherein said computer processor updates said
   digital advertisements using real estate information downloaded from a remote
   database via said wireless interface.

6. The signboard as claimed in claim 1, wherein said video display unit is an interactive
   video display unit allowing a prospective customer to select options displayed in said
   digital advertisements.

7. The signboard as claimed in claim 1, wherein said prospective customer may
   download a portion of said digital advertisements from said computer processor onto
   a portable wireless device of said user via said wireless communication module.
8. The signboard as claimed in claim 1, wherein said prospective customer is an authorized user that is allowed to update programming instructions and information contained on said computer processor via said wireless communication module.

9. The signboard as claimed in claim 1, wherein said power supply comprises a battery pack rechargeable via an external power source.

10. The signboard as claimed in claim 9, wherein said external power supply includes an array of solar power panels mounted external to said lockable housing.

11. The signboard as claimed in claim 1, wherein said video display unit is an LCD screen.

12. The signboard as claimed in claim 1, wherein said lockable housing is substantially weatherproof.

13. The signboard as claimed in claim 12, wherein said lockable housing has an ingress protection rating of at least 55 for dust and splash water.

14. The signboard as claimed in claim 1, further comprising at least one speaker capable of providing said prospective customer with audio commentary.

15. The signboard as claimed in any of the preceding claims, further comprising a proximity sensor adapted to initiate one of said digital advertisements when a person is within a predetermined range of said signboard.

16. A lockable housing for a computer processor and a video display unit, said lockable housing having:
   - a fixed display mounted thereto for displaying a fixed advertisement,
   - said video display unit housed substantially therein which displays digital advertisements, said digital advertisements including a countdown timer adapted to display time remaining until an event,
- said computer processor housed therein which controls said video display unit, a power supply for providing power to said lockable housing.

17. A signboard having a computer processor and a video display unit, said signboard comprising:
- a lockable housing,
- a fixed display mounted on at least one side of said lockable housing for displaying a fixed advertisement,
- said video display unit housed substantially within said lockable housing and adapted to display digital advertisements, said digital advertisements including a countdown timer adapted to display time remaining until an event,
- said computer processor housed within said lockable housing for controlling said video display unit, and
- a power supply for providing power to said signboard.

18. A signboard for marketing a real estate property, said signboard comprising:
- a lockable housing,
- a fixed display mounted on or adjacent to said lockable housing for displaying a fixed advertisement,
- a video display unit substantially housed within said lockable housing and adapted to display digital advertisements,
- a computer processor housed within said lockable housing for controlling said video display unit, and
- a power supply for providing power to said signboard.

19. The signboard as claimed in claim 15, wherein said digital advertisements include a countdown timer adapted to display time remaining until an event.

20. The signboard as claimed in claim 15, wherein said event is an auction.

21. A method of event oriented marketing of a real estate property, said method comprising:
- providing a signboard having a lockable housing, a fixed display mounted on at least one side of said lockable housing for displaying a fixed advertisement, a video display unit substantially housed within said lockable housing and adapted to display digital advertisements, said digital advertisements including a countdown timer adapted to display time remaining until an event, a computer processor housed within said lockable housing for controlling said video display unit, and a power supply for providing power to said signboard,
- generating said fixed and digital advertisements about said real estate property,
- affixing said fixed advertisement to said fixed display,
- energising said power supply,
- installing said digital advertisements onto said computer processor, including setting the time remaining until said event,
- locking said lockable housing, and
- stationing said signboard on display on said real estate property.

22. The method of event oriented marketing of a real estate property as claimed in claim 14, wherein said event is an auction and said countdown timer shows an observer the decreasing amount of time available to purchase said real estate property.
INTERNAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/AU2005/001886

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

Int. Cl.

G09F 19/22 (2006.01)  G09F 13/00 (2006.01)
G06Q 30/00 (2006.01)  G09F 27/00 (2006.01)

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic database consulted during the international search (name of database and, where practicable, search terms used)

DWPI, USPTO, ESP@CE - KEYWORDS: signboard, billboard, digital, electronic, timer, countdown, lock, secure, video, screen, computer, auction, sandwich board, A-frame, G09F, advertising, and similar terms.

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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<th>Category*</th>
<th>Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages</th>
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<td>GB 2387472 A (McNAIR) 15 October 2003 See the abstract and figure 2</td>
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<td>Derwent Abstract accession No: 2003-051881/05, Class P85, T01, JP 2002288518 A (AISIN AW CO LTD) 4 October 2002, See the abstract and figures and machine based translation from PAJ at URL: <a href="http://www.idpl.ncipi.go.jp/homepg_e.ipdl">http://www.idpl.ncipi.go.jp/homepg_e.ipdl</a></td>
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[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C  [X] See patent family annex

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

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"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

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Date of the actual completion of the international search
24 January 2006

Date of mailing of the international search report
01 FEB 2006

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Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (April 2005)
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<td>US 2002/0016743 A1 (DORR) 7 February 2002 See the entire document</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Patent Abstract of Japan JP 2001265871 A (MISAWA HOMES CO) 28 September 2001 See the abstract and figures 27 to 39</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Derwent Abstract accession No: 2000-088168/08, Class P76, S04 DE 1982553 A1 (COMPRESS MEDIA WERBEAGENTUR) 9 December 1999, See the abstract and figures.</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>EP 0421941 A1 (CALIPSO S.A.S. MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT DI GIANCARLO CIPPELI) 10 April 1991 See the whole document</td>
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<td>US 6438880 B2 (DUNDORF) 27 August 2002 See item 10 or 43A</td>
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<td>US 1203712 A (DITZ) 7 November 1916 See columns 86 to 93</td>
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The first two documents combine to disclose all of the features of the claims when they are further combined with the later documents in respect to the indicated "Relevant claim numbers".
This Annex lists the known "A" publication level patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

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Due to data integration issues this family listing may not include 10 digit Australian applications filed since May 2001.

END OF ANNEX