

# APPRAISAL TODAY

## How to use less gasoline and save money today!

**W**e all drive. Some of us drive a lot. Some use pickup trucks and some use high mileage cars. Gasoline is not cheap. You can easily save money by getting more miles per gallon, whatever type of vehicle you drive.

Many years ago, long before hybrids, a friend of mine won a "highest mileage" contest. How did he do it? Keeping as steady a low speed as possible, avoiding stopping whenever possible and accelerating very slowly.

I have always used this technique when I am low on gas and not near a gas station. Now, I am trying to change my driving habits to do it even more because it saves so much money with current gas prices and it doesn't cost me anything except a little time lost. When researching this article, I found that I was not the only one advising this technique.

I am now driving only 5,000 miles per year as I do almost all my appraisals in my small city. My gas, oil, repairs, etc. are significantly lower. When I started my appraisal business in 1986, I covered a wide geographic area. I used to drive over 20,000 miles per year, almost all of it on appraisals. But, driving is wasted time I could use for doing more appraisals closer to my office. I

decided to cut my area gradually.

Note: Much of the information below is from the original [www.hypermiling.com](http://www.hypermiling.com) website. This link is now forwarded to another website that has some of the information from the original website.

### **What if you drive long distances in rural areas without a lot of traffic?**

Much of the advice focuses on urban areas, where the lowest efficiency and highest gas cost is being stuck in stop and go traffic.

If you are busy, time is money. Go for the fastest speed. If business is slow, drive a much slower speed to save money on gas.

Use your cruise control to keep from changing speeds and using more gas. Driving less aggressively helps.

### **Use the fuel efficiency data from your vehicle**

I recently rented a car for three days as mine was in the repair shop. I had never driven a vehicle with continuous displays of fuel efficiency. My Lexus was built in 2006 and did not have those features.

Learn how to take advantage of the data you are getting to see how your

mileage/fuel efficiency can be better. It's great to read this article and get ideas, but we frequently forget about it when we are behind the wheel.

### **Change your driving habits**

According to Edmunds.com changing your driving habits can improve fuel economy up to 37 percent right away (depending on how you drive).

They tested what works by driving over a specific route in test cars. See the results below and see all the other tips about how to modify your behavior.

Is this easy? No. Does it save money? Yes. The higher the price of gas the more money you can save.

### **Summary of ways to decrease your fuel consumption (More details below)**

- First (and most important) step: Start recording your gas mileage. Easiest way? Use your trip odometer. Method to check your MPG
- Second step: Do you drive aggressively and not know it?
- Third step: How long are you sitting still at red lights?
- Fourth step: Keeping moving in traffic congestion

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- Fifth step: Slowly accelerate after stops
- Sixth step: Your cruise control saves gas (but not by using it the way you might think)

### **Lower speeds**

Substantial savings on a long trip. Up to 14 percent savings, average savings of 12 percent per Edmunds. No one recommended driving significantly under the speed limit for safety reasons.

### **Cruise control**

Result: Surprisingly effective way to save gas. Up to 14-percent savings, average savings of 7 percent per Edmunds. In Edmunds.com's test using a Land Rover LR3 and a Ford Mustang, the Land Rover got almost 14 percent better mileage using cruise control set at 70 miles per hour rather than cruising at driver-controlled speeds between 65 and 75 miles per hour. The Mustang got 4.5 percent better mileage.

### **A/C on, windows up vs. A/C off, windows down**

Nice in theory; not true in practice. No measurable difference per Edmunds.

### **Avoid excessive idling**

More important than Edmunds assumed. Avoiding excessive idling can save up to 19 percent. How long to idle without shutting down varied from 10 seconds to a minute. Edmunds recommends shutting down after a minute of idling.

### **Hang with the trucks**

Ever notice how, in bad traffic jams, cars seem to constantly speed up and slow down while trucks tend to roll along at the same leisurely pace? A constant speed keeps shifting to a minimum - important to those who have to wrangle with those ten speed truck transmissions - but it also aids economy, as it takes much more fuel to get a vehicle moving than it

does to keep it moving. Rolling with the big rigs saves fuel (and aggravation) and is safer than going in and out of lanes, speeding up and slowing down).

### **It's all in your head**

Do you drive aggressively but not know it? You need to start thinking about -- and becoming aware of - all the stuff that goes on in your head while you drive.

### **Keep your foot off the brake**

Ask yourself while you drive - can you possibly let some of your thoughts focus on having maximum carefulness while driving, including offering buffer space between you and other drivers. When you are not paying attention to other drivers, for whatever reason, does it cause you to use your brakes more than you normally would?

Drivers apply their brakes between 10 and 25 percent more time than they need to!

If drivers leave a big enough buffer between them and the car in front - at least 2 seconds or more - there would be more time to coast before putting on the brakes. And if you see a red light way up ahead, why bother to keep your foot on the gas?

People who don't leave much space between their car and the car in front use their brakes more often.

Braking turns motion into heat via the friction of the brakes, slowing down your car. Gas was used by your engine to achieve motion.

### **Keep a steady speed**

How long are you sitting still at red lights? You are getting ZERO mpg when you are stopped at a red light or any other time you are stuck in traffic and not moving.

People who don't leave much space between their car and the car in front use their brakes more often. Keeping yourself moving in traffic congestion. Plan ahead by looking at traffic. For

example, when you see traffic slowing down, gradually slow down rather than hitting the brake.

Slowly accelerate after stops. Let your foot off the gas the minute you see a red light in front of you. And think ahead, even if you don't see a red light: maybe there is a big street coming up, or maybe there is a 'stale' green light (a light that has been green a long time and you suspect it may go yellow before too long.)

Try to minimize the time you spend fully stopped with your engine idling. The second that you see brake lights in front of you, take your foot off of the accelerator pedal, or hit the cancel button on your cruise control, and stop burning the gas that you know you'll be using up at zero mpg while you are stopped.

### **Don't accelerate fast**

When you start moving after a stop at a red light or a stop sign, \*and\* if you are in a car with an automatic transmission, give an extra second of time between when you release the brake pedal and when you hit the gas pedal. (Don't do this with manual transmissions or you could cause an accident!)

An automatic transmission car will start moving very slowly on its own with no brake applied. You can use this to your advantage, as a form of starting out slowly from a stop, even if you only do it for a second. Then once your car is in motion - however slowly it may be going - you can start accelerating with the gas pedal.

It takes a LOT more energy to get a stopped object moving rather than to get a moving object moving a bit faster (friction forces are involved here). Letting an automatic transmission car start moving \*slowly\* under its own very small acceleration -- even just for a second -- will allow you to start using the gas pedal while the car is already in motion. (Note... this of course doesn't work on hills.

Use it on flat or downgrade roadways.)

### **Check your tire pressure**

Important for safety and to reduce tire wear. No measurable effect on the vehicles Edmunds tested. Check your tire pressure often, but don't expect a big savings.

According to AAA, your gas mileage dips by 2 percent for every pound of pressure your tires are under-inflated.

Who knows which one is correct? But it does reduce tire wear.

### **Clean out your car**

Per AAA, an extra 100 pounds can reduce a typical car's fuel economy by up to two percent. Clean out all the stuff you don't need. Appraisers work in their cars a lot. Some of us tend to accumulate stuff.

### **Reduce aerodynamic drag.**

At highway speeds, more than half of the engine power goes to overcoming drag per Consumer Reports. Driving with a car-top carrier cut 6 mpg from their test car, a family sedan.

Slow down. Drag rises with speed. Slowing from 75 to 55 mph boosted gas mileage 33 percent in our sedan and in a large SUV.

Turn it off. Shut off the engine if you'll be idling for more than 30 seconds. Consumer Reports

### **Consolidate your personal trips**

Drive less. Half of all car trips are less than 6 miles. String together your errands with one long trip instead of many short ones. Driving with a warm engine saves gas and limits pollution and engine wear. Consumer Report

### **A little humor - from the Christian Science Monitor**

1. Use fuel slowly. If you use it fast, it won't last as long.
2. Avoid long trips that consume

large amounts of fuel by finding places to visit that are close to home. Start by knocking on doors along your street. In many areas, neighbors turn out to be fascinating people. Some of them may have backyard swimming pools, hammocks, and other amenities that rival any destination resort.

3. Educate family members about the importance of conserving fuel. If you overhear your child playing with dolls and planning a pretend party at the beach, intervene quickly. Tell her it would be much more fuel-efficient to have the dolls relax on the back patio and do some serious reading.

You can even make this into a craft activity by using paper and glue to construct doll-size pretend editions of Proust, Stendhal, and Thomas Hardy.

### **Tips from a hypermiler who can get over 100 mpg**

Hypermilers compete on who can get the best mileage on a closed course. "NASCAR in reverse."

"Wayne Gerdes can squeeze 84 miles per gallon from your standard issue Ford Ranger pick-up. He once averaged more than 100 mpg during the course of an entire summer. And while behind the wheel of a hybrid electric Honda Insight, he coaxed the vehicle into yielding an astonishing 180.1 mpg. Gerdes can do these seemingly impossible things with a car because he is one of a rare breed of drivers known as "hypermilers."

In one exercise, Gerdes guided a driver through some basic techniques in a standard Honda Accord, and the driver extracted 51.2 mpg from a car that the EPA rates at 24 mpg city and 34 mpg highway.

### **Drive fewer miles when you are appraising**

Appraisers have to work in the field. Taking a bus or a bicycle is not an option, except for a few appraisers.

Try not to have to return for more

comp or subject photos. Have a checklist.

Plan combine your appraisal trips together. Also, try to do your personal trips with your appraisal trips.

Use your GPS to plan your appraisal driving.

The fewer miles you drive, the more money you save.

### **What to do while you are driving**

I live in an urban area where the traffic seems to get more congested every day. Traffic slowdowns cannot be avoided, even in the middle of the night, when roadway repairs are done.

Getting a positive attitude about slowdowns is possible. I have hundreds of podcasts on my iphone. Most of my listening time is when driving. There is an almost unlimited list of topics, including appraisal podcasts.

Before podcasts, I used to listen to Books on Tape. Today, Often audio versions of books are available for free or relatively low prices.

You can also make phone calls. I have an adapter to put my iphone on my dashboard air vent, but I prefer to listen to podcasts. I have difficulty making notes when talking on the phone, such as the address etc. for a new appraisal,.

### **Where to get more information**

There is lots of information on the Internet. See what you can find for your vehicle specifically. For example, Google how to get better mileage in your pickup truck or for the make, model and year of your car.

You can get more info on hypermiling by googling Hyper Miling.

Learn how to use the data your vehicle provides in your dashboard readouts.

# Bail Bond Appraisals - all cash, very high fees, little competition

Many appraisers are requested to do appraisals for property bonds, but most didn't do them because of the typically very fast turnarounds. But, most appraisers don't like working for AMCs. Appraising for bail bonds is an opportunity with relatively little competition and very high fees.

This type of business does require research and personal (one on one) marketing. Some appraisers use post card marketing to bail bond agents. But, to get started I strongly recommend bail bond agent interviews to find out about your local market.

Most appraisers, including myself have done a few. But, we never did any marketing. There is demand and marketing can definitely help.

Note: in this article I use the term "bail bond appraisals" however, property bonds are a type of bail bond.

## Two types of clients: bail bond agents and criminal attorneys

Note: in this article I use "bail bond agents" instead of "bail bondsmen".

The reason they hire you is the same: get their client out of jail. But, the marketing is very different.

Bail bond agents are similar to mortgage brokers. Meet at office, chit chat, leave a brochure or flyer, etc. They can provide names of attorneys who use property bonds. Wikipedia has a good analysis, with info on history, trade associations, etc.. Google Wikipedia bail bond agents.

Attorneys are very difficult to market to. Don't waste your time sending postal mailers, visiting offices, calling, etc. You will get business by referrals from bail bond agents and other attorneys.

First, check your state regulations

(county, and city) to see if bail bonds are allowed.

Some states are trying to eliminate cash bail for various reasons, especially for low bail amounts. Some counties and cities are trying to do it as well.

Property bonds are not allowed in all states. Just Google property bond and your state's name.

Here is California info:

Last fall, the California legislature passed a bill (Senate Bill 10) ending cash bail, effective October 2019, which is now "on hold".

The bail bond industry fought back and put a ballot initiative to stop SB 10 on the November 2020 ballot.

## What are bail bonds?

There are two ways to get out of jail if someone is arrested: OR (on own recognizance), or posting a bail. Types of bail are:

1. Cash
2. Acceptable securities such as savings accounts and CDs
3. Surety bonds
4. Property bonds

With cash and securities, you post all the bail money required by the courts. With surety bonds, you obtain insurance for the bond. In a property bond, the equity in a property is used for the bail.

## Surety bonds

What most people think of as bail bonds are actually one type of bail, surety bails, where you obtain bail through a bail bond agents. The bondsman typically takes a non-refundable fee of 10% of the bail, and uses an insurance company for the rest of the bail money.

When the bail is high, often an insurance company will require additional security, such as real estate.

## Property bonds

Many people are unaware of property bonds. They are a substantial savings over using a surety bond. Fees in my area typically run from \$1,000 to \$2,000 for all the paperwork and the appraisal (assuming a typical home is used).

The minus, of course, is that if the person skips bail, the property owner loses the home or other property. Usually property bonds are used for very close relatives (child, brother, etc.) After the judge approves the title report and appraisal, a promissory note secured by a deed of trust is recorded with the court as beneficiary.

## How often is bail used?

I was unable to find any statistical information on use of bail. In fact, I was unable to obtain much written information on bail itself at all, except legal references and articles about whether or not bail should be used.

Checking with my local county court, which doesn't keep any statistical records, on a guesstimate basis, out of 350 cases, fewer than 5 property bonds were used and fewer than 10 were surety bonds. The rest were out on OR (on recognizance), used cash bail, or remained in jail.

See if you can find any information in your area. It could be very different from mine.

## Who does the appraisals for property bonds?

The legal references I saw referred to "licensed" or "qualified" appraisers, but in reality the judge determines who can do the appraisals. Some allow real estate brokers, some require MAIs, and some want licensed or certified appraisers.

### **Research your local market**

Do bail bond agents or attorneys order most of the property bonds? How much business is there?

Is your state, city or county trying to eliminate cash bail?

What types of appraisal formats do local judges prefer?

A local knowledgeable bail bond agent should know this information.

### **What report formats are used?**

Ask your attorney client or local bail bond agents which forms are typically used and what judges prefer. Judges decide whether or not to accept your appraisal.

Any form, except the current lender forms, can be used. Or you can do a short narrative. Check your forms software. The GPAR is popular. Do not include URAR, etc. as they are not appropriate for non-lender work.

### **What types of properties are used?**

Often it is a single family home, typically owned by a relative. However, when there is a high bond requirement, any type of real estate can be used, such as commercial or apartments.

### **What about fees and turnaround?**

Doing property bonds requires a very fast turn time. This can be difficult to manage if you have other clients, such as AMCs, that also want short turn times. If you already do fast turn times, it will probably be easier.

Sometimes the turnaround is longer, if the bail amount is very large, as it takes some time to assemble the properties to be used.

Fees charged by appraisers are typically 150% to 200% or more of a normal fee, up front,(or more) in cash.

Real estate brokers charge much less, of course. Usually the turnaround on the appraisals is 24 to 48 hours, as someone is sitting in jail waiting to get out.

### **What problems can occur?**

Sometimes judges object to your appraisal. Be sure you use the report format that they are familiar with. Find out before you do your first appraisal.

I heard of some appraisers being sued when property owners lost their homes. One appraiser I spoke with has the owners sign a notarized statement that they understand what happens if the person skips out on bail.

Another appraiser mentioned having to testify in court when the district attorney disputed his appraisal so the accused person would have to stay in jail. So he made sure to support the value, plus getting paid for testifying.

Some mentioned using a P.O. Box so no one knew where their office was located.

I suspect that these problems are relatively rare.

### **Who hires the appraisers?**

Most of the appraisers I spoke with who did appraisals for property bonds were hired by attorneys, or by the people putting up the property bonds.

However, there were some who market to bail bond agents. They are also an excellent source of which attorneys to contact.

### **Marketing - what are you offering to your clients in under 10 words?**

Attorneys and bail bond agents want to get their clients out of jail quickly. They want the judge to accept your appraisal without any hassles.

Here are a few ideas

- We can help get your clients out of jail! The primary tag line, or a similar one. This is what they want.
- Get appraisals fast, within 24-48 hours
- Licensed California appraiser with over 30 years of experience. Speaking, teaching or writing experience. (So judges will accept your appraisals.)
- Property bond experience: have

done appraisals for many property bonds (leave out if none, for now) Our appraisals have always been accepted by judges.

Your brochure/flyer can address these issues, plus resume content, such as your geographic area, teaching or speaking, professional designations, etc.

### **A flyer or brochure to hand out is useful**

For bail bond agents, this is easy. Just go by their offices to visit and drop off a brochure or flyer and introduce yourself.

For attorneys, you give them a brochure after you have determined which ones do property bonds.

You can try postal mailings, but it can be a hassle. In my article on assessment appeals, I discuss how to do post card mailings as this is the primary marketing method for appeals when properties in an area are reassessed.

### **Property owners as clients - marketing**

Sometimes bail bond agents ask the property owners to get their own appraisals. They use these as additional security when obtaining a surety bond, as the bail bond agents insurance policy may not cover large or risky bonds.

Appraiser websites I saw were almost all focused on the property owner. See how often bail bond agents (and maybe attorneys) ask their clients to get an appraisal.

### **More than one appraisal needed for large bail bonds**

For large amounts, such as a \$550,000 bail bond in my area, sometimes more than one appraisal will be needed.

## Marketing on your website

When you Google "bail bond appraisals" in your area, appraiser websites will come up. Almost all of these have "generic" pages that are very similar, probably from using a template. All the websites I saw focused on property owners.

However, appraisers are hired typically by bail bond agents and attorneys. Google bail bond appraisals in your area to see what they say.

If you already have a bail bond page that comes up on Google, you can just re-write it for your target markets.

### **I found an appraiser video with some good marketing info, but it marketed to homeowners.**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TEwYf5VGeg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TEwYf5VGeg)

Having a bail bond page on your website is good for marketing as you can put the link on your ad material. Be sure to SEO (search engine optimization) it so that it comes up on Google searches.

Few appraisers get much bail bond business from their websites. However, it is possible that an attorney or bail bond agent will Google bail bonds in St. Louis. Or one of them wants more information on you before they hire you.

### **Where to get the "big picture" on property bonds from the property owner's side**

The link below a good explanation for the general public and explains the entire procedure. The link is for California. Google for your state to see if it is different.

It will help you understand the pressure and stress for families with someone in jail. Plus the documents they have to get.

"Using your California property to get somebody released from jail":  
[www.suretybondauthority.com/porfolio/california-property-bond/](http://www.suretybondauthority.com/porfolio/california-property-bond/)

## Who hires the appraiser?

Find out what is done in your area.

Some bail bonds agencies will allow, or even require, you to use the equity in a home as collateral for a bail bond. This means that they will put a lien on that property until the entire case has been resolved in court.

Sometimes paralegals handle this.

Many appraisers are contacted by attorneys. The appraisals I did were for attorneys. But, I never marketed to bail bond agents.

## Marketing to bail bond agents

Read the Wikipedia writeup on bail bond agents. Google Wikipedia bail bond agents to get the "big picture" of what they do.

Marketing is similar to the old mortgage broker days, but the volume of work will be much smaller than for mortgage loans.

Just go to their offices and ask if they ever need an appraiser to get an idea of the market. They are also excellent sources of names and referrals to attorneys.

I googled "California bail agents association" and found a group. Check out any local meetings, or just call them for information. Look for a member in your local market to contact.

From Bryan Knowlton (in California) on appraisersforum.com "Most of my bail bond work has come directly from my brochures or postcards mailed or left in the bail bond offices. The bail bond companies will tell their clients they need to get a full appraisal. Other times people found me by looking for an appraiser in their area using a search engine."

## Marketing to criminal attorneys

I strongly recommend first contacting local bail bond agents and finding out which attorneys use licensed appraisers. They know what is happening and have time to chat.

Attorneys don't have time. Bail bond agents are also easier to connect with than attorneys.

I do not recommend sending postal mailings, visiting offices, etc. to attorneys. After you have done your research above, you will have a list of prospects. Then contact local criminal attorneys. Yes, they can be tough to connect with, but you probably won't have much competition.

Go to meetings of the section of your local bar association for criminal law. I googled "Alameda County Bar Association" and got information on who runs the group, any meetings, etc. You can call one of the contact persons and ask them about any upcoming meetings or classes for criminal attorneys.

See if any local paralegals are handling property bonds and contact them.

Many thanks to the attorneys, appraisers, and court clerks who helped me.

## How much property bond business will you get?

Your research will tell you. Do this first before doing much marketing. If there is not much business, it may not be worth doing them.

## Should you do bail bond appraisals?

This is a market that few appraisers try to get, even though many have a "generic" bail bond page.

Is it too much hassle doing the research required to find out about the market?

Are you uncomfortable working for bail bond agents or criminal attorneys? Many appraisers are not.

Can you do the very fast turn times, with little or no notice, and put your other appraisals on hold?

Do you want to make very high fees, all cash?

# Assessment appeals - Marketing, re-assessment opportunities, fees, critical dates, etc.

Property values have been going up all over the country. The best time to make money when there is a new assessment and prices are going up.

If you own property, just look in the mirror to see how you feel about increased property taxes due to re-assessments.

You will need to research your area - effective dates, appeal dates, assessor valuation methods, regulations, appeals procedures, etc. You are not typically doing current value.

You definitely want to focus on more expensive homes as the tax savings will be higher and the home owners will be more willing to get an appraisal.

You market directly to property owners.

In this article, I write about California methods and terminology. I worked for an assessor's office in the late 1970s when prices were going up 2% per month, so I am very familiar with reassessments dramatically increasing property values. See how your state compares.

Appraisals for property tax appeals are not like lender appraisals. You are working in the past. You need to understand the procedures and politics of the jurisdiction. On the plus side, there are no hassles with underwriters and AMCs.

Every taxing jurisdiction is different. Every state is unique. You will need to research the requirements and preferences. Property tax rates vary widely. If a jurisdiction is 1% of the assessed value and another one is 4%, the property taxes can be much different.

Note: California has not done periodic re-assessment since 1979, so opportunities are much more limited.

See what your state does. When prices are going down, you can make a lot of money doing assessment appeals. When prices are going up, there is significantly less business. See below.

## Dates are critical

You must know the lien date, the appeals date and when the notice of re-assessment goes out. Plus, know the tax rules for what is allowed in an appraisal or tax appeal.

## Assessor valuation methods used in your state

To help your client, you MUST know how the assessor determined the value.

Which valuation methods are used in your state or jurisdiction?

Is Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) used for homes and other properties? Or, are valuations done manually, using the standard 3 methods: Cost, Sales and Income.

Look at the assessor's records for your property (and other properties you have appraised). How did they determine the value?

Ask the assessor's appraisers what they do. Many are former fee appraisers, or do fee appraisals on the side, which will be preferred as they can more easily explain the differences.

The IAEO (International Association of Assessing Officers) is the professional association for property assessment. [www.iaeo.org](http://www.iaeo.org). There is lots of information there. See what they say about valuation methods.

## Are there any restrictions in your state on increases in property taxes?

Property tax limitations have been adopted in forty-six states and the District of Columbia, though their designs and restrictiveness differ widely.

See if your state has restrictions.

There are three broad categories of property tax limitations: assessment limits, levy limits, and rate limits.

Get more information here: <https://taxfoundation.org/property-tax-limitation-regimes-primer/>

## Two types of reasons for assessment appeals: individual properties and mass re-assessments

Both methods require marketing to property owners directly.

Type 1. A property owner calls you and says their property taxes are too high because the assessor overvalued their addition, or the assessor has a GLA that is too high. This requires marketing directly to random property owners, which can be difficult.

Type 2. An area is re-assessed. You know the market and see that the assessor is too high on many properties. You do a post card mailing. You will very likely get orders.

## Summary of some of the relevant factors

- Dates - what is the effective dates for the value, what is the timing for the appeal, etc.
- Appeal procedure and paperwork
- What type of report
- Definition of value
- How and when to market your services. Timing is Critical.
- Previous assessment level and how much it will increase.

## **Who makes the most money on tax appeals?**

Tax representatives for corporations with high value properties, fee based on value reduction make the most money. Or, working on local high value properties for small companies. Their fee is contingent, based on how much they get the property value reduced.

The taxpayer, of course, prefers contingent fees.

But, fee appraisers cannot work for a contingent fee, so the money is much lower. They only get the appraisal fee.

## **Assessor's job - property tax equalization**

When I worked for an assessor's office, my job was to make sure everyone pays their "fair share" of property taxes. When I am doing multiple property estates, I still use this orientation.

This is, of course, a very different orientation than appraising a single property.

## **You Must be objective. USPAP does not allow contingent fees (based on value)**

The people who make a lot of money are tax representatives (consultants), who get paid as a percent of the value reduction.

Appraisers cannot do this. As an appraiser, you must be neutral and objective. You can work for a tax rep doing appraisals for a fee, but few appraisers do this.

## **What about tax appeals in California (and possibly some other states) where there are no mass appraisals?**

California tax appeals (and possibly some other states) are much more limited when prices are increasing. When prices are going down there is lots of business. The California market is very cyclical: late 1970s big increases, early 1980s big declines (interest rates way up). Late 1980s,

increasing prices (rates went down). Early 1990s, prices decreasing, late 1990s to early 2000s, some price increases, 2000s significant price increases, late 2000s, significant declines.

Here is a recent example from a local assessors office with two assessment appeals board panels:

- Market crashed in mid 2000s: both panels met every 3 weeks and were backed up for 2-3 years.
- Market recovered with significant price increases in early 2010. Panels meeting every 6-9 weeks with few appeals. Most appeals were handled by stipulations, so they did not go to the appeals board.

There is not a lot of money to be made in California residential tax appeals when prices are going up. But, there are some opportunities, usually if there is a change in ownership or a too high sales price paid by the property owner. Proposition 13 values are based on the most recent sales price.

California does not have property tax equalization. Values can be increased by up to 2% per year, if prices are increasing. If there is a sale, new improvements or transfer of ownership, the assessed value can be increased.

For example, I purchased my house in 1985 for \$140,000. It is currently assessed at \$250,000. The current value is around \$900,000 (median price). My neighbors purchased their very similar house recently. Their assessment would be the purchase price of \$900,000.

However, in California, assessor's records have not been updated since 1989, when Proposition 13 passed (Jarvis-Gann). Check to see if they are correct.

Maybe there was a private sale to a close friend for a price well under market. The assessor uses the sales price.

Many successful California

appeals are based on the home owner paying too much. If there is a failure to disclose by their real estate agent, they will sue the agent. However, some file tax appeals.

Here are a few examples of when the assessment may be too high, that you can easily find for sales, especially if the assessor does not inspect the property:

- Bidding war with multiple offers and property sells over market. Assessor uses sales price.
- Non-market sales. Assessor uses sales price.
- Ownership changes. Assessor values the property too high.

## **What if there is a tax increase not due to a reassessment?**

Someone calls and says their property taxes are too high but there has been no mass reassessment. You ask why.

Or, you do an appraisal and find out their tax assessment is too high. You find out why and if it is a good candidate for an appeal.

Here are a few examples:

They purchased a small new home with few upgrades, but the assessor thought it was a much larger model with lots of upgrades.

You get the assessor's records and see the assessor's GLA is too high or there are fewer bedrooms. Or, the property needs a lot of work inside.

## **Marketing appraisals where there is not a re-assessment**

They are much more difficult as they can be difficult to find and are very scattered. Plus, there is a lot more research involved for just one appraisal.

Most appraiser find out about high assessments when they are appraising the subject property.

### **What is the fee appraiser's role?**

Be very careful in your advertising.

As an appraiser, your goal is not to lower the client's taxes. You provide an unbiased opinion of value. If it is lower than the assessed value, so be it.

The promise that the assessed value will be lowered or accepting payment for the assignment based on a result that it is lowered are ethical violations.

### **What is the effective date of the appraisal and the appeals date?**

Most, if not all, jurisdictions have a specific assessment date. They also have an appeals date. For example, the assessment date may be March 1 of every other year. The appeals may be way behind. For example, they are hearing appeals for the 2016 taxes now.

### **When are new assessments sent out?**

You need to know this way ahead of time, so you can get your marketing materials ready: post cards, change website, media interviews, etc. The time period may be short to file appeals.

If taxes go way up, homeowners will be upset and ready to do something.

### **What is the deadline for appeals?**

The appeals deadline is the most critical factor. As the date approaches, you will get more business.

### **Are there mass assessment changes when prices decline?**

See above for information on significantly increased tax appeals when prices go down.

Some jurisdictions are computerized and do "mass" reassessments. If these have recently been done or are planned soon, there will be little assessment appeal work. Be sure to check how reassessments are done.

In California, taxes are only increased on a sale or improvements, thus there is less work available than in other states.

However, California's Proposition 8 allows a temporary reduction in assessed value if there is a price decline. Providing assistance to home owners by giving them a list of sales (consulting) or comps (similar to a free comp check) is very helpful.

Proposition 8 makes tax appeals for value declines easy. Homeowners just fill out a form with comps.

### **Providing only data**

Recently a friend called who wanted some sales to submit with her application for a reduced assessment. I gave her sales in her neighborhood and didn't charge her, but she would have been very willing to pay.

Be sure you are not providing comps as this is considered an appraisal.

What did I send her? All the sales (prior to the lien date of March 1, 2018) from her condo project. On a more difficult property, I could have provided comps, with a file similar to one you would set up for a free comp check that appraisers used to do for mortgage brokers, as you are providing appraisal services.

Providing "comps" is tricky as then you are providing appraisal services. I didn't want to go to that level.

For "comps" I would have been providing desktop appraisal services and would have a higher fee, plus a file. I would have to look through the sales and pick the ones best for her condo.

Just like any appraisal, some are easy and some are hard. Be sure to charge more if you need to provide comps because a list of sales is too confusing for the home owner.

### **What appraisal formats are used?**

See what is typically done in the jurisdiction. What does the assessor want to see? Forms used by appraisers include the GPAR or other non-lender form, and short narratives.

### **What about drivebys?**

A non-lender form is best. You must find out what report formats are acceptable and adequate for the jurisdiction.

### **Consulting**

You can do preliminary research, such as overall value trends, charging for example, \$50 or \$75, to be applied to the appraisal fee.

Or, you could just supply sales to the owner to include with his or her appeal. You are not providing a value.

You could give the owner a list of sales and have them pick the ones they want.

### **Fees and payment terms**

Collect in advance or COD. If you are appearing before the assessment appeals board, have the property owner bring a check.

Here are some sample fees:

- Providing sales only (not comps) - \$50
- Preliminary consulting - \$75 - look for assessor data errors
- Driveby appraisal - \$250
- Full Appraisal - \$400
- Appearing at tax appeal hearing. \$200 per hour.

### **Get a copy of the assessor's records for the property**

You may be able to get this yourself, or the property owner may have to obtain it for you.

## Why can an assessment be appealed?

Check out the reasons that appeals are allowed in your area.

## Which markets are the best?

The higher the prices and assessment rates, the better the market for tax appeal appraisals.

Property taxes vary dramatically around the country. Some markets, such as California, can only re-assess when there is a sale or new construction (Proposition 13).

In most parts of the country, including California prior to 1979, properties are reassessed on a regular basis. Prices have skyrocketed almost all over the country. In a few areas prices have declined.

## The players - attend an appeals hearing (s) is strongly recommended

Depending on the state, players are:

1. Assessment appeals board (or some other name). Number of levels depends on your state
2. Owner's representative and/or attorney
3. Assessor's office
4. Property owner

Find out:

- How many requests for lower assessments go to hearings and why.
- Expertise of board members
- What type of reports they want to see
- Why they agree with the property owner or the assessor
- Who helps the owner? No one, friend, appraiser, tax rep

Each of the players has a different agenda, expertise, etc. I attended appeals hearings in two California counties to get an idea of what it was like. It was quite an eye-opener. There were no other members of the public present.

To the average citizen it would probably be very boring and tedious, but to an appraiser it would be much more interesting. I highly recommend attending sessions in your area, even

if think you don't want to do appeal work. You may change your mind. I did.

When you attend the sessions, network with any appraisers that are there, such as those from the assessor's office. Many appraisers are on assessment appeals boards. Tax reps can also be helpful.

Your goal is to not have the appeal go to the appeals board. Try to find out about how "stipulations" (negotiating with the assessor's office) are done compared with appearances before the appeals board.

## Look for changing markets, especially sub markets

You know what is happening in your area. Are the assessments way off in certain segments? For example, condos are declining and detached homes are stable. Or, the market is soft for high priced homes but good for low priced homes.

## Taxpayers' representatives

Tax reps are typically paid on a contingent fee basis. For residential properties, they usually send out mass mailers offering an initial service for a nominal fee, which may or may not help the home owner.

Sometimes the tax reps don't go with the property owner to the appeals board and don't tell the property owner they will not be there. See what is happening in your area. In your marketing, be sure to tell the home owners that you are available to go with them to the appeals board.

Tax reps' appraisal knowledge varies widely.

Since it's an easy entry career, many are attracted to it. There are schools, but they are not really much help as they don't give you the specific knowledge needed in your area.

Check to see what the tax reps are offering, what they charge, and how effective they are.

Some jurisdictions have publicized that tax reps aren't worth much because the assessor's office can han-

dle the appeals better than the tax reps.

As an experienced, licensed, and qualified appraiser you have much better credentials, but you cannot accept contingent fees.

## Assessment Appeals Board

Be sure to attend a few meetings of the Assessment Appeals Board.

Typically the home owner appears alone. But in knowing how it works you can advise the home owner. Unfortunately, most of the homeowners did not know enough about valuation to get their appeals granted.

Fee appraisers can testify, of course. Be sure to include this fee in your price schedule.

The assessment appeals board may be very knowledgeable, or know little and fall asleep during your presentation. In a recent edition of my weekly free newsletter, there was a link to assessment appeals board members sleeping.

In some areas, being on the assessment appeals board is a political plum, to be given out by elected officials as a reward to loyal supporters. In other areas, members may be very experienced appraisers or real estate brokers. Or, they may not know much about property values.

Some boards favor the taxpayer, some the assessor's office, and some don't play favorites. Some think it's important to keep taxes coming in, and some think it's more important to treat taxpayers fairly. You need to know their hidden agendas.

You may have different levels, with the first level rejecting almost all appeals. The proceedings may be judicial, with lawyers, or quasi-judicial, with some rules, but giving the appeals board great latitude.

Tailoring your remarks to the expertise of the appeals board is mandatory. For example, in a hearing I attended on a \$25,000,000 mixed use property, the issues were rents and OAR. No DCF, or other complicated discus-

sions. No big appraisal reports, just a few pages of comp sheets and rental data. None of the board members appeared to be very knowledgeable about valuing a mixed use property, as revealed by their questions. The tax rep tailored his presentation to their level of expertise. She won the appeal for her client.

### **How does your assessor value properties?**

Remember, you are not doing current value as you are appealing a value set by the assessor in the past.

Learn how the assessor does valuations. They can be Cost Approach based, mass appraisals, etc.

Look at the tax card and see how it is done. Also, ask the assessor's appraisers.

A good approach may be to rebut the assessor's office methods and mistakes. The assessor may not have current information. Often the owner will not allow them to see the interior. Maybe it actually needs work.

Some jurisdictions have special requirements, such as commercial properties must be valued using actual, not market, rents (California). Your appraisal value vs. an assessor's MRA value.

We all know how inaccurate AVMs or Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) can be. Many states use MRAs for mass reassessments. Your appraisal with relevant market data and supported value can really make a difference.

### **Tax equalization**

For most assessors, except in California and a few other states, the goal is tax equalization, where everyone pays their fair share.

Assessors make mistakes. All appraisers, including assessors, make mistakes.

All the homes should have equalized values. If they don't there is a good basis for an appeal.

### **Property owner savings**

See how many years the assessment remains the same. If the jurisdiction is on a 3 or 4 year reassessment cycle, the tax reduction is much higher than for a one year cycle.

Go after owners who will get the greatest tax reductions.

### **Appeals with consulting and no appraisal**

Check the tax card for a property. See if there are any errors in GLA, condition, etc. You are a consultant.

### **Assessor's office**

Some try to not go to appeals, and work out "stipulation" with the property owners. Others may send almost everything to the appeals board.

Some assessors see fee appraisers as "hired guns" and don't like them getting into their business. Find out what jurisdiction's assessor's office thinks.

You need to find out what is actually done as well as what the regulations say.

According to our sources, many appeals in California are handled by "stipulations", where the assessor's office and the owner or owners rep come to an agreement about the assessed value and the appeal does not go to the assessment appeals board. See what it's like in your geographic area. Thus, having a good working relationship with assessor's office employees is very important. Going to the appeals board is like going to court: you never know for sure what's going to happen.

Even if few appeals are settled before the hearings in your state, it's important to know the personalities of the assessor's office appraisers who handle appeals, how the assessor's office values properties (what methods and data they use), where they are weak, etc.

Appraisers in assessor's offices, like most appraisers, vary widely in their expertise and experience. In the appeals I observed, the assessor's office appraisers varied from very knowledgeable to not very knowledgeable about the specific issues of the valuations.

For awhile now, as fee appraisers get older, they have been taking jobs at assessors' offices to get a retirement pension. The assessor's appraiser may be very knowledgeable.

### **You must know the property tax laws the assessor uses**

You must know the tax laws the assessor's office operates under. For example, in California, rents must be economic rather than contract. If your contract rents are lower than market, your assessment could be above "market".

Be aware of the required filing deadlines for appeals. If you miss one, you're in trouble. Taking a copy of the property tax code, which you know backward and forward, to the assessment appeals hearing is advised.

Work with, not against, the assessor's office. Don't try to show how great of an appraiser you are. Find out what they need to understand the valuation problem. Don't try to reeducate them. Try to be open to a range of value.

Like assessment appeals boards, assessors' offices are subject to political pressure. Or, the assessor may be given direction by his or her bosses to keep assessments high to keep tax dollars coming in. Or, to give the homeowners a break if election time is approaching.

### Commercial properties

Commercial properties are very different than residential, regarding changes in prices. For example, onsite retail, especially shopping centers, have significant price declines even though home prices are increasing. Or, a large office building which was a regional headquarters for a large corporation was shut down and could not be rented as it was not in a popular office location. Nearby smaller office buildings were also negatively affected.

In California, where properties are only reassessed on change of ownership or improvements, the owner of the office building above negotiated a reduced assessment from \$5,000,000 to \$4,000,000, which was way still way above the market value. This was by using Proposition 8 discussed above.

This article is oriented toward residential properties. There are some

commercial appraisal opportunities, but most of the large properties are handled by tax reps who specialize in corporate assessment appeals. Sometimes they use fee appraisers for appraisals, but it is a limited market.

If you do commercial or apartment appraisals, you have probably seen subject properties where the assessed value is too high. You can offer to redo the appraisal to fit the effective assessment date for the owner.

Commercial appraisal fees are much higher than for residential, so the property value needs to be much higher, and the amount of reduced assessment to justify your fee.

If the assessor in your area tends to over value these properties you could do postal mailings to get business.

The assessor's office usually has very good information on sales, which is confidential. However, in my area, most appraisers use Costar, which does not have this information. Be sure to do lots more research when doing commercial tax appeals.

### Contingent fee assessment appeals

The most money is made in contingent fee assessment appeals of commercial properties. The consultant is paid a percent of the property tax reduction.

The two primary ethical issues are:

1) payment on a contingent fee basis and 2) advocacy. Of the two, contingent fees are the greatest problem. Everyone I spoke with who does much tax appeal work said if you don't want to do appeals on a contingent fee basis, it's hard to get many clients and make much money. The standard form of payment is a percent of the tax reduction. Many appraisers get occasional assignments to appraise a property for appeal purposes, with payment on a non-contingent basis, but this can seldom be relied on as a regular source of income.

Not being misleading is crucial. You must disclose your contingent fee and what you are doing.

When doing contingent fee work, if you're a licensed or certified appraiser, you cannot act as an appraiser. You must act as a consultant.

If you present an appraisal report, it cannot be done by you, but must

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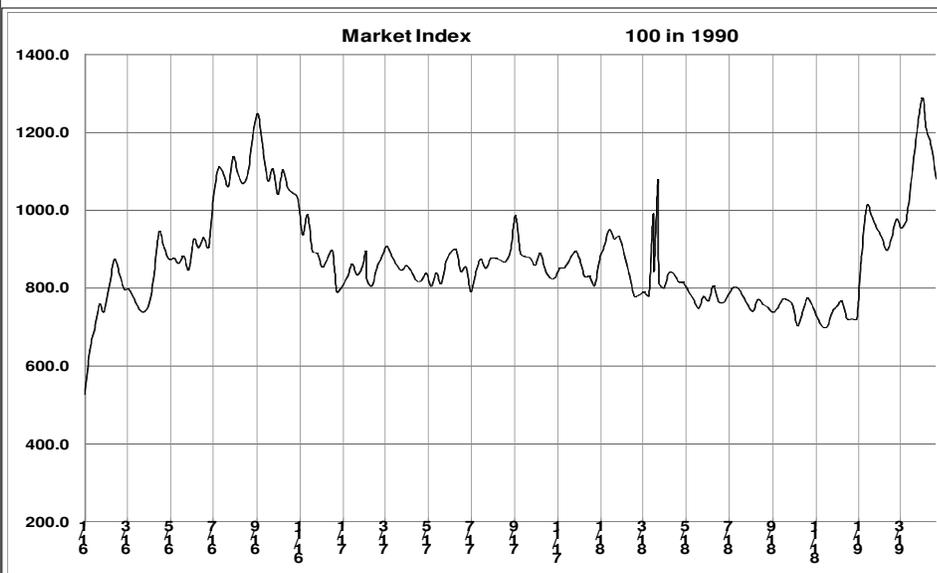
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### MBA Loan Volume Application Index – 1/90 to 4/19



be done by someone else. The appraisers I talked with use someone else in their office, a subsidiary company, or fee out the appraisal assignments.

If you're really worried about the ethical issues, you could hire a non-licensed person to handle the actual appeals, and you would provide the supporting documentation. Or, you could set up a separate company to handle the work. I couldn't really get clear, black and white answers as to how an appraiser, who is acting as a tax consultant, should conduct the appeals process so as not to violate the Ethics Provision. It is definitely a gray area, as are many parts of appraising.

In many ways, not being a licensed or certified appraiser makes it easier to be a tax rep. You can do the appraisal and represent the owner. That's one of the reasons few appraisers do assessment appeal work. But, appraisers are better able to understand the appraisal issues than nonappraisers, and make a good presentation of their support for tax reduction.

### **Property owners "doing it themselves"**

All the residential appeals I observed were done by the property owners and most were sad and/or pathetic. I felt sorry for the taxpayers as they obviously didn't know the property tax laws, what time period their sales had to be in, that listings from the newspaper weren't much help, had inadequate responses to the assessor's office appraisal data, etc.

One commercial property owner represented herself, and also didn't know the relevant issues. She made a remark about a condition of the purchase of her property unknown to the assessor's office that would allow her assessment to be reduced. She didn't know it was important and could have easily left it out of her presentation.

It is obvious to me that tax reps are

very useful, especially to commercial property owners. Unfortunately, few are willing to help home owners because of the low profits as compared with commercial appeals.

### **Appraisers cannot do both appraisal and consulting**

One appraiser does the consulting. Another appraiser does the value. Or, have a non-licensed person do the consulting if you're in a non-mandatory state. Be sure you have all the USPAP issues absolutely correct in how you handle it as it can be tricky.

### **Marketing tax appeal services**

Research the market and find out which properties (and neighborhoods) will increase the most and send post cards to the addresses.

The critical factor is timing the marketing when new assessments come out and when it is close to the deadline for appeals.

For homes, you will be marketing to consumers when they get their new higher assessments, when there are increasing prices.

Post cards can be very effective.

I looked on the Internet for what other appraisers are doing. Most of them seemed to have the same verbiage and layout and had used a brief template from their website provider. They got little or no work.

Change your website home page to emphasize your property tax assessment services, when the time for reassessment approaches. When it is time to market, you could change the headline on your website to say: "contact us for property tax appeals in Lewiston County. The filing deadline is July 1, 2019 for the 2007 tax year.

If you're worried about too many phone calls, on your post cards advertise a link to your website where the owners can fill out pertinent data such as address, name, assessment, phone number, email, etc. so you can prescreen the

prospects. Using email saves a lot of time.

Go through your records and see if any homes you have appraised have increased in value or the assessor has incorrect information. Send letters or call the owners.

### **How to use post cards for mass re-assessments**

Be sure to check with your printer to see if there are any problems with your layout, especially the front side. USPS is very picky about how this is laid out. For the rear side, see how much "bleed" is needed: distance between your ad copy/images and the edge of the post card. The smaller the bleed, the higher the printing price.

Be sure to select a color that allows the ad material to be easily read, but stands out from other mail. For your first mailing you can use white or yellow or green card stock.

Your printer will print the post cards, use their indicia (pre-printed postage) so you don't have to put on stamps, and print the names and addresses using the excel file you send.

Over the years, before the Internet, I did hundreds of thousands of postal mailings for this newsletter. It was very expensive. I never did small post card mailings, which are relatively inexpensive. The mailing cost is \$ .35 per post card.

My local Appraisal Institute chapter has been doing post card mailings for many years to about 7,000 appraisers. They told me how they do it.

There are restrictions on what can be on the front page, which includes the size of your logo and return address.

You can use online printers, but for your first mailings I recommend using a local print shop and doing very simple ad copy.

Vista Print online has lots of templates, but none that were for appraisers that I could find. Appraisers are combined with real estate agents.

Post card postage prices are much lower than standard envelopes. The size used by my AI chapter is typically 4.5 inches tall and 6 inches wide. Be sure your printer uses these dimensions.

USPS requirements:

- Rectangular.
- At least 3-1/2 inches high x 5 inches long x 0.007 inch thick.
- No more than 4-1/4 inches high x 6 inches long x 0.016 inches thick.

### **What to put on your post cards - front side**

See what the small post cards you receive look like. Go to your local print shop and look at what they have.

There is only a small area on the front that you can use.

Decide what is your "tag line". I recommend "Property taxes too high? We can help!" or something similar. Put this on the front, or both sides of the post card. Focus on what you can do for them (benefit).

There is very limited room on the front side. Go to [www.overnightprints.com/usps](http://www.overnightprints.com/usps) to see how much for the post card size you want to use.

Don't put too much on the back side, so the font size does get too small to read.

Contact information: phone calls or website form. For your first time, I recommend your phone number. Then, if you get a big response, you can set up a form on your website for them to fill out with a direct link on your post cards.

Writeup what you want on both sides of your post cards. Then, set up some template sizes on your computer and see how they look. Have your printer do a manual "mock up" to make sure the front is okay per USPS regulations.

For the front side, there is not much room for any ad material. Be sure to put your "tag line" here. There may

be room for your phone number. Your return address and logo can go in the upper left.

For the back side, there are no USPS regulations.

### **What to put on your post cards - back side**

Be sure that the type is readable. Repeat your "tag line" from the front of the post card, probably in a larger font.

You could put the latest date to file appeals as a reminder. Also, your name, qualifications for assessment appeals, etc. Do not put lender related promotional material.

Be sure to put a disclaimer in the bottom, such as "There are no guarantees and the appraiser cannot accept payment which is contingent on any action by the Appeals Board." as you want to be sure there is no confusion between appraisers and tax reps.

If you have a client that used your appraisal to get his tax lowered, mention it (not the person's name). If not, just say you are familiar with assessment appeals procedures. (You did the research above)

Also, maybe include your license number and type, number of years of experience, particularly in the area of the appeal, etc.

Including your email address and website link is good, if they are very, very easy to type.

### **How much time between when new assessments come out and appeal date?**

The shorter this time, the faster you will have to research the markets to see which are over-assessed and send mailings.

### **Which addresses to use in your post card mailings?**

Your printer will be able to use your addresses in Excel. You won't need to paste labels and they will be printed in the correct location.

You will need to identify which areas are the best (highest overvaluations), download the names and addresses from your public records data source, and send to your printer.

### **One appraiser's success at marketing who used a letter**

"I did get several tax appeal cases with a direct mail effort. I completed the first appraisal at full fee for a client who found me on the internet - didn't know which site though. In working that engagement, I found 15 other homes in the subdivision which were over-assessed to the extent they are overpaying at least \$1,000 per year."

"Without giving any specifics, I just sent letters to each with 'You should appeal your tax assessment!!' printed on the outside of the envelope".

"Four of the 15 ordered appraisals at full fee to support their appeal to the Board of Revision."

"The letter inside the envelope was short - just a brief introduction of my company, the fact that I had recently completed an appraisal to support an appeal to the Board of Revision for one of their neighbors, and that - although an appraiser cannot pre-judge any specific engagement - their homes were at or near the top of the assessed value spectrum in their neighborhood and far in excess of the highest market sale within their subdivision over the 24 months preced-

ing the 01/01/2010 assessment date."

"I should have done my first mailings much sooner the first time. Now, I target 20 or 30 such subdivisions in advance and get the letter out there early. That kind of work can be VERY profitable, since the template is set with the first report in the subdivision, all of them have the same effective date, and most of the comps can be re-used many times over."

"With each Desktop report paying full fee, that can add up to a lot of money if there are enough orders. independence in preparing the appraisal report (i.e., there are NO guarantees and the Appraiser cannot accept payment which is contingent on any action by the Board of Revision)."

#### **What about using letters, not post cards**

If you are only mailing to a few property owners, like the example above, this would be much easier than post cards. Be sure to put your "tag line" in large letters on the front of the envelope. You could hand write it in red, for example. You could include a form to be returned with their address, etc. Include your email address.

For ideas on what to put in the letter and your website, Google assessment appeals appraisers and see what comes up. They are almost all "generic" from templates, but they target homeowners and will give you some ideas.

#### **What to put on your website**

A page or two to explain the process, give the links to the site where all the appeal forms and instructions are available.

Another option is to say "Google James Johnson St. Louis appraiser" for more information on your postal mailings. Then, on your home page, prominently display your tag line (add your geographic area) with a link to your Assessment appeal page.

You may get swamped with phone calls and have long conversations the first time. Setting up a form, on your assessment appeal page, where the owner can fill in address, name, contact info, email address, etc. could save a lot of time.

#### **Where to get more information on assessor's offices procedures**

Attend a seminar or meeting given by IAAO (International Association of Assessing Officers).

Many fee appraisers are now working for assessors' offices. Find out if there are any at your assessor's office.

#### **Should you do property tax appeals?**

The marketing for re-assessments because of declining values is very easy.

The market for one time appeals, at any time, is difficult because you have to market to individual home owners.

Do you want to do all the initial research, including understanding the rules and regulations for your areas?

Are you in a state that does not do mass re-assessments? If so, marketing will be much more difficult except when prices are declining. If prices are not declining now, do your research so you will be ready when they go down!!