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## ACHIEVING AN AUDACIOUS GOAL

Royal LePage's Future-Focused Digital  
Transformation With rlpSPHERE

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# Achieving an Audacious Goal



## Royal LePage's Future-Focused Digital Transformation With rlpSPHERE

by Maria Patterson

From its founding in 1913 to its status as its nation's largest real estate company with more than 600 locations and 18,000 agents, Royal LePage is synonymous with real estate in the Great White North. As President & CEO Phil Soper says, "Royal LePage is Canada's Real Estate Company; a contemporary, innovative business built on more than 100 years of industry leadership. We have no intention of slowing down."



Royal LePage COO Carolyn Cheng

Photography: Korby Banner

The catalog of Royal LePage firsts stretches back decades, from introducing For Sale lawn signs to the country early in the last century, to the launch of Canada's first national real estate website in 1995. RoyalLePage.ca is Canada's second most visited home search portal.

Today, Royal LePage is once again shaking the industry's foundations as a technology innovator with the launch of its groundbreaking digital ecosystem, rlpSPHERE. Powered by kvCORE from Inside Real Estate, the platform features a suite of fully integrated proprietary and industry technologies. Automating the full spectrum of a real estate professional's needs—from lead generation and CRM, to marketing automation and EDM—rlpSPHERE is a solution uniquely customized for the Canadian market, and designed to empower Royal LePage's management, teams and agents.

The timing of the platform's launch was fortuitous.

"The rlpSPHERE concept and high-level architecture was born 18 months ago," explains Soper. "We envisioned a cloud-based, AI-enabled operating environment where our people could access what they needed to work anywhere, anytime, on any device. Thanks to Inside Real Estate and our brilliant design team, we had created a system optimized for a pandemic well before the world had heard of COVID-19."

Royal LePage Chief Operating Officer Carolyn Cheng describes rlpSPHERE as "a fully integrated, future-focused" solution. "It allows brokerages and agents to move away from multiple, disjointed technologies," she explains. "Right now, especially with the pandemic, this integrated ecosystem is a huge component of a brokerage's value proposition."

### **An Idea Whose Time Had Come**

According to Cheng, emerging shifts in the market made the timing right to embark on the rlpSPHERE project. Responsible for Royal LePage's



Royal LePage President & CEO Phil Soper  
Photography: Jacob Sharrard

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**- PHIL SOPER**  
President & CEO, Royal LePage

strategic vision and the delivery of its products and services, Cheng closely monitors real estate technology, and noticed the material infusion of venture capital flowing into the space, along with an increasing level of tech sophistication.

"For the first time, we felt there were companies that could effectively digitize the brokerage, agent and team processes, allowing each party to automate many of their administrative and routine tasks in order to focus more on elevating the level of service and professionalism being offered," she explains.

Also emerging in the market, for brokerage, team and agent websites, were advanced capabilities for leveraging AI and behavioral automation, such as lead generation websites that monitor repeat visits and proactively reach out to consumers, or push out search alerts and mar-

ket reports based on a consumer's search criteria. Royal LePage wanted to tap into the positive implications this could have for lead conversion.

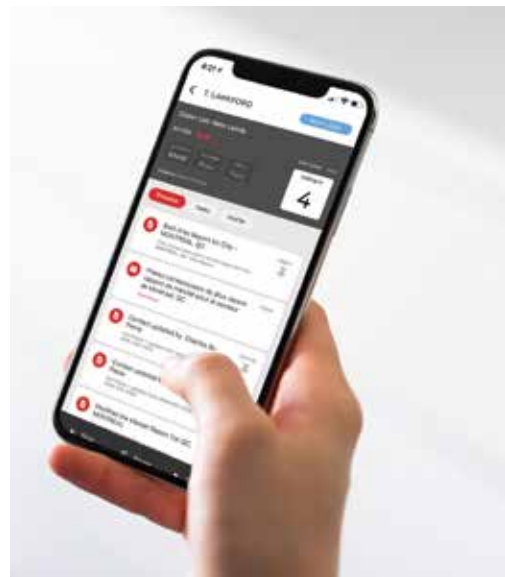
"There's been a lot of progress in AI, and we're able to do a lot of interesting things that we haven't been able to before," explains Cheng. "All of a sudden, agents have a new assistant that is effectively nurturing all of their leads but only surfacing the warm ones as they become ready."

### **Setting Bold Goals**

Royal LePage's goals for rlpSPHERE were ambitious, but in keeping with the company's long history of innovations and firsts.

"We wanted to make sure we were building a future-focused system that leveraged advanced sales-automation technology to give our network an advantage and to make sure everyone had the tools to be successful as transformation in the digital age progresses at an accelerated pace," says Cheng. This included a solution that would allow a broker to generate leads, then track and service those leads throughout their entire lifecycle, from inception to close.

Differentiation was also a major goal when it came to the development of rlpSPHERE. "We wanted to create a completely Canadianized





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COO, Royal LePage

solution uniquely tailored to Royal LePage with the data, customizations and integrations needed to make it work for our users while enhancing brand value,” explains Cheng.

The company’s digital solution also needed the flexibility and depth to serve both new and experienced agents alike—one solution for all.

According to Soper, there is a broader, bolder vision for the new ecosystem that goes beyond having best-in-class features and functions. “To rapidly drive adoption across thousands of independent contractor agents, we needed the wow-factor provided by amazing new discrete functionality, like automated lead management,” he says. “Yet the true superpower to increase enterprise productivity and revenue, and to reduce cycle time and costs, comes from integration. Gone are the typical real estate company’s islands of technology that devour hours of human labor to allow them to talk to each other. rlpSPHERE represents a triumph in end-to-end design and data integration.”

### **The Right Partner for the Job**

Always on top of technology trends and actively involved in industry conferences and mastermind groups,

Royal LePage was well informed when searching for a partner to make its technology goals a reality.

“We interviewed 25 different vendors to make sure we had a common vision and that their interface was intuitive and very usable in order to get the adoption we needed,” recalls Cheng. “We also had to make sure there was a good cultural fit with their management teams.”

Eventually, Cheng issued an RFP to three finalists who were then subject to an evaluation matrix from Royal LePage’s internal project team, and a meeting with the company’s Services Advisory Council, composed of 18 brokers from across the country. This multifaceted vetting process resulted in the selection of Inside Real Estate, known for their innovative tech leadership in the industry, who Royal LePage views as an independent, well-funded, long-term partner. Inside Real Estate brought to the table:

- ▶ **A proven ability to support large enterprise organizations and complex rollouts**
- ▶ **Modern tools (AI-driven CRM, behavioral automation, lead generation, etc.) that catered to all of Royal LePage’s key stakeholders and user personas**
- ▶ **A highly sought-after platform (kvCORE) that was well-established in the market, yet flexible and customizable to Royal LePage in order to create a unique ecosystem**
- ▶ **An open API platform, allowing for existing integrations with proprietary systems, key Royal LePage partners and other ancillary service providers**

“This is a robust system, but one that was designed to be intuitive for agents,” says Cheng. “We needed a proven platform that has a track record of driving results for brokers, agents and teams, and we found that with the kvCORE Platform.”

### **Creating a Unique Tech Ecosystem**

One of the biggest priorities for Royal LePage in developing rlpSPHERE was customizing the platform and ensuring “Canadianization.” The platform, says Cheng, needed to integrate the Royal LePage roster, Canadian listings and data feeds, and the company’s high-use service partners. Also on the must-do list: Canadian regulatory compliance, federal privacy and marketing law compliance, and provincial real estate regulator requirements.

The rlpSPHERE platform also required complete white-labeling, including branded digital and print marketing pieces, smart drip campaigns tailored to Canadian consumers across the core platform, as well as mobile apps. Royal LePage also introduced a branded, custom Learning Portal.

“Our brand is incredibly important to us, so every single piece of collateral—print, digital and social media—had to have Royal LePage’s branding and speak to the Canadian agent and consumer,” says Cheng.

### **Scaling a Major Roll-Out...Despite a Pandemic**

While there are inevitable bumps in the road for any tech roll-out, no one could have prepared to launch a large-scale digital platform in the midst of a pandemic.

According to Cheng, however, the challenge presented by the COVID outbreak only strengthened their resolve.

“Once the pandemic hit, all of our teams went fully virtual,” she recalls. “Because of the size, scale and importance of the project, it bonded our team with an even larger sense of purpose and helped us deliver the solution to our network during the pandemic.”

The team began creating buzz for rlpSPHERE at key national events in late 2019, and at regional broker meetings in the first quarter of 2020. Prior to launch, a four-week teaser video series was pushed out,



and to help brokers prepare for the agent launch, a manual was created outlining the benefits of the system by agent persona (new agent, experienced agent, team), a comparison of the service to key players in the market, the essential phases of configuration and training, tips for initial adoption and engagement and, of course, support.

Since the launch, the influx of information continues, including best practices from other Inside Real Estate customers and more in-depth, custom webinars from Royal LePage's Learning Services team in conjunction with Inside Real Estate's trainers.

"The scope of this service is broader and more complex than what we've done before, and the training is comprehensive," says Cheng.

### Evolution to Revolution

Cheng is happy to report that the adoption plan for rlpSPHERE is ahead of schedule. "All of our brokers are really excited by the fact that this is something unique to us," says Cheng. "During the pandemic, it's been a strong retention tool, and they're starting to see the early benefits when recruiting new agents. It's important that everyone becomes a digital expert. This is a transformation for everyone in the industry and our network."

And there couldn't be a more critical time to embrace a fully digital future. Bullish market conditions are expected to continue through 2021, and home-buying and -selling habits continue to evolve in the wake of the pandemic. Says Soper, a well-timed business revolution.

"Never underestimate the power of luck when it comes to business success," he smiles. "In Canada, we are commonly first-to-market with new real estate services and technologies. We expect our competitors to follow suit in a year or so. The global health crisis that has shut down air travel and sent people to work from home has made the creation of something like rlpSPHERE exponentially more difficult. We will enjoy an unusually lengthy window of digital exclusivity as a result.

"There will be no resting on our laurels," Soper concludes. "The wizards at Inside Real Estate and Royal LePage are continually working on enhancements and will keep us on the cutting edge of innovation. With the rlpSPHERE framework in place, we've already been able to announce new functionality that widens the gap between us and our hungry pursuers. It is great fun!" **RE**

For more information on rlpSPHERE, please visit [rlp.ca/rlpsphere-agents](http://rlp.ca/rlpsphere-agents) and [rlp.ca/rlpsphere-teams](http://rlp.ca/rlpsphere-teams).

To learn more about Inside Real Estate and their kvCORE Platform, visit [www.insiderealestate.com](http://www.insiderealestate.com).

## rlpSPHERE: The Missing Piece for Real Estate Pros

*Royal LePage real estate professionals are already experiencing the advantages of rlpSPHERE.*

As the director of operations for Royal LePage Royal City Realty, Gillian Atkinson sees the value of rlpSPHERE for real estate professionals at every level. "The system offers something for everyone, whether you're just starting out or you're a veteran. And for team admins, the platform's CORE Team add-on takes a heavy load off," she says.



Atkinson

rlpSPHERE helps agents focus on what they're good at as opposed to getting overwhelmed by technology, Atkinson explains. "rlpSPHERE takes that fear away for them," she says. "Everything they possibly need to do is there, and it's free and there's tons of support. And you don't need to use every piece of it—you just use what works for you and your business right now."

And real estate professionals can now make more meaningful connections than ever thanks to rlpSPHERE's integrated social media feature.



Burke

"This platform gives us rich intel and the ability to share that intel with clients," says Mark Burke, team leader at Royal LePage Triland Realty. "This gives you an authentic way to broaden your reach to existing clients, and reaffirms our market dominance in social media."

This year, since the launch of rlpSPHERE, Carlo De Castris, a sales representative with Royal LePage Royal City Realty, is able to credit rlpSPHERE with one new additional client every month that he would not have had otherwise. As he says, "I've been waiting most of my career for technology to catch up with what I thought could be accomplished...and it's finally here."



De Castris



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*We needed a proven platform that has a track record of driving results for brokers, agents, and teams, and we found that with the kvCORE Platform.*

**CAROLYN CHENG | COO | ROYAL LEPAGE**

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