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The Hidden Cost of Paper Checks: How HUNT Real Estate Solved an Outdated Process with DepositLink

Where Process Meets Scale

At HUNT Real Estate, the accounting team doesn't just track numbers. It keeps every deal moving. Earnest money deposits come in, transactions get recorded and agents get paid. That flow has to work every time, across a brokerage that spans Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Albany in New York state and across Massachusetts and has been operating for more than a century.

Today, HUNT Real Estate supports about 1,500 agents and handles roughly 13,000 transactions each year. At that scale, even routine processes carry real weight.

Alicia Townsend is responsible for keeping that weight from turning into friction. As Accounting Operations Manager, she oversees the financial side of every transaction, from initial entry to final payout. She has spent more than three decades in accounting, including over 17 years at HUNT Real Estate, giving her a clear view of how processes perform under pressure as a company grows.

For Townsend, one process kept standing out: earnest money deposits, where small inefficiencies had a way of compounding quickly.

The Challenge: When Checks Slow Everything Down

At HUNT Real Estate, earnest money deposits followed a process that was familiar across the industry and increasingly difficult to manage at scale. Agents collected paper checks, and offices deposited them. Copies were sent to accounting. Then someone had to match each deposit to the right transaction and make sure everything lined up.

The process was manageable in pieces. At scale, it created drag.

"Copies of the checks, copies of the deposit receipts were sent to our central accounting person who would record it into our database," Townsend said.

The process depended on physical movement. Checks had to be picked up, carried, delivered and deposited. That added time and uncertainty to transactions that were already time-sensitive. **"Agents have to walk around with that check,"** she said.

For accounting, the work did not stop at recording deposits. Every check raised the same question. **"I always have to worry about, is the check going to clear the bank?"**

When funds were delayed or unavailable, the impact reached agents first. A deal could appear to be moving forward, only to stall when the deposit did not come through. **"Agents think that they've got a deal, but then there's no funds,"** she said.

Even when checks were valid, the physical nature of the process introduced risk. Checks could be lost, delayed or destroyed in transit, creating additional complications for clients and staff.

"We've had checks shredded, lost in the mail," Townsend said.

At HUNT Real Estate's scale, these issues were not constant, but they were persistent. And each one required time, follow-up and coordination to resolve. As transaction volume increased, so did the pressure to find a more reliable way to manage deposits without adding complexity to the process.

The Solution: A Digital Path for Deposits

HUNT Real Estate did not set out to reinvent its deposit process. The change started with an acquisition. A brokerage the company acquired in Massachusetts was already using DepositLink, giving HUNT Real Estate a chance to see the platform in action before making a decision.

"We saw proven effectiveness with our acquisition. That was the best testimonial for us," Townsend said.

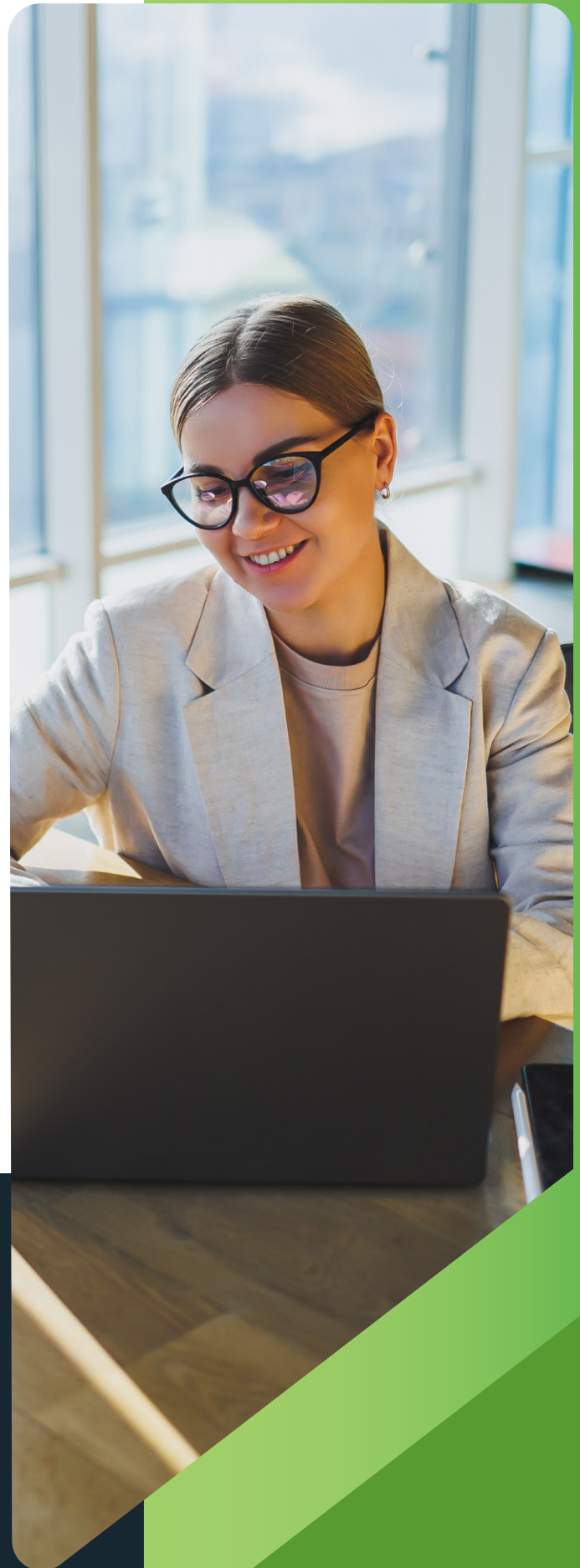
After reviewing the platform internally, including a security evaluation by its IT team, HUNT Real Estate moved forward with implementation.

DepositLink introduced a digital alternative to paper checks, allowing buyers to submit earnest money securely and electronically. For agents, it removed the need to collect and transport physical checks. For accounting, it created a more direct path from deposit to transaction record.

Instead of relying on checks to move between people and offices, deposits could be sent, received and tracked in one place, reducing delays and removing much of the back-and-forth that had defined the process. In practice, that meant replacing a fragmented, manual process with a more unified approach to handling transaction funds. The decision was easier because the platform does not add cost to the brokerage.

At a high level, the platform supports:

- ▶ **Earnest money and transaction-related payments** – DepositLink supports electronic collection of earnest money deposits, rental payments and transaction-related funds tied to title or escrow services. This allows brokerages to use one platform across sales, leasing and affiliated services, reducing fragmentation between payment workflows.



- ▶ **Mobile-first payment experience** – Payment requests can be sent and completed through a mobile-friendly interface. Buyers submit funds electronically, while agents, administrators and affiliated teams can initiate and track payments within the same system.
- ▶ **Brokerage-level visibility and branding** – Payment activity is centralized, giving leadership visibility across agents, offices and business lines. Payment requests and interfaces can reflect brokerage or affiliated-entity branding, supporting a consistent experience throughout the transaction lifecycle.
- ▶ **Security aligned with financial-services standards** – DepositLink is SOC 2 Type II compliant and uses 256-bit encryption. Payments move through the ACH network, with processing and verification handled by providers including Dwolla and Plaid, allowing the platform to avoid storing banking credentials. User access includes two-factor authentication, and infrastructure is hosted on Microsoft Azure.
- ▶ **Integration with brokerage systems** – DepositLink integrates with transaction management tools such as SkySlope and Dotloop, supports single sign-on through Azure Active Directory and Okta, and offers API access for custom connections to accounting or back-office systems.

Implementation: Rolling Out Without Disruption

Rolling out DepositLink at HUNT Real Estate required coordination across offices, systems and teams, but the process itself was relatively straightforward. The company worked closely with DepositLink to configure its account structure, user access and office setup. Because many staff members support multiple offices, that structure required some upfront planning.

"We had to really, before we implemented, think about the setup," Townsend said.

Once that groundwork was in place, the technical rollout moved quickly. HUNT Real Estate provided its data, and DepositLink handled much of the implementation.

"They were very helpful. It was just a matter of giving them all the data in a spreadsheet," said Townsend. **"They were great about the implementation. It went very quickly."**

One of the most important pieces of the rollout was integration. DepositLink worked with HUNT Real

Estate's accounting software provider, Profit Power, to build a data bridge that connects payment activity directly to the brokerage's financial systems.

"DepositLink built that with our software vendor, and now it's much easier for us to post payments to the correct sales," Townsend said.

To support rollout across the organization, HUNT Real Estate also coordinated training and follow-up sessions for agents and staff. DepositLink hosted additional demos for offices and teams, helping reinforce how the platform fits into day-to-day workflows.

Ongoing support has remained consistent post-launch. When issues arise, the DepositLink team responds quickly, allowing HUNT Real Estate to resolve questions without disrupting operations.

"It's a quick email," Townsend said. **"They're very responsive."**

Results: Fewer Issues, Faster Transactions

At HUNT Real Estate, the changes showed up quickly in the day-to-day handling of deposits, where fewer issues and fewer delays meant less time spent managing exceptions.

In practical terms, that translated into:

- ▶ **Fewer bounced checks** – Monthly bounced checks dropped from two to three per month to about one.
- ▶ **50% reduction in time spent on refunds** – Returning escrow funds is now handled electronically instead of issuing and mailing checks.
- ▶ **Faster deposit processing and improved compliance** – Deposits can now be received and held within required timeframes, without delays tied to delivery or manual deposit.
- ▶ **Reduced manual handling for agents** – Agents no longer need to collect, carry or coordinate physical checks.
- ▶ **Fewer transaction disruptions** – With fewer delays, lost checks and funding issues, transactions move forward with fewer interruptions.

Leading Adoption in the Market

For HUNT Real Estate, the value of DepositLink extends beyond internal operations. It has also influenced how the brokerage engages with others in its markets.

As part of its rollout, HUNT Real Estate introduced the platform to other brokerages in the region, notifying them that agents and clients would begin using DepositLink for earnest money deposits.



"We notified the largest brokers in our regions that we were going to be switching over to DepositLink," Townsend said.

While there was some initial hesitation, that exposure helped drive broader familiarity with digital payments across the market.

"I know that there's also been some other brokers who have since signed on because of it," she said.

As more brokerages adopt the same process, transactions become easier to coordinate. Fewer exceptions, fewer workarounds and less back-and-forth between parties using different methods. For HUNT Real Estate, that means fewer disruptions when working across brokerages and a smoother path from contract to close.

Conclusion: A Better Way to Handle Deposits

At HUNT Real Estate, the impact of DepositLink is most visible in what agents no longer have to do.

They no longer need to collect checks, carry them between offices or follow up to confirm whether funds have cleared. What used to be a routine part of every transaction has largely disappeared from their workflow.

That change shows up in how agents experience the job.

"The agents who use it use it a lot because they enjoy the freedom of it. The hands-off, I don't need to touch your check, I don't need to carry your check, I don't have to worry about whether or not your check will clear," said Townsend. **"The agents who use it, they love it."**

That kind of response has real implications for a brokerage. When agents find a process easier and less frustrating, they are more likely to adopt it, stick with it and expect it as part of how they work.

For HUNT Real Estate, the result is straightforward. A process that used to require constant attention now runs in the background, without the same delays, uncertainty or manual effort. That change is felt across the business, in how transactions move, how accounting operates and how agents experience the work — and at scale, that makes a difference.

To see how DepositLink helps brokerages simplify deposits, reduce risk and create a better experience for agents and clients, all at no cost to the brokerage, visit depositlink.com

About the Author

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