

Frequently Asked Questions

A copy of this portion can also be found on the password-protected Agent Portal of Benchmark's website.

Paperwork

1. Q: *What is required in the paperwork I turn in?*
A: If it's on the checklist, it is required. Generally though, less is more when it comes to paperwork! So if it's not on the checklist, there's no need to turn it in unless it is actually a component of the contract, such as a special addendum. Please do NOT send us MLS picture printouts, CMAs, or tax reports, and remember EVERY listing and contract packet MUST have its respective checklist as the cover sheet.

Other paperwork we don't need: Buyer Inspection Contingency Releases, Repair Counters, loan commitment letters, inspection reports, rejected offers, other company's disclosures, and any document with sensitive information (e.g. social security numbers).
2. Q: *Why don't you need other "important" paperwork?*
A: TREC requires that the forms listed on our checklists are accessible and fully signed and dated. What TREC requires in the broker file may be different from what is good business for YOU, the agent, to maintain in your file. Always "Cover Your Assets" by keeping your own files complete. Likewise, TREC requires the maintenance of the broker files for 3 years, but we always keep them for 7 years. Our recommendation is that you do the same. There is a reason that E&O Insurance is individual in Tennessee. If a claim is filed, invariably it is against the individual – which is why we are strong advocates of maintaining at least \$1,000,000 in E&O Insurance, individually. As a company, we carry \$3,000,000. You will need every scrap of paper should you need to format a defense yet it is virtually impossible for the broker file to duplicate that effort.
3. Q: *Since Benchmark and Touchstone Title are affiliated businesses, can I expect Benchmark will get my contract docs if I send them to Touchstone?*
A: No. Benchmark and Touchstone are separate entities with separate admin staff. You will need to turn in paperwork to both offices, just like you would if you were using a non-affiliated title company. Don't let the fact that we are both paperless confuse you, as we are on two different paperless programs, and we do not share documentation.

Additionally, your title company will need different documentation than what we need. You will need to check with your title company to see what they require from you and your client.
4. Q: *What paperwork do I need to turn in for rentals?*
A: If the property is listed for sale on the MLS, we should already have your listing agreement on file, and we don't need anything more. If the property is NOT listed for sale, all the office requires is the Rental Authorization/Notification form sent to the Pipeline. When you are ready to be paid a rental/lease fee, you will need to turn in the check, check submission form, and lease agreement directly to the office.
5. Q: *I'm relisting a property, and the office already has all the listing docs. Do I have to turn everything in again?*
A: Nope. If your listing expired, the only paperwork we require is a listing amendment or Change of Status form documenting all the changes from the original listing agreement (e.g., term dates, listing price). If your listing was withdrawn, make sure you also include the Back on Market date. If you want to withdraw a property and save yourself some work, you may submit the request to withdraw, the anticipated BOM date, new term dates, and the new price (if applicable) on ONE listing amendment.

6. Q: *What paperwork do I need to turn in for a lease/purchase?*
A: Turn in all typical contract docs listed on the sales/purchase checklist (Confirmation of Agency, Disclaimer, Property Condition, Affiliated Business Disclosure, etc.), but use TAR F57 and F58 in lieu of the Purchase and Sales Agreement. Remember to make a note at the bottom of the checklist that this sale is a lease/purchase.
7. Q: *How do I withdraw my listing on the MLS?*
A: Only office staff with broker permissions are able to withdraw listings. In order to have a listing withdrawn, you must fill out and sign a Change of Status form or Listing Amendment requesting the withdraw. Don't forget to get your seller's signature and date, too. When you have completed this, send the form to the Pipeline. Office staff is not allowed to withdraw any listing from the MLS without this paperwork; an email or phone request will not suffice unless your broker is notified of an emergency (i.e., gas leak, theft or vandalism, etc.), and personally withdraws the listing from the MLS or directs office staff to do so.

Check Processing/Commissions

1. Q: *I'm expecting an earnest money check to come to the office...*
A: If a check comes to the office in an envelope with your name on it (whether hand delivered or via the mail), it will go in your mailbox and remain there until you come by to get it. Office staff is not allowed to intercept and open your mail. After all, that's a felony! If you want us to accept and start processing a dropped-off check, you MUST send us a Check Submission Form PRIOR to the check being dropped off. Do not submit any earnest money or misc. commission check without the Check Submission Form attached. We MUST have a full accounting of each check that comes through the office.
2. Q: *But what about title company checks?*
A: Closing commission checks need to be submitted directly to the office with a copy of the check AND the Closing Checklist attached (or emailed directly to Donna prior to receiving the check). Do NOT use the Check Submission form for a closing commission check, and make sure the closing checklist is completely filled out, including how you want to be paid (check or direct deposit), if there are any referral fees that need to be paid out, who will be paying the transaction fee if co-selling, the address you want your check mailed to if applicable, etc. Do not scan the closing checklist to Paperless Pipeline since we should already have it with the original check. Likewise, if you send the closing checklist to the Pipeline INSTEAD of sending it directly to Donna, your commission is almost guaranteed to be delayed.
3. Q: *What about paying referral fees?*
A: Normally, referral fees are paid directly from the closing agent upon funding of the purchase (i.e. at closing), and our preference is always for the closing agent to handle all extraneous payments. However, if Benchmark is to remit the referral payment, you must include the fully executed referral agreement in your contract or closing packet sent to the Pipeline AND submit to Donna a W-9 from the company receiving the referral payment (OR your referral agreement noting the Tax ID# of the company) immediately upon closing. ALSO, make a note on the Closing Checklist of the receiving company's name, the referring agent's name, and the address the check is to be mailed to.

In regards to outgoing referral fees (where a Benchmark agent is receiving a fee), submit to Donna the referral agreement and check submission form with the referral check when you are ready to be paid. It is expected that you will have already sent the referral agreement directly to your broker to sign. Because of the nature of referrals, the admin office does not keep outgoing referral agreements on file.
4. Q: *My deal has fallen through, and I need earnest money released back to the buyer...*
A: If your deal has fallen through, send the Earnest Money Disbursement form to your broker to sign, then directly to Donna (NOT the Pipeline). You MUST communicate "release instructions" in writing on the bottom of page 2 of the Earnest Money Disbursement form telling us the following: (1) to whom the check should be made payable, and (2) the name of the person who will be picking it up from the office OR the address where the check needs to be sent.

If “release instructions” are not articulated, the check will sit for pick up in the Benchmark admin office indefinitely.

5. Q: *I have a closing where my commission is less than the earnest money. What do I do?*
A: We will need to transfer the earnest money to the title company PRIOR to closing. To initiate this, email the Earnest Money Release to Title Company form to Donna (NOT the Pipeline) 48 hours in advance.

In the future, if you anticipate your commission amount to be less than the earnest money, you can avoid this paperwork shuffle by simply having the title company hold the earnest money. Whatever you do, be certain that your paperwork reflects what actually happened. Especially concerning earnest money.

6. Q: *When will my commission be ready?*
A: The policy manual states that we strive to pay all commissions within 36 business hours after all paperwork has been received and approved. Often, we can get it to you within a couple of days after we receive all the docs and checks, but THAT IS NOT GUARANTEED. Please remember some days are busier than others – especially the last day of the month, and in deference to those in line ahead of you – there may be times when it could take the full 36 hours to get down to your file. Remember: making sure your paperwork is fully compliant ensures that you get paid quicker.

If you selected to receive your commission as direct deposit, we will email you a record of the deposit once it's been processed. That email will probably go to your junk folder, but we will also put a copy on the Pipeline for you. Commission paid via direct deposit is NOT immediate. Most likely the deposit will show up in your account the next business day, but depending on which regional Fed system your bank is on, it could take up to three business days. This time can be shortened if we are depositing into a Pinnacle Bank account. We have no control over how long it takes for your bank to accept the deposit and put it into your account.

If you selected to receive your commission in check form, we will call you when your check is ready to pick up. If you don't answer, we will leave a message on your voicemail. **Calling the office to ask if your check is ready is completely unnecessary and only lengthens the processing time.**

Paperless Pipeline

1. Q: *I've never used Paperless Pipeline before. Will you help me?*
A: We can, but it's REALLY simple. If you can send an email, you can submit docs to the Pipeline! All you have to do is send your listing and contract packets to the Pipeline email address: 4408-10533-1265@docs.paperlesspipeline.com. You can do this from your scanner at home, or use the pre-programmed one-touch scanner in the office. Refer to the “10 Rules of Pipeline” for more info (page 25).

2. Q: *My docs aren't getting to the Pipeline. What am I doing wrong?*
A: First, double check the email address. It should be the long, numerical address above. Make sure you did not include the period at the end of the above sentence!

Second, make sure your scanner settings are set to a lower-resolution so that you are not generating a 15mb file. If the file size is too big, The Pipeline will not accept it. If you are sending high-res docs to the Pipeline, you may or may NOT receive a bounce-back message. Sometimes high-res docs disappear in cyberspace and never make it to the Pipeline. Just keep in mind that a normal doc package is rarely over a 2mb. If your file is larger, your scanner settings are set on too high of a resolution. We cannot help you with changing the settings on your scanner; refer to the instruction manual that came with your machine.

While you're checking your scanner settings, make sure that it is not password-protecting or adding a security lock to your documents. Also, the file created must be a PDF file to submit to the Pipeline. Some scanners create a PST, TIF or JPG file and the Pipeline does not recognize those file formats. Nor does it recognize MS Word format.

3. Q: *I just sent a packet to the Pipeline, and haven't received a confirmation that you got it. Can I just call you to make sure it went through?*
A: Please don't. Instead, you can log on to the Pipeline at www.paperlesspipeline.com and see for yourself! You will need to wait 24 business hours, though, as you will only see your docs once we have a chance to get in there and assign it to you. If you do not see your paperwork after 24 business hours from submission, check your scanner settings and submit it again. Always, send yourself a copy as well to make sure your email is going out.

Your login information is your email address (the one we have on file for you), and your password is your copy code (000__), unless you've already logged in and changed it. Once you've logged in, make sure you are looking under the "Transactions" tab and not the Dashboard, which does not show all your properties. Here you can see all your paperless transactions, whether they are complete, and if they've been approved by the broker. If there is a discrepancy in what Paperless Pipeline reflects and what you know to be true about your properties, email Jenifer.

4. Q: *I just had a closing. I'm confused about what needs to go to the Pipeline and what I need to turn in directly to the office.*
A: Follow the directions on the closing checklist: turn in the commission check, a copy of the check, and the closing checklist directly to the office. Everything else (HUD, final property condition disclosure, etc.) should be scanned to the Pipeline. Remember, we will NOT process your commission until we receive the closing checklist and the broker has reviewed and approved your final docs. Refer to the chart on page 25 if you need help understanding what goes where.
5. Q: *I'm confused about what goes on the Pipeline and what is "staying paper."*
A: Credit/criminal check requests, misc. commission paperwork (lease agreements, referrals, BPOs, etc.) – all paperwork not associated with a listing, contract, or closing packet will stay in paper format. Make sure to refer to the closing checklist for instructions regarding turning in your closing paperwork and commission check. And remember: Listing, Contract, and Closing packets go on the Pipeline, along with their respective amendments, such as price changes, extensions, and withdrawals. Rental authorizations also are sent to the Pipeline.
6. Q: *But what about documents that need my broker's signature?*
A: Change of Status forms will be "checked" when the broker approves the change on the Pipeline, but will remain unsigned (printing it out just to sign something probably no one else will see defeats the purpose of being paperless). Remember Referral Agreements and Earnest Money Disbursement forms can be emailed directly to the broker, and do NOT go to the Pipeline. We will send it to the Pipeline after the broker signs it where you can retrieve a copy for yourself.
7. Q: *Can I still forward email authorizations on a Change of Status form?*
A: You can, but Paperless Pipeline is not an email provider, and only receives PDF attachments, not messages in the body of an email. If you want to use an email authorization in lieu of a seller's signature, you will need to print out the email and send it as a PDF attachment along with the Change of Status form with the property information completed and signed by you.
8. Q: *Can you email me a copy of the Property Condition Disclosure to such-and-such agent? OR The other agent needs a copy of the earnest money deposit – can you send it to me?*
A: The beauty of Paperless Pipeline is that you have 24-hour access to ALL your paperwork wherever you have an internet connection. Not only can you print copies for your own records from PP, but you can also email documents directly from the Pipeline!

Communications

1. Q: *I want to send out an announcement to the agents. Can you do that for me?*

A: It is our goal to help your business stay efficient by not inundating you with emails from our office that may be perceived as spam or junk; we don't want to get to the point where no one reads our messages anymore! As reasonable as a request may be, we have to say, "No, sorry," to this question.

That being said, we WILL provide you with an updated roster every couple months listing all agents and their contact information. You can use that list to create your own distribution list. This will involve some initial set up on your part, but you only have to do it once, and we always let you know who has come and gone since the last roster was distributed. It may also be a good idea to keep this list in your car in case you want to contact other Benchmark agents. Please do not call the office asking to be transferred to a fellow Benchmark agent.

2.

Q: *I received a notice from Phillip stating that I have a transaction that is about to close/expire. Am I in trouble? What do I do?*

A. Paperless Pipeline sends you an automatic alert whenever your listing agreement is nearing expiration, or your purchase contract nears its closing date. Please do not hit "reply" and send a message back to Phillip. The system is simply sending you a reminder, not accusing you of doing anything wrong. Log into the Pipeline and enter a note to admin if you need to, but more importantly, work on getting that extension agreement signed and submitted to the Pipeline so we have the needed documentation on file to change the expiration/closing date. If you do not wish to extend the listing, or if the property will close when expected, you do not need to do anything.
3.

Q: *I don't think I'm getting email messages from the office – why not?*

A: Our agent count has grown to where our email sending capacity can't keep up. The solution is to send emails via *iContact*, or to all the agents via a "broadcast" feature on the Benchmark website. The email address you will see in your mailbox will be benchmarkagent@gmail.com OR info@benchmarkrealtyn.com. Make sure you add these email addresses to your "Safe Senders" list! They may be going to your junk folder, but we are not spam. Please, READ THEM! It will save us all a headache or three and in many cases the emails contain important information from your broker, too.
4.

Q: *I'm expecting a fax to come in. Will you send it to me?*

A: If the fax is properly addressed so we can tell who it is for, rest assured we will get it to you. Every fax that comes in is duplicated on the admin email. We will most likely forward you the email version and put the fax original in your mail box. If there is no name on the fax and we can't figure out who it belongs to, it will sit on the shelf in front of the printer for about a week until we throw it out. Please inform senders to use a cover sheet on all incoming faxes.
5.

Q: *I just got a phone call from the office. Did you call me?*

A. NO. If we called you, we WILL leave a message. Most likely, we transferred a call to you and the caller failed to leave a voicemail. If we called you, we will always leave a message.

Q: *Well, do you know what it was about?*

A. NO. Our system is to determine who the person is calling for and then to transfer the call directly to the agent with instructions to leave a message on the agent's voicemail. With 100's of calls every day, it is physically impossible to investigate each caller's intent or take messages for our agents.

Q: *Could you look it up on your caller ID then?*

A: Commercial phone systems do NOT have caller ID history. We only know who is calling between the time we pick up and hang up the receiver. It is physically impossible for us to look up historical information.