

Planning for the future

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Dave Ramsey introduces data standards, the link between RICS standards and proptech

[RICS](#) concentrates much of its efforts on raising the professional status of its surveyors worldwide, focusing on people. But the modern world is about more than people: it is awash with data, software applications, hardware components and digital companies, all interacting with each other.

Expressions such as the 'internet of things' are becoming more than concepts, so behind every device should be a standardised way of communicating and representing data objects. Developers rely on clear standards to ensure that the data they are processing can be read consistently and potentially used in ways they have not considered. Costs, valuations and building measurements are clearly embedded in much of what will be digitised in the future and RICS must offer value to its members by staying relevant as the property sector is transformed. Part of this value comes from defining schemas for the representation of data, providing guidance and ensuring that software tools comply with the relevant standards and regulations.

An invaluable role

Data standards form the link between the standards RICS professionals follow and the software products that they use. Often they are invisible, but they serve an invaluable role in ensuring that data is portable, comparable and re-useable. However, data standards guarantee only the correct format, not its quality. They complement rather than replace written standards and are another way of checking the requirements of RICS' professional statements. It is envisaged that defining the data standards will be vital to every standard-setting initiative and arguably the most important part for many users.

New challenges

RICS is committed to developing a suite of data standards to help professionals interact with the digital world. One of the first of these is designed to support the [International Property Measurement Standards \(IPMS\)](#) and define how a building's measurements can be exchanged between applications. Ethical and compliance issues must be recorded as part of this standard, as these areas are critical to the profession.

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New challenges are also being met: for example, how can data be recorded in the

measurement process where RICS-adopted standards do not officially recognise it? Many users of measurement data report the maximum width and length of rooms, or ?components?, as they are defined in IPMS. If maxLength and maxWidth are part of the data standard, this could suggest that these measurements are pertinent to the IPMS, though this is not the case. If this requirement is omitted, however, the data standard will be less helpful to a large user base. Making the measurement optional but without pointers as to how they should be named ? for example, maxLength, maximumLength or maxLen ? could in turn mean the standard is not used in a consistent way.

Other challenges include data that is barely in use today but could become essential in future, such as volumetric measurement and height information. Even though volumetric and height data are not currently part of IPMS, when the IPMS second edition is published, measurers will update their skills and should work just as efficiently, armed with their new information.

It is not so easy with software. Firmware ? that is, embedded software ? must be updated, database tables modified and reporting tools redesigned. Then there is the issue of how to support different versions of the same data standards because no one wants to have to ask: ?Which version of IPMS does your tool support??

Positive points

The surveyor?s role can be defended and improved by introducing digital signatures to professional reports. Exploring this technology, we can demonstrate how professionals can sign off on their work, ensuring changes to their output are detectable. Furthermore, compliance documentation included in measurement data can be enhanced to enable large-scale audits ? all with the goal of providing first-class service.

The first data standards are scheduled for publication by early 2018. This will involve working closely with RICS? technical affiliates and consulting with floor-plan specialists, software suppliers and measurement professionals to ensure a quality output and that the value RICS is aiming to provide is articulated and quantifiable.

There will be future updates on this in RICS journals and on the website.

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Further information

- RICS [Technology Affiliate Programme](#)
- Related competencies include: [Data management](#) , [Property records/information systems](#)
- This feature is taken from the RICS [Property journal](#) (October/November 2017)
- Related categories include: [Document management](#) , [RICS property measurement](#)