

Being an Elite member

Real Stories: Q & A with Ralph Squillace, Summit Appraisal Services Inc.

The image is a collage of three screenshots. The top left screenshot shows the Summit Appraisal Services Inc. website, featuring a navigation menu, a profile picture of Ralph C. Squillace, and contact information. The top right screenshot shows the WinTOTAL software interface, displaying appraisal data for four comparable properties with columns for price, acreage, and location. The bottom center screenshot shows a 'Scheduled backup' progress window from 'a la mode' software, indicating that 600 files are being updated.

Ralph Squillace is a professional appraiser in Evans, Georgia. He's an Elite customer who uses WinTOTAL Aurora in conjunction with his Enterprise XSite to run his appraisal shop. We spoke with Ralph about his experience using our tools, attending our

seminars, and interacting with our employees.

After reading this interview, if you have questions about TOTAL or any of our many appraisal tools, visit alamode.com or call 1-800-ALAMODE to get in touch with a representative.

How does the Elite System work for a one-person shop like you?

It's all inclusive. It's every tool that I need for my office and it's all linked together in some form or fashion. The QuickBooks® integration allows me to access bookkeeping facets of my business, so my office manager can come in and look at all my billing, without duplicate tasks. Just when I think that you don't have a feature, I find out that I'm wrong and that it's there, but I didn't know about it. Every imaginable scenario has been given thought.

I also think it's very user friendly. I read on the forums where people say otherwise and that there are too many bells and whistles, but it's kind of a la carte. You can pick which bells and whistles you want to use and it doesn't hurt you if you don't use the other ones. It just helps me because everything that I need that could possibly pertain to any area of managing an appraisal business is right there. I can access it from one of two places, either my XSite or from within the software. It's all well thought out.

You've attended our appraiser training seminars in the past, how did you like them?

There have been two in Atlanta in the last six years and I attended both of them. It was easy for people to get to — it was right there by the airport — and everyone I've talked to was very pleased with the Atlanta seminar. It was wonderful.

Would you say your XSite has been pivotal in your non-lender dealings?

Yes, definitely, because when clients start asking me, "how can I place an order with you?" or "how can I get more information?" I can hand them a card with the address to my website and they have a place to go and get additional information about my company.

The XSites have come a long way, and offer so many choices that each one looks unique nowadays. I often get compliments on my XSite, as it looks very professional and I am able to continuously change content and graphics.

You do quite a bit of non-lender work. What kind do you do?

Most of my non-lender work is with attorneys, mostly divorce, estate settlement, as well as tax challenges. I also have done some consulting work with some smaller local investors.

What was your impression of the a la mode employees you interacted with?

They're awesome. I'm horrible about remembering people's names. So if I remember somebody's name by the end of the conversation then they've made an impression on me. I can name just about everybody that was there at the last seminar. They were all really friendly. Brian and Pebbles worked on my XSite for me. Then I was able to speak with Dustin, who had a lot of good information. They were very professional and very, very helpful. They just seemed really geeked up about what they were doing.

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When I can call Brian and he knows who I am and what city I'm from — knowing how many customers you have — that's always kind of cool.

What made you choose a la mode?

If there's something happening in our industry that's relevant to appraisers, by the time we find out about it, a la mode has already started working on it. And that's the truth. Just when I think that I've found some wonderful nugget of information, it soon becomes obvious that it has already been on the a la mode radar.

a la mode is not just fixated on manufacturing software and selling it to people. You represent the industry and keep all of us in tune with the things that are happening in our industry that most of the "Average Joe" appraisers don't know about. And if it weren't for a la mode, they wouldn't know about it.

I think that's what's great about your company, more than anything else, is that I'm getting in tune with the industry by being a part of the a la mode team. Anything that's

relevant is going to be funneled down to me in a way that I can understand — whether that be a video or a manual you can download — it's all there. You're covering so many things beyond just providing forms to fill out and I just think it's awesome.

The one thing that keeps me coming back to a la mode is just when I think I could use another software company for half the price, I'll get on that labs page or I'll just happen to be browsing your website and realize that you guys are on top of one or two other things, or something new is coming out, or you're working on something that makes me sit there and go, "whoa, wait a minute, no one else is talking about this, maybe it's worth sticking around to see what happens."

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Vault is awesome because I had a computer crash on me and, while we ultimately ended up getting it back up, out of haste I ended up going out and getting a new computer. I had backed everything up a few days before. When I installed my a la mode software with

Exact and Vault I think it took me a total of an hour and half to be up and running again from the time I purchased that computer. It was hard to believe. I used to be a big fan of having an external hard drive, and I still do, but it's too hard to go in there and retrieve all those files and folders and know where to put them in the software.

In summary, I would say what I'm a fan of is accessibility to tools that are not solely based on producing an appraisal but on running an appraisal business, and it's all right there. All of these products interact with each other in a way that makes me feel there's an unobstructed flow between tools and methods to run your business.

That's what I think really sells me on a la mode, because it appeals to my entire business model and not just formfilling. And that's what many appraisers think of when they think about appraisal software is filling out forms, they don't think of it in terms of tools for their entire business.

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Elite System

Real stories

"I use my a la mode Elite system because it gives me all the tools to perform appraisals as well as manage and market my business. As a one man appraisal shop, it is crucial to me to be able to do all of these jobs in a timely manner. And the 24 hour support I receive from a la mode is unbeatable! I don't need it very often, but when I do it's there, and the techs work hard and fast to get me back up and running again."

— Tom Terwilliger, www.AlgonaAppraisal.com



"I've been with a la mode since 1987 — ancient, right?? The Elite system gives me everything I need to stay abreast of the market, plus it helps me keep up with future expectations in the industry. The XSite as well as other marketing tools have added to and strengthen my existing business — all for one price.

a la mode is the "Cream of the Crop. The educational mini courses online have made it possible for me to stay in the office and not travel to offsite courses and this is a tremendous savings to me.

Overall, I have been very pleased and have recommended this to more than 250 appraisers who now have the same program. The program sells itself!"

— Nancy Point, www.NancyPointAppraisals.com

"Elite literally has everything I need. I never have to worry where I'll get "this or that" report from because I already have it.

I've been in the business for 31 years and the quality of reports I produce with Elite is far superior to anything I've ever used. And while it may cost a little more, there's a lot of value in always producing professional looking reports like I do with Elite.

I'm not the most tech savvy appraiser, and I love the fact that if I need help, it is just a phone call away — even at 3AM.

I don't have it all figured out yet, but I know one thing for sure... I'm going to keep using Elite."

— Rusty Hartsell, www.HartsellAppraisal.com

"I invest in Elite because of its overall affordability. Elite handles all of my business process needs easily, and with as much intricacy as I care to involve. The web site service is simple to use and easy to update. Clients have located my services on the web, which has resulted in an increase in some non-lender related work. Whenever I do encounter problems with my software, the a la mode team is always responsive, and works with me until my problem is resolved. Thanks a la mode!"

— Matthew Malik, www.SequoiaAppraisal.com

"In the 20+ years I have been appraising, I have tried Hyperform, Day One software, ACI and a la mode software. I've also completed a few appraisals in ClickFORMS.

I have been absolutely impressed with not only your software, but with your innovations and visions for the future. And your tech support has always been second to none.

I know all this because I have used your software, dealt with your tech support, and been to numerous workshops you guys have had in Atlanta.

But that's not all. I have watched Dave Biggers fight for the appraiser. There are many examples of this but the one I remember most is when he had over 35,000 appraiser letters mailed to Andrew Cuomo's office. It seemed to me that Dave spearheaded a huge effort to fight for appraiser's rights. I'm not aware of anyone else or company that has fought for the appraiser like Dave Biggers and a la mode."

— Steve Collins, www.CollinsAppraisals.com

"I enjoy working with Elite system because it's easy to use, always up to date and the accounting system is great to track invoices, etc. It's also comforting to know that with a Platinum Partnership I can always get help at any time of the day, 7 days a week.

As far as getting new business, Mercury Network has given me some work in the past couple of months. Meanwhile, the XSite system is easy to update and gives me exposure in the market.

I also like that a la mode gives customers the opportunity to renew Elite membership every about every six months with rebates that help in these hard times."

— Thomas Kjaerjaard, www.HKAAppraisal.com

"With the cost of the website alone saving me over a third of the annual cost of a comparable website elsewhere, it is truly cost effective to remain an Elite customer! On top of all that, we get 24/7 tech support, instant updates, a plethora of appraisal tools, and the list goes on. Thank you a la mode for making appraising as easy as possible!"

— Ashley Martin, www.AM-Appraisals.com

"I have had a very good experience with the Elite System. It does all I need to do my work efficiently and quickly. It is easy to work with and so far I have had no problems or bad experiences with this program."

— Warren Mitchell, www.WCMitch.com