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Paperless apartment sale in Sydney suburb makes history

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Claire Martin carries out the first end-to-end paperless residential transaction. Photo: Christopher Pearce

Lawyer Claire Martin sold her \$510,000 one-bedroom apartment in Dee Why, in Sydney's northern suburbs, without having to touch a piece of paper.

In a historic transaction for the Australian property market, Ms Martin executed the first housing transaction that was paperless from exchange to settlement.

The 35-year-old lawyer, who heads up the property department at Kreisson Lawyers, had access to the money from the sale in 10 minutes, and was able to skip through weeks of visits to lawyers' offices and cheque banking.

Using InfoTrack's eContracts and eSigning technologies, Ms Martin drew up her own contract and exchanged it with her buyer via email.

The touch of a button

Through PEXA, the federal government's national electronic conveyancing initiative, Ms Martin settled the sale of her investment property on Thursday from the comfort of her office and with the touch of a button.

In the past, every legal document had to be printed, scanned and emailed. Amendments had to be handwritten and printed out. Reams of document exchange were done manually.

"We are on the cusp of a digital revolution," she said. "You need all transacting parties to come to the table and play but in my case when I came to sign and exchange, I had a very supportive real estate agent, Fay Petrou from

Century 21 Harbourside in Neutral Bay, and in addition an open-minded conveyancer, Robb Rigg from Gavin Williamson & Associates in North Narrabeen, who was acting for the purchaser.”

PEXA confirmed this is the first “end-to-end electronic contract and e-settlement transaction” for retail home owners.

There have been other PEXA settlements since the program started in 2010 – the first e-settlement was Commonwealth Bank of Australia and Land Victoria in 2013 – but they involved a physical exchange of contracts.

PEXA wants to increase cost efficiencies for the laborious but lucrative \$1.2 billion conveyancing industry, and emulates other paperless institutions such as the Australian Securities Exchange in the settlement of shares. It allows land registries, financial institutions and buyers and sellers to transact together, online.

Online shopping redefined

InfoTrack is a workflow technology company and considered a “disrupter” in data management having introduced contact-less contract signing from anywhere in the world

“It gives new meaning to the term online shopping because now we can include online property,” Ms Martin said.

“On average [as a lawyer] I can draft up to 30 odd contracts a month. That’s a lot of contracts and a lot of manual, low-value work. From a business perspective, it’s not exactly what you would call cost efficient.”

Seventy-two financial institutions have signed up to transact property online through PEXA, including Ms Martin’s bank, National Australia Bank, and St George Bank, her buyer’s banker.

Many legal firms have pioneered their own e-exchange services with a follow-through to PEXA for settlement.

Gadens drew up and facilitated the electronic exchange of those contracts for buyers of Crown Group’s Infinity apartment project in Sydney’s Green Square in August, and Colin Biggers & Paisley did the same for Sekisui House’s lot auction in Gledswood Hills in Sydney’s south-west a month later.

None of these exchanges have settled yet, however.

Incidentally, Victorian lawyers Maddocks launched its electronic exchange platform on Thursday.

