

SOUND OFF *Craig Oshrin*

What role does social media play in real estate today?

While the Internet confers advantages which are almost beyond comprehension, it's worth noting that there is no substitute for the knowledge that comes with professional experience. Sure, it may be tempting to self-diagnose that scratchy throat of yours as strep — after all, Web MD says your symptoms fit the bill so it's gotta be strep right?

One immediately sees the preposterous nature of this frequently-recurring scenario. There is no substitute for the training which a physician receives in medical school. Without the specific acumen which is gained through such laborious study, any attempt to do what a physician does (diagnosing disease and illness) is, at

best, an educated guess.

The same consumer behavior is seen in the world of real estate with websites and apps such as Zillow and Trulia.

For clients entering the marketplace on either the buy or sell side, Internet sites have made it easy to access information, though sometimes it is too much information. While sites like Zillow, Trulia, and Realtor.com do have a supporting role in the property game, one must use caution if this is their sole source of information.

Features on these websites, such as the Zestimate (an estimated monthly mortgage with all of the extras added in) are not always realistic and can set unfathomable expectations in a buyer's



mind very early in the process. Often, buyers may not have even spoken with a Realtor yet!

Tried and true professional real estate agents get the majority of their business from their sphere of influence — not from paying for a listing on an online site.

Sites like Zillow and Trulia do have value. Nine out of 10 buyers

start their search online through sites such as these which are easy to navigate, user-friendly and have the unique ability to capture the emotion of the potential buyer before that person even parks their car in front of a property to view it for the first time. We've all fallen in love with the picture of our dream house; Zillow and Trulia allow you to browse the Internet as a window shopper.

Much like online dating, the photos of a property are the first thing to grab your attention; a home may look great in photos, but when you see it in person and see the wear and tear, the quality of the features and age of the property may be giant disappointments. Photos are often selectively chosen to give the viewer a

manipulated view and attract your attention: rooms look larger, hardwood floors look shinier and appliances appear new.

Also, critical parts of the buying process — neighborhood vibe, sense of community, quality of windows, age of boiler and various other miscellaneous yet important details — are omitted, exaggerated, or generalized online with some creative writing.

These elements can only be fully appreciated by immersing one's self in the proposed property environment. Buying a home is a serious decision with indelible impact, and as such it should not be taken lightly.

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