

A Message from the President of the Youngstown Columbiana Association of REALTORS®

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BROWSING FOR HOME ONLINE

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Let's just admit it...browsing for homes online is a window shopper's dream. The elegantly decorated rooms, the sculpted landscaping, the colorful front doors that just pop with those viral paint hues.

Browser beware: Those listings may be attractive, but they might not be giving you the complete picture.

That perfect ranch? Might be too close to a loud, busy street. That lovely colonial with the light-filled photos? Might be hiding some super icky plumbing problems. That attractively priced condo? Might not actually be for sale.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when searching for your dream home online:

You Keep Current. A Property Site Should Too

You wouldn't read last month's Vanity Fair for the latest society gossip, right? So you shouldn't browse property sites that show old listings.

Get the latest listings from reputable websites recommended by your REALTOR®. These websites pull their information frequently from the Multiple Listing Service (MLS), regional databases where real estate agents post listings for sale. That means listings from reputable sites are more accurate than some others, which may update less often. You wouldn't want to get your heart a flutter for a house that's already off the market.

A Photo Doesn't Always Tell You The Whole Story

A picture, they say, is worth a thousand words. But what they don't say is a picture can also hide a thousand cracked floorboards, busted boilers, and leaky pipes. So while it's natural to focus on photos while browsing, make sure to also consider the property description and other key features.

Each listing, for example, has a "property details" section that may specify important information such as the year the home was built, price per square foot and how many days the property has been on the market.

Ultimately though, ask your REALTOR® to help you interpret what you find. The best REALTORS® have local knowledge of the market and may even know details and histories of some properties. If a listing seems too good to be true, your REALTOR® will likely know why.

A REALTOR is a True Asset

At the end of the day, property sites are like CliffsNotes: They show you active listings, sold properties, home prices and sales histories. All that data will give you a working knowledge, but it won't give you the specific details that a REALTOR® can provide.

To assess all of this information--and gather facts about any home you're eyeing, like how far the local elementary school is from the house or where the closest gym is--talk to your REALTOR®. A REALTOR® who can paint a picture of the area is a TRUE ASSET.

It's important to find a REALTOR® that you connect with and that you trust who can deliver the dish on specific properties. They are more likely to guide you away from homes with hidden problems and save you the time of visiting a listing that is not a good fit for you.

So let's practice some self-care and set our expectations appropriately from the start

Step one, fill out our home buyer's worksheet with what you must have, what you want and what you can do away with. The worksheet helps you understand what you're looking for.

Step two, meet with your local REALTOR® to discuss the type of home you are looking for, what areas you are looking to locate to, and how they can help you through your dream home search.

Just remember: You're probably not going to find that "perfect home" while browsing listings on your smartphone. Instead, consider the online shopping experience to be an amusement to the home-buying process. The best way to find the perfect home is through your REALTOR®. In addition to you browsing online, a REALTOR® can set you up on a search alert, delivering you properties that match your criteria in real-time.

All in all, browse away...on the right websites of course. BUT, the absolute best way to find your dream home is through your REALTOR®.

Michael Stevens is the 2023 President of the Youngstown Columbiana Association of REALTORS®