

‘Talking House’ among new tactics enlisted to help real estate sales and searches

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Realtor Linda Pierce holds a sign advertising a “Talking House” by tuning in a car radio. Herald photo by Jackie Lorentz.

House hunters in Grand Forks now have an added tool to use while driving around looking for homes for sale.

Local real estate agent Linda Pierce of Crary Homes & Real Estate recently added audio recordings describing a select number of her listings.

Instead of scribbling down a real estate agent’s phone number found on a for-sale sign and calling to find out more about the house, or getting out of their car to search for a brochure that isn’t always there, potential home buyers have an additional option.

House hunters who pull up to a home with a Talking House sign can tune their radio to a designated AM frequency to hear a detailed report about the house.

The three-minute message is broadcast by a radio transmitter about the size of a small VCR that’s placed inside the home. It can be heard up to 300 feet from the home.

“It’s more convenient,” Pierce said. “Potential buyers don’t even need to get out of their car.”

‘Much more memorable’

Pierce said she started using the Talking House system less than two months ago, but she already has sold one of the houses that had been on the market for awhile before. She said she is close to selling another after a buyer saw one of her Talking House signs, listened to the message and called her for more information from his car.

“For listing agents and their sellers, a house that talks is much more memorable and stands out amid the clutter of homes on the market,” Pierce said. “The radio report

qualifies buyers by providing them with enough information about the house for them to decide if they'd like to tour the home.”

The Talking House system first was introduced to real estate agents and sellers in 1985, but Pierce said she does not know of any other local agents who use the service. She has two Talking Houses and plans to add more this spring.

With home sales lagging in much of the country and houses staying on the market longer, an increasing number of real estate agents have turned to services like Talking House to differentiate their listings.

Other services allow potential buyers with Wi-Fi enabled laptops or smart phones to take virtual tours of a house from the car or the front yard through Wi-Fi transmitters set up at the home.

Some agents also have started using video podcasts to highlight individual home listings.

Other services offer quick overviews of properties, including a home's current value and sales history, via text messaging.

“It's immediately there,” said Rick Bengson, the CEO of San Diego-based HomeFeedback, about recent technological breakthroughs. “You can find out all about a house right away. Any phone you can send a picture on, you have the capability to use this technology. It's not as obtrusive as getting out of the car and walking through the house. People want that information immediately. They have that technology now.”

Easy-access feedback

HomeFeedback, a Web-based property-feedback service, sends e-mails to a real estate agent after that agent's clients tour a house whose owners subscribe to the service. The e-mails ask the agent to fill out a short survey asking what the prospective buyers thought of the property, its appearance and price. The feedback given by the agent can be accessed online by both the sellers and their real estate agent, and it can give the sellers valuable information, such as whether most buyers think their house is too highly priced, has carpet that needs replacing or is too cluttered.

Bengson said more than 70 percent of buyers' agents fill out the surveys. HomeFeedback does not have any clients in North Dakota, but the service is used by more than 370 agents in Minnesota.

According to the National Association of Realtors, the average age of a homebuyer is 39, while the median age of a real estate agent is 52.

The hope is some of these newer technologies will help agents bridge the gap between younger buyers, who have become increasingly tech savvy.

“Buyers and sellers want data,” Bengson said. “They want the process to be transparent. They can look at prices online and they can weed out multiple houses. Buyers dictate what houses they want to see. The agents no longer dictate as much of the home-buying process.”

Schuster covers business.