

## INTRODUCTION

---

# SHOPPING FOR HOMES

Easier, Faster, Cheaper

*By MaryEllen Tribby*

My parents bought their first home in 1957—51 years ago. Back then, the only way to buy a home was to look up a real estate agent in the phone book and call them. The real estate agent would come to you and tell you about homes on the market (homebuyers didn't even have the advantage of browsing through listings). And if a property that the agent knew about sounded close to what you were looking for, you took a ride together on a Sunday afternoon to check it out.

My dad loved to tell me his story about going through this process. He'd told his real estate agent, Margaret, that he wanted a three-bedroom ranch-style home in a nice neighborhood. A good public school system was a must. And he wanted at least one nice park nearby and easy access to shopping. The last thing on his list was very important to him: He did not want his family to be near any type of apartment building.

My father had grown up in a rough neighborhood, near a big apartment complex and with no parks and no convenient shopping. He attended a public school where little girls got shaken down

## 2 CHANGING THE CHANNEL

for their lunch money, and he didn't want that to happen to his daughters.

My parents went house shopping with Margaret. She told them she had found "the perfect house" in a neighborhood they would "love." Imagine my father's surprise when Margaret drove them to his old neighborhood! He made her turn around before they even got to the place she had in mind.

When my father asked Margaret what she was thinking, she confessed that she had not actually seen the house or the neighborhood. She had trusted the owner's word that it met my parent's criteria.

Since Margaret was the only real estate agent in town, my parents continued to rely on her. These Sunday afternoon debacles went on for months.

Finally, 11 months after their search had started, we moved into a house that my parents were confident they could raise their family in. And their family had already been started. During the house-hunting nightmare, my older sister was born. My parents have always said that it was easier to have a baby than to find the perfect home.

I heard this story dozens of times growing up. So when it was time for my husband and me to buy our first home in 1996, I didn't want to leave anything to chance.

## THE NEXT GENERATION BUYS A HOME

We determined the town we wanted to live in by:

- Using the Internet to research schools in the areas we were interested in, and then visiting the ones that looked promising.
- Researching the neighborhood amenities of our target areas. This meant scouring the Internet for parks, shopping, cultural opportunities, and restaurants.
- Driving around the various towns.
- Speaking to friends about what they liked in those towns.

Once we determined the town we wanted to live in, it was time to focus on a specific community. We did this by:

- Going online and plugging in the zip code of each community, along with criteria for the kind of house we wanted.

- Watching local television advertisements for new homes.
- Listening to the radio to find out about local events in the various neighborhoods.

It wasn't until we'd narrowed down our search to three neighborhoods that I even called a real estate agent. And I found her by:

- Asking friends and colleagues for referrals (word of mouth).
- Researching online to find out which agents had sold the most homes in the communities I was interested in. (I figured they knew those neighborhoods inside and out.)
- Reading the local newspaper.

After selecting Barb as our agent, we worked with her to draw up a list of homes we might want to see. From that, Barb got a good sense of our expectations. After doing some of her own research, she narrowed down our list to several options. We were able to view all of them online. With two of them, we took "virtual" tours.

Exactly 19 days after we started our research, we made an offer on our home.

## THE MULTI-CHANNEL APPROACH

For my parents and my husband and me, buying a home was the biggest, most important purchase of our lives. It took my parents 11 months. My husband and I did it in less than three weeks.

The ultimate outcome was the same. We found a dream house in which we could raise our families. But the channels we took to get there were entirely different.

Because my husband and I were house-hunting at the beginning of the Internet Age, we were able to take a multi-channel approach to making our life-changing purchase.

Our multi-channel approach didn't end when we selected the home we wanted to buy. We used it for almost all aspects of the home-buying process, including finding the right mortgage company, insurance plan, moving company, and furniture.

But unlike the house search, we weren't doing all the work ourselves to get the information we needed. All sorts of companies were

finding us. Furniture companies were e-mailing us about furniture sales. Mortgage companies were sending us mortgage offers in the mail. Insurance agencies were calling us about insurance. And moving companies were hoping to get our attention by placing big ads in our local newspaper.

All these marketing efforts—including the strongest sales pitches—were welcomed by us because we were emotionally, financially, and rationally predisposed to buy what those companies were selling. We were the perfect customers for most of them. We were motivated. We had money. We were prepared to buy. And receiving information about products and services we needed through so many channels made it easier and quicker for us to compare options and make decisions.

The businesses that did the most business with us were those that were relentless, contacting us through various marketing channels. They were smart enough to realize that if we weren't responsive to a space ad or postal sales letter, we might react to an e-mail promotion. And if an e-mail promotion didn't work, they could get through to us via the Internet when we did a search by typing in certain keywords. And if that failed, they could try to contact us by phone.

Your best customers are those who are motivated, financially capable of buying from you, and prepared to buy. If you don't locate and convert those customers through a multi-channel, direct-response advertising campaign, then you are leaving dollars—perhaps millions of dollars—on the table.

There is no reason to do that in this day and age, when there are so many ways to get access to the ideal buyers for your product or service. This book will teach you about the many channels you can use to reach your customers.