

## To Buy or Not To Buy – Finding Your Dream Home *Online*

RealEstate.com / Realtor.com / Trulia.com / Yahoo! Real Estate

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## Report Contents

Report Highlights

List of Figures

Background

Objectives

Methodology

Detailed Findings

Behavioral Analysis

Consumer Attitudes

Overall Preferences

Task Performance

Best Practices

Acknowledgements

Company Information

Appendix I

Appendix II

# To Buy or Not To Buy – Finding Your Dream Home *Online*

## RealEstate.com / Realtor.com / Trulia.com / Yahoo! Real Estate

For over a century, home buyers have relied on real estate brokers and agents to manage the process of finding and purchasing a home. Whether researching properties, providing market forecasts, or interpreting financial and legal documentation for their clients, brokers have had the experience and insight to play an essential role in the lives of home buyers. They have further increased their value by guarding exclusive access to the Multiple Listing Service (MLS), a tool that accounts for an estimated 88% of all for-sale homes and provides listing agents with the ability to post property details to a large population of potential buyers.

But thanks to the advancement of the Internet, there is now a growing disintermediation of the real estate industry. Information that used to be available only through the broker channel is now available directly to consumers for free – due to the emergence of a new generation of Websites focused on the real estate market. Consumers are able to view key property information, such as contract data, prices of comparable homes, and neighborhood details, all from the comfort of their own home. Realtors are still helpful during the purchase process; however, home buyers can save substantial time and effort by utilizing the Internet for much of their research without a broker.

As home buyers continue to empower themselves online, the following questions emerge: What information are buyers looking for on a real estate Website? What features do they need when conducting their search? How do consumer opinions differ between local and portal sites? Is there a difference in attitudes between short-term and long-term buyers? And ultimately, which real estate Websites receive the highest levels of customer satisfaction, and which drive home purchases?

The eVOC Insights / RelevantView Competitive Real Estate Report, “To Buy or Not To Buy – Finding Your Dream Home *Online*” addresses these questions in detail, identifying key differentiators between various real estate Websites, and providing best practices for increasing customer loyalty and satisfaction online.

## Report Highlights

- 9 out of 10 home buyers have used or plan to use the Internet to aid their research
- Photos, property/neighborhood descriptions, effective search tools, and mapping are the most important features on a realty Website
- Real estate portal sites are perceived to have more listings, better selection, and neutrality; local realty sites are considered more accurate and trusted
- Realtor.com is the #1 real estate site across key metrics, including site traffic, brand recognition, property selection, search results, and home descriptions
- Trulia.com is considered the next best of the sites polled; users herald it for its innovation, ease of use, design, and helpful mapping functionality
- Over half of recent and active (short-term) home buyers prefer Realtor.com to all other sites reviewed
- Those looking to purchase in the next 2 years (long-term buyers) are evenly split in preference between Trulia.com (32%), Realtor.com (29%) and Yahoo! (22%)
- Despite Trulia.com having less traffic than other real estate sites (Ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in terms of unique visitors and 15<sup>th</sup> for brand recognition), respondents prefer Trulia.com over both Yahoo! and RealEstate.com after completing tasks on each of the sites

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1:</b>	Top Real Estate Sites – Total Unique Visitors (June 2007)
<b>Figure 2:</b>	Leading Real Estate Sites – Traffic Performance (June 2007)
<b>Figure 3:</b>	Resources Used for Home Searching
<b>Figure 4:</b>	Frequency of Visiting Real Estate Sites
<b>Figure 5:</b>	Average Number of Sites Used When Shopping for a Home
<b>Figure 6:</b>	Channels for finding Real Estate Sites
<b>Figure 7:</b>	Websites Used for Home Search and Purchase (Unaided)
<b>Figure 8:</b>	Real Estate Sites Heard of / Visited (Aided)
<b>Figure 9:</b>	Primary Reasons to Visit a Real Estate Site
<b>Figure 10:</b>	Preferred type of Real Estate Site
<b>Figure 11:</b>	Reasons for Site Preference – Local Realtor Sites vs. Real Estate Portals
<b>Figure 12:</b>	Importance of Features When Viewing Property Listings
<b>Figure 13:</b>	Most Popular Search Criteria
<b>Figure 14:</b>	Desired Home Characteristics
<b>Figure 15:</b>	Hottest Real Estate Markets
<b>Figure 16:</b>	Preferred Site – Property Search Task
<b>Figure 17:</b>	Reasons for Site Preference – Property Search
<b>Figure 18:</b>	Key Attributes – Satisfaction vs. Importance
<b>Figure 19:</b>	Satisfaction with Features, Functionality and Content
<b>Figure 20:</b>	Brand Attributes – Per Site
<b>Figure 21:</b>	Property Search Scorecard
<b>Figure 22:</b>	Property Search Call -to-Action
<b>Figure 23:</b>	Primary Methods to Search for a Property
<b>Figure 24:</b>	Preferred Search Results View
<b>Figure 25:</b>	Frustrations Encountered Researching Homes
<b>Figure 26:</b>	Next Steps After Using Real Estate Sites
<b>Figure 27:</b>	Helpful Features / Functionality
<b>Figure 28:</b>	Site Preferences – Neighborhood Information & Comparable Sites
<b>Figure 29:</b>	Reasons for Site Preferences – Neighborhood Information & Comparable Sites
<b>Figure 30:</b>	Frustrations Encountered– Neighborhood Information and Comparable Sales

## Background

eVOC Insights and RelevantView formed a Syndicated Research partnership in 2005 to address the need for industry-specific, head-to-head competitive research that combines vertical expertise with direct consumer feedback. Unlike other methodologies, the focus of this research is to evaluate target customers as they interact with highly competitive Websites and gather detailed feedback on their attitudes, experiences and site preferences relative to the competition.

Utilizing RelevantView's ActiveSandbox® Web user tracking technology, eVOC evaluates consumers in their natural environment, as they complete competitive tasks online. This proprietary technology captures the behavior, thoughts and attitudes of consumers as they interact with a series of competitive sites on the Web and provide feedback about their experience.

In addition, eVOC integrates key online behavioral analytics, provided by Compete, Inc., to understand the total volume and nature of consumer usage of the online channel in the real estate industry.

The goal of this research is to help companies maximize the effectiveness of the online channel by understanding the complete view of the customer decision process relative to the competition and to provide a window into the minds of customers as they weigh the strengths and weaknesses of competitors while making a purchase decision.

Each syndicated research report includes in-depth analysis of the customer experience across the top sites and identifies what drives competitive preferences and industry best practices. These best practices establish the foundation from which sites can increase conversion and brand loyalty by improving the customer experience.

## Objectives

The objectives of the “To Buy or Not To Buy – Finding Your Dream Home Online,” study are to understand how highly competitive real estate portal sites including RealEstate.com, Realtor.com, Trulia.com and Yahoo! Real Estate compare when it comes to overall site preference and customer loyalty and to establish a benchmark for customer experience relative to the leading competitors in the industry. The specific objectives of the study follow:

- Determine which realty site(s) users prefer most and why
- Explore what home search features and functionality are most important to consumers
- Learn the most useful content and format of property information online
- Compare attitudes of short- and long-term home buyers
- Understand how consumers utilize online mapping when planning real estate
- Establish customer experience best practices for real estate Websites
- Identify how the sites’ brands are perceived and the impact on site visitation

## Methodology

For this study, eVOC applies a within-subject methodology, using RelevantView’s attitudinal and behavioral survey tracking technology, to evaluate a sample of 200 consumers as they interact with four competitive real estate sites – RealEstate.com, Realtor.com, Trulia.com, and Yahoo! Real Estate. Respondents were equally split into the following two segments:

**Short-term buyers:** Recently purchased (within the past year) or actively looking for a new home  
**Long-term buyers:** Likely to purchase a home in the next year or two.

The initial open task “Property Search” elicits natural behavior as users explore each of the competitive sites for a home that would meet their needs. The second task “Neighborhood Information & Comparable Sales” gauges how well key sites can deliver a positive customer experience based on the content, usability, and overall satisfaction with a specific site function.

USER TASKS	
<b>Introduction</b>	
<b>Property Search</b>	<b>RealEstate.com, Realtor.com, Trulia.com, Yahoo! Real Estate</b> [Randomized] Keeping in mind what you have described as your ideal home, please use SITE.com to search for properties of interest in your desired location.
<b>Neighborhood Information &amp; Comparable Sales</b>	<b>RealEstate.com, Trulia.com</b> [Randomized] Now we will ask you to evaluate the ability to find information about the neighborhood you are interested in and the prices of homes comparable to the property you just found. Use this site to find this information.
<b>Wrap-up</b>	

The combination of these two tasks helps identify what aspects of the customer experience drive purchase behavior, brand affinity, and customer loyalty. The eVOC team assesses the results of this data to provide statistically reliable benchmarks and best practices for online real estate Websites.

In addition, eVOC integrates key online behavioral analytics, provided by Compete, Inc., to understand the total volume and nature of consumer usage of the online channel in real estate. eVOC and RelevantView combine the best of market research, Website analytics and online usability testing to bridge the gap between e-business metrics and voice of the customer insights.

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For information about other Syndicated Research reports or custom research provided by eVOC Insights and RelevantView, please contact above.



eVOC Insights is a customer experience consulting firm that provides Web strategy, usability, and “voice of the customer” research. We combine innovative technology, comprehensive market research, and expert analysis to deliver actionable insights into the behavior, thoughts and attitudes of your customers. The founders of eVOC have over 20 years combined experience in market research. Each spent five years developing and managing the Custom and Syndicated businesses at Vividence Corporation (acquired by Keynote Systems in September 2004).



RelevantView is a leading provider of Web-based market research solutions, serving market research firms, advertising agencies, Website design firms, usability professionals and Website owners around the world. RelevantView's proprietary ActiveSandbox® Server-Based Web User Tracking Technology enables simultaneous collection of qualitative, quantitative and behavioral feedback online supporting Website usability and concept testing.

## Appendix I – Participant Profile

### SAMPLE

N=200

Age 18+

50% have recently purchased (within past year) or are actively looking for a new home  
50% will be purchasing a new home in the next year or two

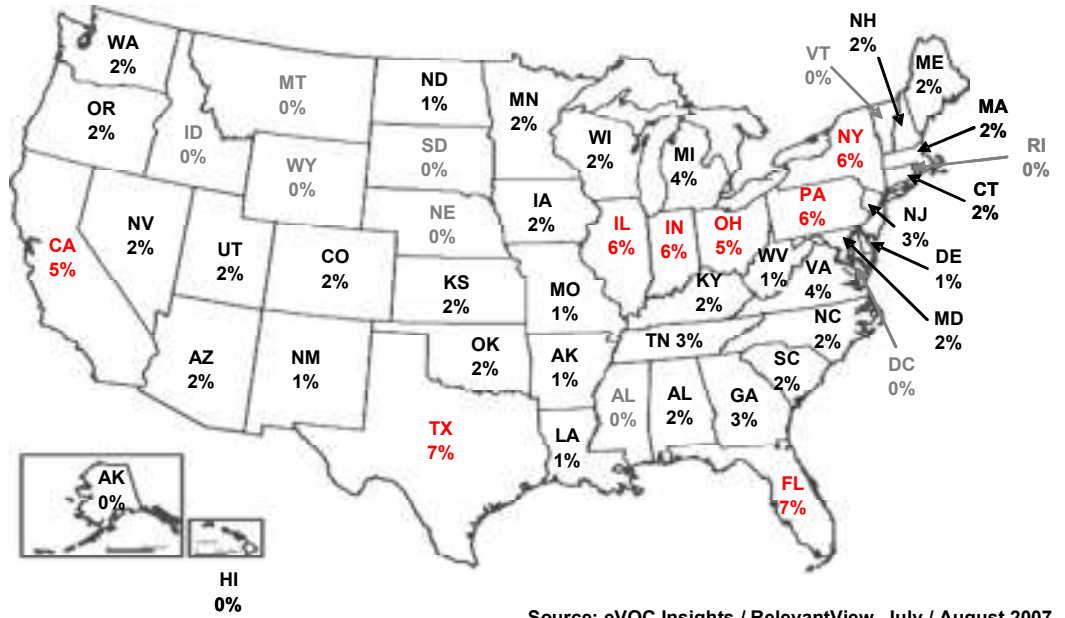
All use the Internet for their home search, at least several times per month

### DEMOGRAPHICS

<b>GENDER</b>	
Male	47%
Female	54%
<b>AGE</b>	
18-24	15%
25-34	34%
35-44	22%
45-54	14%
55+	9%
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>	
Less than \$20,000	3%
\$20,000 - \$29,999	7%
\$30,000 - \$39,999	8%
\$40,000 - \$49,999	12%
\$50,000 - \$59,999	13%
\$60,000 - \$74,999	16%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	20%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	15%
\$150,000+	7%

Source: eVOC Insights / RelevantView, July / August 2007

KEY REAL ESTATE MARKETS – GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF SAMPLE



Source: eVOC Insights / RelevantView, July / August 2007