

MONDAY  
October 20,  
2003

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## Open houses still can make a sale

By Anne Straub  
Florida Today

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The use of open houses as a real estate sales tool has declined in recent years. But those who conduct them say open houses still have a place in a home-marketing plan.

"You're definitely going to get a lot of people who aren't ready to buy. But the hope is you'll get at least one in there who's ready to buy and can qualify at that price range," said Toni Pastermack, a Realtor for Re/Max Service Team on Merritt Island, Fla.

The proportion of buyers who used open houses to find their home declined from 41 percent in 1995 to 29 percent in 2001, according to the National Association of Realtors.

The organization's 2003 survey did not include the same question, but it did ask buyers to rank the usefulness of different methods of finding a home. Open houses ranked after real estate agents, the Internet and yard signs.

Technology might be decreasing the need for open houses. Virtual tours that provide 360-degree views of listings are becoming more common on realty companies' Web sites.

Agents and sellers who use open houses explain their reasoning in terms of a numbers game. Many people who visit an open house will end up as leads for the agent to pursue as new clients, rather than as a buyer for that home.

But, still, the more people who see a home, the better the chance someone will buy it.

Frank Goodwin, who is selling his Titusville, Fla., condominium himself, was pleased with the results of his first open house, which brought 12 visitors to his riverfront condo.

Goodwin is relying on open houses, newspaper advertising and signs to market the property without the benefit of an agent. He is ready to list the property with a real-estate agent if the interest he is getting slows down.

That way, he could get in on the Realtor caravan, a type of open house for real-estate agents that lets agents see what's available for their buyers.

Goodwin -- whose wife is a licensed real-estate agent, but is not currently practicing -- said he has sold five other houses through open houses.

Pastermack became a believer in open houses before she went into real estate. When she was trying to sell the second house she owned, she remembers, she begged her agent to hold an open house. The agent was too busy, so the task fell to a

new agent at the firm.

"The lady sold it at the open house. I was pretty convinced," Pastermack said.



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