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ERA Study Of The Senior Market Yields Some Surprises

by Blanche Evans

If you think only boomers and GenXers use the Internet to find homes, a new survey by ERA Real Estate, conducted by Insight Express, has some surprises for you that may change your ideas of what seniors want in their next homes.

More than 1,300 people, age 55 and older, told surveyors that the Internet is an essential tool in researching potential properties during their homebuying process. In fact, the Internet was the second-most-popular homebuying research method, just behind physically "touring potential neighborhoods."

Nearly 70 percent of seniors who may be looking for a new home in the next five years cited "photos and virtual tours" as the most important tools available when looking for real estate property on the Internet.

While many seniors view the Internet as a crucial first step in their home buying searches, they still view a qualified real estate sales associate as "the most influential professional" during the entire home buying process, said the survey.

So much for greybeards not liking technology.

And if you think that the majority of seniors want to relocate from their homes to townhouses, condominiums or adult communities, you'd also be wrong.

According to ERA's survey, most seniors want single-family homes, choosing independence over communal living. They also don't want to move far away to "retirement meccas." Most prefer to live within 20 miles of where they currently live.

"The survey results contradict some popular assumptions about the senior market," says Brenda W. Casserly, president and COO, ERA Franchise Systems, Inc. "And, more than anything else, the survey reinforced our belief that seniors



Columnist Blanche Evans

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represent a unique market segment with particular needs. As a group, seniors clearly keep up with the latest technological research tools at their disposal, but are also savvy enough to recognize the value of a real estate sales associate in the home buying process."

If seniors don't want communal living, and want to live within 20 miles of where they live now, what kinds of homes are they seeking?

According to a similar study performed last year by the National Association of Homebuilders and Countrywide, most homebuyers over the age of 50 want detached one-story homes for lower maintenance, but they also want more luxurious amenities than they currently have.

The idea is that seniors want to stay near the friends and family contacts they've built in their own community, but they also want a home that will be an attractive gathering place for their children and grandchildren, rather like a "mini-resort," as one expert put it.

They want their home to be fun, yet the home must also allow them to play out their remaining years with universal design benefits that allow them to "age in place." In other words, those wide doorways should look like an integral part of the home's sumptuous design, and it's OK if they allow easy wheelchair access.

Other amenities that seniors want that aren't so surprising, according to the NAHB, are proximity to shopping, houses of worship and medical facilities.

And, as ERA found, they want access to high-speed Internet service and other smart home technologies that promote communication, safety and security.

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Blanche Evans is the publisher of [Agent News](#) and the associate editor of [Realty Times](#), the Internet's largest independent real estate news service. She is the author of two best-selling real estate books: [The Hottest e-Careers In Real Estate](#), [Real Estate](#)

[Education Company](#), an Internet marketing primer for real estate professionals, and [homesurfing.net: The Insider's Guide To Buying And Selling Your Home Using The Internet](#), [Dearborn](#), a consumer homebuying and selling guide. In 2000, she was recognized by the editors of REALTOR(r) Magazines as one of the "25 Most Influential People In Real Estate," and in 2003 when the "Most Influential" list was updated, she was recognized as one of nine "Notables." She is also a frequent contributor to "Your Money" on CNN fn.

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