



Q: What do I need to know about how today's technology can help me buy or sell a home?

A. Do you remember the Yellow Pages telling us that we should "let our fingers do the walking?" At the time it was introduced, that was a pretty novel approach. Instead of walking (or driving) around the neighborhood looking for something you needed to buy or finding a service person who could help you solve a problem, with the Yellow Pages you could "shop from home" and accomplish the same results.

Today, the slogan might well be "let your fingers do the typing" as more and more Americans use their computers to find information, get help and to make purchases.

And, like so many elements of our lives, the Internet and other computer-based technologies are having a significant influence on the world of real estate, as well. Whether you are looking to buy or sell, the Internet offers you extraordinary access to information and many resources to help you with the sale or purchase of a property.

Until recently, finding a new home likely meant hours of driving neighborhoods and working with a real estate agent who had access to the private information in a multi-listing service. If you were looking to buy real estate outside your own city or state, then you often had to travel to that location as the only option for finding out what was available.

Today, Internet access has opened new possibilities to how we sell and buy homes. Though multi-listing services are still an important tool for buyers, sellers and real estate professionals, the Internet has opened up access to information, making it so much easier to gather information that will help you find the right new home or to reach potential buyers of real estate you want to sell.

Let's imagine that you want to find a new home outside of Colorado. To begin with, you can use the Internet to learn about housing prices in different markets you might be considering in your search. Google, Yahoo and other search engines can generate plenty of news stories and analyses of individual real estate markets.

When you focus in on a particular market you can do all the research you need about schools, neighborhoods and resources through websites set up by the school districts, chambers of commerce and economic development organizations via the Internet. You can even use a tool like Google Earth (www.earth.google.com) to get satellite views of neighborhoods you might be considering.

Ready to actually look at houses that are available? Many individual real estate companies, as well as multi-list services offer websites where you can search for available homes by location, price, features and more. Several national sites, like REALTOR®.com and Zillow.com, offer access to information about homes throughout the country and are a good place to start your search.

If you find a home that appears to meet your needs, why not take a tour of it right on your computer? Many REALTORS® include still photos and video tours of homes as part of the service they provide in helping to sell a home. Sellers often choose to work with real estate professionals who can provide this service as buyers expect these high-tech ways of previewing homes.

Computer technology is also affecting other aspects of the selling and buying processes. In many places the traditional, manual lock boxes that people put on their doors to give real estate agents access to the property for showings are giving way to electronic versions. Not only do these provide a higher level of security, by having codes that change periodically, they also can collect information about which real estate agents/companies are showing your property.

Cell phones and PDAs are also taking on new roles in real estate. In some locations when a real estate agent shows a home with an electronic lock box, the listing agent gets either a cell phone call notifying her of the showing or an e-mail with specific information about who showed the home, when and how long they spent looking at the property.

As a buyer, using the Internet and its related technologies to narrow your search can save you time and help you find that perfect home more easily. For sellers, the technology and information opens up the world of potential buyers and invites them to come see your home by letting their fingers do the typing.

This article was provided by the Colorado Association of REALTORS®. Additional information about buying and selling real estate is available at www.coloradorealtors.com.