

Home shopping alone - without the help of a professional even when online - can become a huge handicap for home buyers. Here are four reasons:

- Late information. Shoppers who limit themselves to only looking at real estate Web sites will overlook some very good properties, possibly one that is perfect for them, and they won't get up-to-the minute information.
- Fake listings. Web operators sometimes try to collect page views with fake listings to pump up their advertising returns, and that wastes the time of real home shoppers. It's also frustrating for shoppers to find an interesting home that's not available.
- Questionable information. Home value Web sites only go so far. Sites like Zillow.com and Cyberhomes.com put prices out there that may or may not be an accurate reflection of neighborhood or housing value. Working with a professional means the buyer gets the benefit of a broader range of knowledgeable resources.
- Process help. Once a home shopper has found a property, working with a pro means they'll follow the right path to close the deal. For anyone except experienced investors, going it totally alone can be risky.

Source: US News & World Report, Matthew Badyk (01/07/09)