

## How to Search for Property

The age of the internet has opened up the world of real estate to potential buyers. Real estate companies and various professional real estate organizations have realized that over 70% of all buyers now start their search for property on the internet before making contact with anybody and have designed search programs to answer this need.

That is not to say that the more traditional advertising methods have disappeared. These are still used extensively but they tend to only reach the local population where the property is situated. As the world shrinks and information becomes a global commodity, the buyer has a selection of research tools at their disposal. There are a number of ways to find property for sale with each method having its pluses and minuses. Here are the most common ways that buyers tend to use:

- **MLS Search** This is probably the most popular and targeted way for buyers to search property, particularly if the buyer is not local to the region of interest. The acronym MLS stands for 'Multiple Listing Service'. If a property is placed for sale with a selling agent (the home owner has contracted the services of a real estate agent to sell their property), the property details will be registered into MLS for the district. This means that a buyer searching MLS can see all properties available for sale right now in their region of interest. This system is a little different to the European way where an individual agent holds property details exclusively and the buyer must go from agency to agency seeing what they have for sale. The MLS system shortcuts the buyer's search by having all homes available by all agents searchable in one place. The only potential downside of MLS is that if a buyer found a property they liked and contacted the presenting listing agent direct, they could be waiving their right to free representation in the purchase as the listing agent is contracted to work for the seller, not the buyer. To understand how buying real estate agents work in Florida in more detail click here.

[Click here to search MLS in various Florida destinations.](#)

For a more detailed explanation on how to use MLS [Click here.](#)

- **Newspaper and Magazine Advertising** Buyers tend to use this research method once they're at their location of interest. There are many local real estate magazines published showcasing local property for sale. Any visitor to Florida can find them dispensed for free from magazine holders on roadsides and outside various restaurants and stores. Whilst it's a good idea for buyers to browse these publications to get a general feel for prices, the downside is the same as the MLS method. The seller's agent who has a duty to the seller and not necessarily to the buyer presents the property that interests you. By contacting the agent direct you could forego proper representation in any forthcoming deal to purchase.

- **Agent For Sale Sign in Yard** If a district or neighborhood really interests you, any buyer should absolutely drive this area extensively at different times to see how the community stacks up at key times of the day and week. What may seem like a sleepy neighborhood on a Wednesday afternoon may be quite different on Friday evening. Becoming familiar with a locale that you plan to purchase in is a smart thing to do. What is not advisable is for buyers to call the agent direct advertising their contact details on the yard sign. Again, this agent is representing the seller and not the buyer and direct contact from a buyer could result in the same consequences for the buyer in terms of non-representation.

- For Sale By Owner Yard Signs Unless the buyer is extremely knowledgeable in the intricacies of Florida real estate and skilled in contractual transactions, I would advise against this route. The Florida law governing real estate contracts between buyer and seller with no involvement from a real estate agent is simple &ndash; &lsquo;Caveat Emptor&rsquo; otherwise known as &lsquo;Let the buyer beware&rsquo;. An unskilled buyer entering such a transaction directly with the seller is entering an unregulated minefield where the buyer is at the mercy of the seller in terms of disclosure etc. This is not a good idea when large sums of money are at stake. The same risk applies to for sale by owner websites and making contact with owners advertising their property via the web.

- Developer Show Homes/Model Homes Who hasn&rsquo;t driven past a beautifully presented home or community with &lsquo;open&rsquo; flags fluttering in the breeze, made a snap decision and taken a swift turn through the gates to nose around a dream property? Before a buyer walks across the threshold of any such property they should ask themselves the question &ldquo;Am I really interested in buying in this community?&rdquo;. If the answer is even a half-hearted maybe, the buyer should think twice before stepping through the door. The agents on duty in developer models work for the developer and their job (and loyalty!) is to sell the developer&rsquo;s product. Buyers walking through the door without their buying agent effectively waive their right to representation if they decide to buy, even if the buyer returns at a later date with representation. The fact they walked through the door the first time without agent representation means the developer can deny the buyer the right of representation by a buying agent engaged by them.

- Agent Open Houses This rule of &ldquo;across the threshold&rdquo; also applies to agent open houses. Weekends are popular times for selling agents to open the doors of their listings and allow passing members of the public (and potential buyers) to view the property with no appointment. When driving a neighborhood at the weekend you&rsquo;ll probably see plenty of agent signs beckoning to open houses. Before a buyer enters an open house it is worth remembering the rules of engagement as per buyer rights when entering a developer model as explained above. By walking across the threshold without your buying agent you could forego representation if you decide you wish to buy this home.

In summary my advice to any buyer is this; by all means do your homework on the internet reviewing regions that interest you. Use MLS to get a feel of prices and what you can get for your money. However what is not advisable if you want free representation and impartial advice is contacting selling agents (also known as listing agents) or viewing property on your own without a buyer&rsquo;s agent at your side. Once you&rsquo;ve concluded where you want to buy, what sort of property you&rsquo;re interested in and your budget, then I&rsquo;d strongly suggest it&rsquo;s time to engage the free services of a buyer&rsquo;s agent who would be contractually obligated to you, the buyer, and not the seller or developer. Let me put it another way; if you were a plaintiff in a court case, would you hire the services of the defendant&rsquo;s lawyer to also represent you? When selecting a buyer&rsquo;s agent to represent you they should be specialized in the purchase of the types of property and region that matches your wish list. They should also have extensive local knowledge and be able to do a lot of detailed legwork to save you time and narrow down the search of properties that are ideal for your requirements.

[Click here to read how buying agents work in Florida, what their duties are and how they can be invaluable in making a purchase go smoothly.](#)