

The Seattle Times Company

NWjobs | NWautos | NWhomes | NWsource | Free Classifieds | seattletimes.com

The Seattle Times
Winner of Eight Pulitzer Prizes

Real estate



57°F

Search

Our network sites seattletimes.com | [Advanced](#)

- Home
 - Local
 - Nation/World
 - Business/Tech
 - Sports
 - Entertainment
 - Living
 - Travel
 - Opinion
 - Shopping
 - Jobs
 - Autos
 - Homes
 - Rentals
 - Classifieds
 - Buy ads
- Quick links: [Traffic](#) | [Movies](#) | [Restaurants](#) | [Today's events](#) | [Video](#) | [Photos](#) | [Interactives](#) | [Blogs](#) | [Forums](#) | [Subscriber Services](#) | [Your account](#) | [Log in](#) | [Contact us](#)

Originally published Saturday, January 20, 2007 at 12:00 AM

[E-mail article](#) [Print](#) [Share](#)

New study shows which words sell, and which don't

Feeling "motivated" to sell your house? It might be best to keep that feeling under wraps, or at least out of the ad.

By **Ann Brenoff**
Los Angeles Times

Words matter. Wars have started over them. Civilizations have collapsed because of them. And it appears the speed with which a house sells might be determined by them.

As listings grow old on the vine in this flush-with-inventory market and frustrated sellers reach for the slightest edge, the findings of several academics might offer guidance.

For example, a Canadian professor, as part of a broader study on real-estate sales patterns, found that homes where the seller was **"motivated"** took 15 percent longer to sell, while houses listed as **"handyman specials"** flew off the market in half the average time. "It surprised even me," said researcher Paul Anglin, who teaches real-estate and housing trends at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. The study dissected the wording of more than 20,000 Canadian home listings from 1997 to 2000.

What surprised him most was how the buying public put style over substance. Words that denoted "curb appeal" or general attractiveness helped a property sell faster than those that spoke of "value" and "price."

Homes described as "beautiful" moved 15 percent faster and for 5 percent more in price than the benchmark. "Good-value" homes sold for 5 percent less than average.

Another finding in Anglin's study was that the plea of "must see!" was received about as enthusiastically as a dinner-time telemarketing call. Using "must see" had a statistically insignificant effect on the number of days homes took to sell.

Listings where **"landscaping" was heralded sold 20 percent faster**, and homes in "move-in condition" took 12 percent less time to sell than the benchmark, although the study showed that "move-in condition" had an insignificant effect on the sales price.

Owners use listing language to convey how serious they are about selling. Some words work better than others, Anglin's study found. Listings in which the seller said he or she was "moving" sold for 1 percent less compared with 8 percent less when the seller was "motivated."

Real-estate listings, not unlike personal ads, are crafted to minimize blemishes and maximize perceived selling points. So if "enjoys moonlight walks on the beach and cooking together" means "I'm unemployed and am looking for someone who won't always expect to eat out," then **"needs TLC" might mean "this house will have you on a first-name basis with the clerks at the local hardware store."**

Anglin's study isn't alone in its attempt to determine what language moves the market.

Last year, the effect of listing language was covered in a National Bureau of Economic Research study that looked at whether real-estate agents selling their own homes hold out for a higher price. (They do; the study found they take longer to sell but fetch a higher price.)



[enlarge](#)
Heather McKinnon / The Seattle Times

Quiz answers

Words that help sell a home:

- Handyman special
- Curb appeal
- Move-in condition
- Landscaping

- Granite
- Gourmet
- Golf

Words that hurt:

- Motivated seller
- Good value
- As-is
- Clean
- Quiet
- New paint

Los Angeles Times

Video



IED sweeping in Afghanistan
In September, Seattle Times reporter Hal Bernton embedded with Apache Company, 2nd Platoon, a Joint Base Lewis-McChord unit, as they patrolled the Panjwai District of Afghanistan, where U.S. soldiers have faced one of the highest IED threats.



Matson on Music: Macklemore's thrifty style



The art of Sherry Markovitz



Voices of the Village

The Music of Trees art installation

Puyallup Fair after dark

PAWS takes in refugee dogs from Iran

The Ridge Mountain Park

[More videos](#)

ADVERTISING

Instantly watch movies

Instantly watch *The Lincoln Lawyer* today!

NETFLIX **1 MONTH FREE TRIAL** [Click here](#)

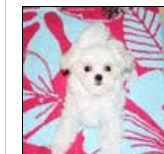
AP Video

[Entertainment](#) | [Top Video](#) | [World](#) | [Offbeat Video](#) | [Sci-Tech](#)

Marketplace

Classifieds

pet classifieds



AKC Maltese Baby Doll Puppies

[Post a pet listing](#)

general classifieds

[Garage & estate sales](#)
[Furniture & home furnishings](#)
[Electronics](#)

just listed

