https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/28/technology/sell-house-with-ai-no-realtor.html

Can AI Replace RE Agents?

A fun game that everyone is playing lately is called: "Can AI Do My Job?"

It's pretty fun. You think about what you do at work and you wonder if AI could do it better. Recently, NYT ran a story called **I Tried to Sell My House With a Chatbot** and it was really interesting. The homeowner listed his house on the MLS for a flat fee, then used AI to tell him how to prep the home, communicate with buyer agents, and negotiate the sale. He felt good about the outcome. He thinks he may have sold it too low, but he saved commissions and feels he came out just as good as if he'd hired an agent. So, let's talk AI, real estate, then combine them.

AI:

I really love AI. It's an amazing tool that allows me to get a basic head start on any question (legal, accounting, marketing, how to choose good watermelons, anything!) and then, if I need the next level of support, I hire a professional. AI can also help with hiring professionals because I can quickly do some research and get some context on what to expect. Also, I can quickly get AI's opinion if the professional tells me things that don't seem right.

Real Estate:

Real estate has collided with technology before:

Dark Ages: Listings were only shared among brokers (imagine Ron Burgundy-type agents driving buyers around in Cadillacs).

1996: Realtor.com launched, allowing consumers to search MLS databases for themselves.

Mid 2000s: Zillow & Redfin improved transparency and introduced map-based searching for consumers.

AI + Real Estate:

When thinking about how AI will change the client/agent relationship, let's look at past technological leaps. 40 years ago, agents had all the info and consumers had none. Today, consumers can get 75% of listing information by themselves. (The remaining 25% comprise agent tools that we pay for, agent remarks that are only shared among brokers, and the fact that agents can simply call each other and get additional info on a listing, client, or transaction. Agents are very collaborative – but only with each other, not the public.)

So, if consumers' access to info shot up 20 years ago… why did agents not disappear or dramatically reduce commissions (a typical transaction these days runs closer to 5% total commissions than the age-old 6%)? I mean, their leverage largely disappeared!

It's because jobs and people adapt. Ron Burgundy agents charged 6% commissions simply for connecting their clients to the MLS. Today's agents charge 5-6%, but they do a lot more than Ron Burgundy ever did. They help with repairs and cosmetic upgrades, they oversee contractors, inspectors, yardwork, cleaners. They do home staging and provide investment analysis. Think Ron Burgundy was walking homes with the stager and coordinating hardwood refinishing? No. He was trimming his mustache and making hilarious jokes.

My opinion is that AI doesn't give access to MORE information (the 25% of info that is the domain of agents is still off-limits). Instead, AI simply gives consumers quicker, more handy answers to general questions. AI can tell them what color scheme to use and what a selling agent is (paradoxically it is a buyer's agent), but all that does is give consumers a better version of Google.

So, yes, AI will make it marginally easier for people to buy and sell their own real estate by helping them navigate paperwork, research listings, and get info on general questions and negotiations. But a lot of the value of agents moved away from paperwork and listing access long ago, and, in my opinion, AI will have less impact than the advent of Realtor.com, Redfin, and Zillow.