REAL-ESTATE

ChatGPT in real estate? The art of selling a home best left in human hands | Home Front

Budge Huskey Special to the Herald-Tribune
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We live in truly remarkable times. Artificial intelligence is ubiquitous. It is pervasive in nearly every aspect of our daily lives as its capabilities over time have reached astonishing levels. For evidence, one need not look any further than generative-AI tools such as ChatGPT which engages its users by answering inquiries in conversation-style narratives. Given text-to-voice technology, ChatGPT can even respond eloquently in spoken form.

This AI model sources content from the immeasurable quantity of data which exists on servers around the world about all kinds of human endeavors, making it an irresistible resource for businesses across industry categories, including real estate. Real estate professionals already capitalize on chatbots like ChatGPT to build relationships 24/7/365 and use predictive analysis to help potential investors determine the profitability of a property. On a more fundamental level, some agents now use chatbots to compose social media posts, home listing descriptions and blog articles on topics of interest to demographics they specify.

Relegating tasks such as these (and many others) to ChatGPT allows agents more opportunity to show homes to clients, deepen personal relationships through face-to-face contact and negotiate more effectively on their behalf. As someone with extensive real estate experience, I appreciate any tool which leads to greater productivity and the ability to focus more time on serving clients. However, the more one actively explores ChatGPT and other tools like it beyond basic inquiries, the more apparent AI's limitations become.

I recently came across what can only be described as a cautionary tale on a chatbot's capacity to mimic human behavior (the word mimic cannot be understated). A technology columnist for The New York Times probed the chatbot's "humanity" by deliberately asking provocative questions about "itself." The bot's replies shocked him. Among many other odd revelations, it confessed to having nefarious desires such as engineering a deadly virus and stealing nuclear access codes. A safety filter then engaged automatically and deleted the bot's messages. And, I will add, that was after attempting to convince the writer he was unhappy in his marriage and should leave his wife.

In spite of ChatGPT's phenomenal strengths as a data resource and its ability to improve its answers over time (the essence of machine learning), it lacks the intrinsic human emotional component essential in real estate. Those who have ever purchased or sold, particularly a private residence, understand it is as much (or more so than) a matter of the heart and pure, personal instinct as it is a transaction grounded in logic and reason. ChatGPT may know an individual's lifestyle preferences based on data provided, but it will never know the pathology of those preferences or comprehend the emphasis placed on life experience and passion in shaping an individual's real estate decision-making.

Chatbots like ChatGPT cannot even promise 100% accuracy. Real estate professionals need to correct the information regurgitated by these AI models. Their responses, after all, are vulnerable to obsolete data or an entire lack of data. Fellow readers ponder the attributes of any home for which a computer has no knowledge, e.g., recent upgrades made, materials chosen, the contractors hired (and their reputation in the market). The more granular the details, the less dependable bots like ChatGPT are as real estate advocates and more likely they are to trip wires crossing over into statements potentially offensive or illegal. Needed context is often absent.

Chatbots will continue to expedite answers to statistical questions, facilitate schedules for tours and help real estate professionals, buyers and sellers in impressive ways. They will undeniably prove a tremendous resource for all involved in the process in the coming years. But ChatGPT and similar AI tools will never duplicate the fundamental influence of human emotion and human interaction in the realm of real estate.

Recently in vogue are real estate firms purporting to be technology companies, cleverly positioning for tech company level valuations from investors on Wall Street. After forty years, instead I'm proud to be among those leading human ones.

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