

The Surveyor's Corner

by Tim Hollingsworth

Tim Hollingsworth, managing director of leading surveying, estate agency and surveying firm Rumball Sedgwick, on the merits of 'bricks-and-mortar' estate agents

Internet, or not to Internet, when selling or letting a property?

The Internet pervades all of our lives nowadays - we work all day on it, we get our news from it, we listen to music on it, we keep in touch with our friends through it.

And of course, it plays a major part in estate agency - websites such as Rightmove and OnTheMarket.com are the first port of call for many buyers, sellers and renters.

These services, which have been around for some years now, work in partnership with 'real' bricks-and-mortar estate agents, who still do the essential work of showing customers around properties, and using their local knowledge to guide clients to the most suitable properties.

'Local knowledge' is an

absolutely fundamental quality for estate agents - here at Rumball Sedgwick, for example, we have been selling and letting property for over 250 years. When we first started in Watford and St Albans, we were the only Land Agent in either town - now there are more than twenty in each.

The population of both towns has grown hugely over the same period - in 1900, for example, the population of St Albans was around 16,000. Now it is ten times the size!

When Rumball Sedgwick

started as Land Agents, our work consisted mainly of selling or leasing major estates, usually by auction - very few ordinary working people owned property. Now we, in common with all established estate agents, work on behalf of the many tens of thousands of homeowners in our area.

Recently we have seen the advent of 'online only' estate agents. These hold out the promise of lower fees, coupled with access to a huge national customer base, in much the same way as ebay or Amazon does.

However, anecdotal evidence suggests that most buyers regard online-only agents as another 'channel' to keep an eye on, but certainly not a replacement for local agents. In high-demand areas especially, buyers value their personal relationships with local agents, who may be able to notify them of new properties more quickly.

Equally, if you are a seller, your local agent will know which of their buyers are most likely to be interested in your property.

Online-only agents just don't have these client relationships.

This means that although the fees promised by the online-only agents may be significantly lower, the numbers of sales that they achieve are also widely thought to be lower, and to take significantly longer to complete, than those of bricks-and-mortar agents. As the leading online-only players won't release any figures of the actual sales they achieve, it is hard to arrive at any other conclusion.

We all know that buying, selling or letting a property is very stressful at the best of times. Having a good local agent to guide you through the legislative maze, and to give you peace of mind, is well worth a bit of extra cost.

After all, your house is probably your most valuable asset, and you should only entrust it to people who are always happy to meet you face-to-face, and whose office you can walk in to. That just isn't the case with online-only agents.



We believe that the best outcome for clients, both sellers and buyers, comes from combining the benefits of Internet technology, with the best personal customer service. So although you'll find us on the best online property sites, you're always welcome in our offices in Watford and St Albans as well!

If you are thinking about moving home, please do contact any member of our sales team. We will make every effort to make the whole process as simple and painless as possible.

For advice on all property matters, please contact Tim Hollingsworth on **01923 200099** or tim@rumballsedgwick.co.uk.

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