

Zillow report: Online research now shapes how most agent relationships begin

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With repeat buyers making up 55% of the market, agents face a more digitally savvy client base that's reshaping how real estate relationships begin

SEATTLE, Dec. 30, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- How buyers and sellers choose a real estate agent has shifted meaningfully over the past several years, and it's reshaping what it takes to win business.

According to [Zillow's 2025 Consumer Housing Trends Report for Agents](#), 36% of sellers now find their agents through online channels, more than double the 15% share in 2018. Among buyers, 33% say online research played a key role in how they chose their agent.

At the same time, repeat buyers account for 55% of all home purchasers, bringing greater experience, higher expectations and a more deliberate approach to hiring an agent.

After several years on the sidelines waiting for mortgage rates to fall, many homeowners are reentering the market with a stronger understanding of rates, timing and trade-offs. These experienced buyers are returning with different priorities and higher expectations as they navigate today's market conditions.

"Repeat buyers now make up the majority of today's market, and they're coming back with a very different mindset than they had even a few years ago," said Amanda Pendleton, Zillow's home trends expert. "These 'comeback buyers' have lived through multiple market cycles; they've adjusted to today's rates; and they're intentional about who they hire, rewarding agents who show up with a clear strategy, strong process management and a truly modern, digital-first experience."

A more competitive but predictable client landscape

The data also highlights a shift in how repeat buyers choose agents. While 79% of repeat buyers say they would consider working with the same agent again, only 13% ultimately hired their agent based on their past experience with them.

That gap reflects common realities — moves to new markets, agents who have retired, or life changes — but it also highlights how intentional experienced buyers have become. Nearly half of repeat buyers interviewed two or more agents, often narrowing their short list through online research before making contact.

"This isn't about loyalty disappearing," Pendleton said. "It's about buyers being more intentional. Agents who stay visible, communicate clearly and demonstrate expertise early are well positioned to earn that business — even with experienced clients."

Once contact is made, decisions tend to happen quickly; 47% of buyers hired the first agent they spoke with, and 59% of sellers did the same. What this means for agents is that the hiring decision often happens before the first call, driven by how clearly an agent's expertise, approach and track record come through online.

What comeback buyers value most from agents

Compared with first-time buyers, repeat buyers place greater emphasis on efficiency and strategic guidance:

- Process over hand-holding: 63% of repeat buyers ranked organizing and submitting paperwork as the most valuable agent service, compared to 51% of first-time buyers.
- Stronger offer strategy: Repeat buyers placed higher value on pricing strategy, negotiations and offer structure, while placing less emphasis on private tours.
- Text-first communication: 50% of buyers who used an agent prefer texting or messaging apps when working with agents, while only 33% preferred phone calls.

Sellers are prioritizing timing and certainty

The report also shows sellers making pragmatic decisions to achieve their goals:

- About two-thirds of sellers covered some or all of the buyer's closing costs.
- One in 3 sellers offered a rate buydown.
- One in 3 sellers said selling within their preferred time frame mattered more than maximizing price.

How agents market listings influences hiring decisions

- 78% of sellers were more likely to hire agents who offer high-resolution photography.
- 75% of sellers were more likely to hire agents who provide virtual tours and interactive floor plans.

Taken together, the findings point to a market that is active, informed and intentional — one in which preparation and clarity matter as much as relationships.

The full 2025 Consumer Housing Trends Report for Agents is available [here](#).

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