



THIS ARTICLE  
IS BEING  
PUBLISHED ON  
THE PRIVATE  
NETWORK,  
BUT EVERYONE  
GETS TO READ IT.

So what’s the deal with private listings? If it’s private (I say in my best Jerry Seinfeld voice) and everyone can see it, is it really private?

Today, more and more consumers have access to—the once highly elusive—private and off-market listings. They’re available to almost everyone. They’ve gone mainstream. Which begs the question, why even list a property on the private network?

The Private Listing Network (PLN), does indeed serve a purpose. Below are some examples of when and why sellers may consider listing on PLN:

1. If sellers want privacy, the PLN gives them that ability.
2. If the home isn’t “show ready.”
3. If a room in the home is painted a dramatic color (like black or deep purple), which may fit the seller’s aesthetic style, but may not necessarily resonate with a larger audience. Before undertaking cumbersome cosmetic changes, especially if the client still lives in the home, listing on the PLN allows a seller to gauge how big of an obstacle the feature may or may not be to potential buyers.
4. If the sellers are looking for a delayed or longer closing date.
5. To generate buzz and build anticipation for a home, especially at a time like now, when inventory is so very low.
6. Or if (here’s the elephant in the room) the seller is testing pricing limits and intentionally listing the home at an inflated price: No bites? No harm! They’ve incurred zero time on the market and now have an incredible data point on pricing strategy when the time comes to go live.

As REALTORS®, we have a fiduciary responsibility to serve our clients’ best interests. The million-dollar question then becomes, are you truly serving your client’s best interests if you list on the PLN, and as such, not maximizing visibility—i.e., not making the listing available to the highest number of consumers?

Whether or not to list privately is a critical question and conversation that needs to be asked and held with each and every seller; we agents must clearly cover and explain to them the pros and cons of listing privately vs. directly going live on the MLS.

Let’s weigh some of those pros and cons here. How would your client feel if you listed their home privately, landed one or two showings, and then sold the home to one of the first few buyers who viewed it? Do you think your clients would feel like they left money on the table by not opening up the listing to a larger number of potential buyers? If so, this could put you on a potentially slippery slope, and as such, how a home is listed needs to be fully considered beforehand so that there are no misunderstandings between you and your client.

It’s true that private listing can be an incredible choice for a seller. If a buyer has access to private listings, it means that they’ve at least engaged an agent to provide them with such a service. When a private showing is requested, we expect there is intention, purpose, and, presumably, a vetted buyer who is looking to call this very home their own on the other end. As listing agents, perhaps we can better serve our clients by bringing in select buyers (i.e., buyers who have declared their serious consideration and intent via connecting through the PLN) vs. throwing an open house sign out front and hoping the Sunday boozy brunch “tourist interest-only” crowd doesn’t stumble in.

The private listing network is also a valuable tool for agents seeking to pick up new buyers. Access to the VIP table (i.e., the PLN) lets you provide red carpet service to buyers who were otherwise stuck outside, waiting in line at the club entrance. It lets you set yourself apart by granting them access. Congrats! You’re the big hero!

However, it is *this* humble agent’s opinion that the PLN has overstayed its welcome. (Not to mention, the what was once “grassroots cool” has now become mainstream, and when things become mainstream, they lose their luster.) Here’s why:

As agents, we owe it to our sellers and ourselves to maximize our exposure and outreach via the MLS; syndicated websites like Zillow, Redfin, and Realtor; social media; broker outreach; and by promoting open houses. Especially at a time when the housing inventory is at an all-time low! By only listing on the private network, we’re missing a monumental volume of buyers who are just as ready to purchase, and perhaps even more financially

able to do so, than those limited to the private pool. We’re also climbing all over each other, trying to get our clients in to see a home before anyone else. This only adds fuel (and frustration) to the fire and causes additional anxiety among the buyer pool.

Here’s another thing to consider: once sellers are no longer sellers, they are buyers. Selling was the easy part, walking away with higher-than-expected profits. Now your clients (the once sellers but now buyers) are dunked right back into a consumer pool that is struggling with seemingly never-ending affordability and inventory constraints. I’m not saying that the lack of inventory is a direct result of more sellers leaning on the private network, but it certainly isn’t helping the market either.

I say the cool thing to do in these current market conditions is to go “old school” and launch your listings directly on the MLS and get them blasted out to the world for all to see. You’ll better serve your sellers, you’ll better serve your buyers, and you’ll better serve yourself.

Wishing everyone a lot of success on this wild ride!

About the Author:

Sam Shaffer, Managing Broker/Owner of Chicago Properties Firm, is a top 1 percent REALTOR® in Chicago providing white-glove service to buyers, sellers, and investors for the past eighteen years!

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