

Content, not ‘nontent’: Reimagining real estate signs

SAN FRANCISCO — We all have that one thing that drives us crazy. Maybe it’s a stubborn buyer. Maybe it’s the car blocking your right turn at a red light. Maybe it’s waiting for the internet to load on a bad Wi-Fi connection.

For Winston Welborn, chief design officer at Hawaii Life, it’s poor design and language in the real estate industry that drive him up the wall.

When it comes to the intricate details of properly marketing a home, the ability to write well is just as important as phenomenal photography, said Welborn in a presentation at Inman Connect San Francisco.

Avoiding ‘nontent’

Remember the power of concision, he said, and choose your language carefully when marketing. Agents should create content that truly says something, that’s meaningful, that’s content — not “*nontent*,” he said.

Make your emails simple, avoid the obvious and keep descriptions after your name to a minimum, Welborn advised. Nobody wants to know how great you are; they can find out about you if they want to.

He urged agents to keep away from using terms and phrases like:

- “Luxury”
- “All of your dreams”
- “Breathtaking”
- “Opportunity”
- “Shangri-La”
- “This home boasts”

These are are particular bugbears for Welborn, who studied English literature in college.

Also, avoid clichés like the plague, he quipped. And, yes, comparisons are just as bad as clichés, he added. Write words, not superlatives, and let consumers come up with their own conclusions.



Welborn, who heads an in-house “Create” team at Hawaii Life, is working on a number of well-worded “for sale” signs that will give consumers the power to make up their own mind. They give more billboard-type messages, which communicate more than the usual property description.

A beachfront home, for instance, might call for a sign that says: “Like living on a boat. Without the rocking.”

Or, “What is this home worth? What is swimming every day at Hanalei worth?”

And a hard-hitting one that touches on a truly unique selling point and a hot topic in Hawaii: “Tsunami. The rest of Haena is in a tsunami flood zone. This half acre is not.”

Welborn — who dreams of designing a Hawaii Life house — thinks you can say more with signs, and he is coming up with a number of humorous, catchy ideas.

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