OJO Labs raises $20.5 million for house-hunting AI assitant

Real estate artificial intelligence startup OJO Labs raised $20.5 million in a Series B round, the company told Inman on Thursday.

The Austin, Texas-based startup added $20.5 million to the $6 million it had earlier raised. This round was backed by investors Realogy, the Royal Bank of Canada, Northwestern Mutual Fund Ventures and ServiceMaster. Returning investors LiveOak Venture Partners and Silverton Partners, Texas venture capital firms, also contributed. With this funding, the company will hire for its product, data science and engineering teams.

OJO is an AI tool that allows consumers to ask questions at any stage of their home search process. The AI assistant, like Alexa or Siri, aims to solve two problems: consumers not asking their real estate agent questions because they think they're too early in the process and don't want to bother them, and consumers who feel like when they do ask questions early on in the process, their agent tries to sell them on properties.

OJO Labs CEO John Berkowitz compares this problem to what shoppers face when a salesperson asks if they need any help and they say no, but need to ask where to find an item five minutes later.

"There's a large group of consumers that want to ask questions, but aren't really willing to reach out to a Realtor," Berkowitz said. "We see this as a valuable tool to provide a better experience to consumers and stay present to them."

The AI assistant uses data from Wolfnet, another real estate tech company with access to 600 multiple listings services (MLSs) across North America, as well as "several other" unspecified data partners. It frees up agents from answering questions from early-stage house-hunters.

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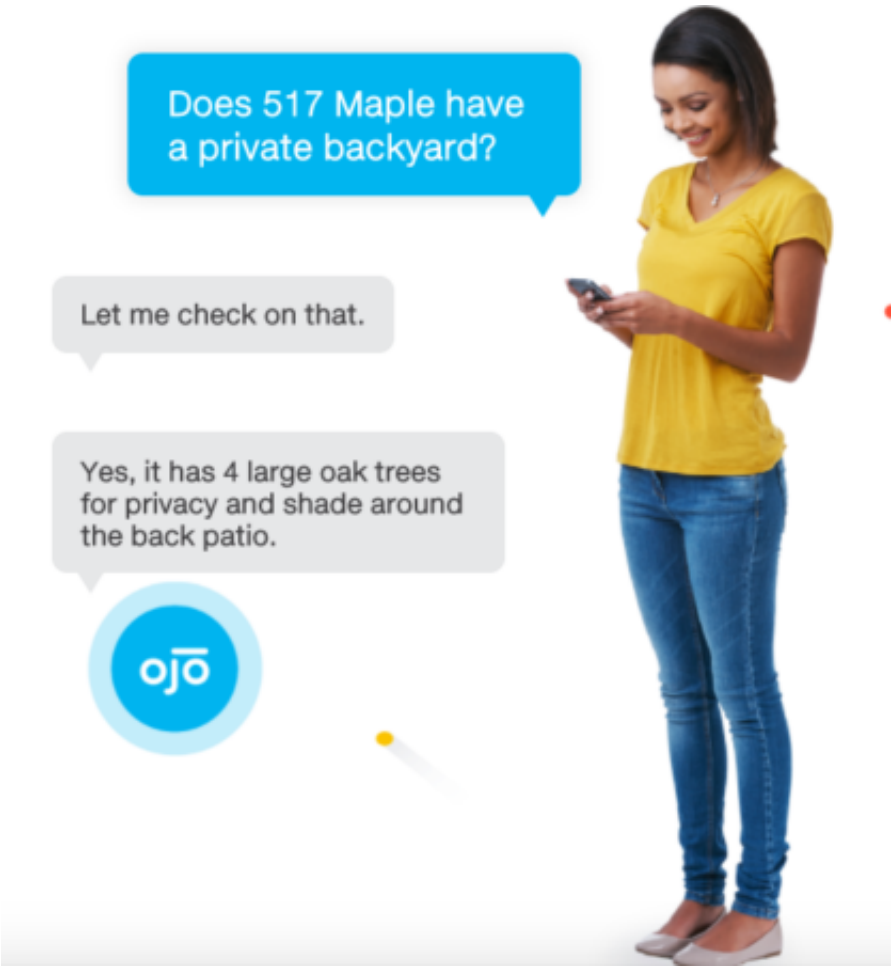
OJO can answer specific questions in the real estate search process. An example on OJO's website shows a consumer asking if a property has a private backyard, and OJO responding with detail about how many trees surround the yard.



OJO's platform. Credit: Screenshot/OJO Labs

OJO has been operating in 10 markets since January, although the company declined to share what those markets are. Berkowitz said that since January “tens of thousands of consumers have engaged” with the assistant, and the technology trains 1 million data points a month.

The platform is free for consumers and the company’s large enterprise partners pay a technology fee, Berkowitz said.

OJO says its product can be used by any future homeowner or current homeowner for any real estate questions they have. The company has been working on its technology for about three years before this full launch.

To expand nationwide, the startup is in large part relying on its relationship with franchisor Realogy to connect with agents and brokers, who then offer the service to their clients. The company will also market itself to consumers directly.

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