Trulia’s latest ad campaign focuses on neighborhood data

A woman is excited to find an open house in what she thinks is a convenient location — but the traffic, crime and weather she encounters upon arriving give her second thoughts.

A family walks up to a home they’re hoping to buy — only to be entirely put off by the, um, unusual next-door neighbors.

Those are two concepts that real estate search portal Trulia is leveraging in its new ad campaign, “The House Is Only Half Of It,” which highlights the demographic and neighborhood “map overlays” that Trulia offers.

Marketing the map overlays

In the ads, “Beth,” a single woman, and “the Coburns,” a small family, have second thoughts about their potential new homes when they get a glimpse of the surrounding neighborhood.

The implication is that just searching for bedrooms and bathrooms isn’t enough; consumers want to know about more than property details when they’re getting ready to invest in a home.

“Finding the perfect place to call home is so much more than the four walls you will live in — it’s about finding the home that fits your needs, and the ideal neighbors, blocks and streets,” said Alissa Reiter, vice president of marketing at Trulia, in a press release. “We wanted to highlight the sense of elation and relief when you find your perfect home and neighborhood by having a little fun showcasing a few extreme examples of nightmare neighborhoods.”

Reiter added in a discussion with Inman that Trulia’s map overlays are one of the features that put the portal on the map (so to speak), but that some users found them difficult to locate, “so we’ve overhauled the experience to better integrate the maps, and that goes hand-in-hand with how consumers think about looking for a house.”

How important is neighborhood?

On that note, Trulia is also releasing survey results that indicate that 84 percent of Americans said that the neighborhood was “as important or more important” than the home itself.

“We found that it’s a really universal thing for people to care as much or more about the house itself as the neighborhood, but the right criteria for the neighborhood were really different for different consumers,” Reiter noted. “If you have kids, it’s about the schools and parks and safety, and if you’re single then it’s more about proximity to the bars.”

The survey was conducted with Harris Poll and asked 2,159 adults about their sentiments surrounding the home itself and the neighborhood. (It wasn’t based on a probability sample, so sampling error isn’t available.)

Survey-takers valued safety (80 percent of respondents) highest among their list of critical neighborhood characteristics, followed by accessibility (proximity to work, restaurants, grocery stores and activities) at 62 percent of respondents.

“We have heard repeatedly from consumers how important it is to feel safe walking your dog at night, how local school ratings matter for their children, and how walkability to restaurants and entertainment is the ultimate convenience. These are all dimensions that play a huge role in deciding on the right home,” stated Reiter in the press release.

The map overlays give consumers insight into safety, schools, commutes “and even surrounding dog parks and night life,” said the company in its release, “helping home shoppers make informed decisions on where to live.”

Other interesting findings from the survey:

- 69 percent of Americans said they’d drive through a neighborhood multiple times at different times of the day to determine whether it’s a good fit.
- 78 percent of Americans have used the internet on a desktop or mobile device to search for a home (up from 73 percent in 2012).
- Respondents were “split 50-50” when it came to their willingness to pay above listing price to live in their “ideal neighborhood.”

Reiter said that through Trulia’s ongoing qualitative research, the company had a good idea of the measures that consumers are willing to take in order to figure out the neighborhood.

“There were people who would purposefully take their dogs for walk in that neighborhood, who’d stop people in the street and ask them what it was like there,” she said. “There was more than one person who said they’d do a sort of stakeout where they’d bring a picnic lunch in their car and hang out on the block at different times of day.”

Buyers are liars?

Based on the survey results, Trulia said, consumers would be willing to give up the following in order to live in the “right” neighborhood:

- A pool (72 percent)
- A furnished basement (55 percent)
- Square footage (33 percent)
- Garage (21 percent)
- Yard (19 percent)
- A bathroom and a bedroom (13 percent and 12 percent, respectively)

Reiter said that as frustrating as it can be for agents, it’s not uncommon for consumers to change their minds about what they want — sometimes based on the neighborhood and how they see their lives unfolding in that space.

“It’s really common for people to not wind up buying in their initial target neighborhood, either because they discover that there’s not enough inventory or the houses are too small or the schools or commute aren’t what they thought,” she noted. “It becomes this journey where they consider other things. Sometimes it’s like kicking and screaming to have them consider other things and sometimes it’s really serendipitous.”

She shared an anecdote: A professor at the University of California at Davis who thought she wanted to live near the university in an older neighborhood — but fell in love with a brand-new subdivision instead. “She wound up discovering that she loved the idea of building this community from scratch, and she could look into this half-empty subdivision and imagine what her life was going to be like there,” Reiter explained.

“It’s not just about getting to know neighborhoods; it’s getting to know yourself.”

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