Why should real estate agents care about chatbots?

SAN FRANCISCO — When a lead reaches out to you at 2 a.m., how do you respond?

In the past, you could set up an auto-responder with no interactivity, you could get out of bed and handle it yourself — or worse yet, you could do nothing and miss out on the lead entirely.

But today, there are much sleeker options that can banter with a lead until the real estate agent is needed to step in.

In the Inman Connect panel, “Chatbots: The good, the bad and the branded,” two young pioneers in the chatbot game, Nate Joens of Structurely and Daniel Ahmadizadeh of Riley, discussed their methods of warming and qualifying leads.

First, let’s define what a chatbot is and what it does.

As Joens put it, a chatbot is an application that can live within any platform such as Facebook Messenger, a live-chat widget, SMS, etc.

Often involved in the process is artificial intelligence, which can learn from data and experiences.

This translates to real estate in several ways.

Holmes and Riley

Joens’s company, Sturcturely, has Holmes — an AI-driven inside sales agent.

According to Structurely’s website, “Holmes will instantly follow up with all of your online leads, ask qualifying questions and answer lead questions using relevant MLS data.”

The AI-powered bot hands the transaction off to real estate agents once the conversation reaches a point that’s beyond the chatbot’s capabilities. For example, if a lead asks a question about a home’s foundation, the bot will say something like, “Let me find out for you,” and then alerts an agent.

On the other hand, Riley takes a more human approach. Riley’s concierges qualify leads 24/7 using real people — exclusively through text messages.

Riley’s concierges ask qualifying questions and can “shoot the shit a little and empathize with them when necessary,” Ahmadizadeh said in an Inman article.

They hand off the transaction at organic points in the conversation.

For example, if someone says he or she is qualified, doesn't have an agent and wants to look at houses ASAP, the lead is turned over to an agent.

Why should you care?

"Ultimately you want to make sure you have a solution in place that integrates with your workflow," Ahmadizadeh said.

These two very different versions of chatbots warm leads for the agent to swoop in at the transaction point, seamlessly.

With all the tasks real estate agents are responsible for daily, automation can be a welcome addition to any agent's lead generation.

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