



Internet, making your real estate needs easy

In the recent past, real estate websites largely offered property listings. Today, services have evolved. You can buy, sell or even find property to rent or buy online, **Carolyn B. Atangaza** writes.

Fueled by easy internet accessibility and the influx of smart phones, digital has become the easiest form of transaction for goods and services. And real estate has also jumped onto the bandwagon. Today, it is possible to find a house or plot of land from the comfort of your chair. Gone are the days when we had to deal with the obnoxiously annoying Ugandan real estate brokers.

Marketing

Enoch Tumusiime runs a tourism site in Mbarara that offers services such as homestays among others. Instead of going the traditional route of using local

brokers to market his services to potential clients, he registered with Airbnb, an online marketplace and hospitality service, enabling people to lease or rent short-term lodging including vacation rentals, apartment rentals, homestays, hostel beds, or hotel rooms.

Other websites such as Just Landed and TripAdvisor are widely used by international consumers looking for houses and apartments to rent in Uganda.

Close to home, there are countless websites offering real estate services online; from established companies such as Jumia, Obx, and Knight Frank to relatively new ones such as Posh Prop-

erty's location on a map and understand its proximity to surrounding physical and social infrastructure. PHOTO BY ALEX ESAGALA

erties and Estate Online.

After noticing how the digital world has created endless possibilities for real estate companies to engage easily with customers, Gavin Ziraba and his partner Eria Mutyabule created an online

platform which makes it convenient for people in the construction and housing industry to connect. According to Ziraba, Structures Hub (www.structureshub.com) unlike other websites in Uganda, brings together buyers and sellers of housing and construction materials and links service providers such as fumigators, painters, landscape designers and plumbers to different clients.

End to brokerage?

When asked whether the digital revolution's penetration into real estate might make real estate brokers obsolete, Bob Bwayo, an independent and veteran broker, laughed off the idea as simply absurd.

"Clients use their phones to search for properties and chose two or three. They then come to me for viewing services," Bwayo explains. He, therefore, believes that instead of being a competitor, the internet gives information especially about properties that he might not have known about.

Be cautious

Although some people get satisfactory services, some express disappointment. Jovanice Neeza recounted an incident where she saw a house from one of the sites, liked it and went ahead to book it.

"I was disappointed when on reaching there, I found a construction site instead of the nice and posh house I had seen in the pictures online. Since then, I do not rely on those pictures and warn my friends to be cautious when using the internet to access services," Neeza adds.

DISADVANTAGES

- It takes a lot of trust for one to buy/rent property online. Sometimes, the images or information is misleading and will not show what is on the ground. Bob Bwayo, a real estate broker, says clients who come to him after visiting a website are most often overwhelmed by what they find on the ground. "A seller will naturally want to capture the best angles for advertisement. However, there are also the non-appealing aspects a client will have to deal with. These are usually things that can be fixed but because they did not appear in the image, the person feels cheated," he says.
- It is very easy for a site to suddenly go offline, completely erasing their digital footprint. Or, the client's information can be taken and used for cybercrime. It is therefore advisable to exercise extreme caution: do not volunteer personal information online unless you have researched about the company or individual you are dealing with.