



OPINION

‘Honey, stop the car!’ 12 listing description clichés we’re over

Hiding flaws behind flowery copy does nothing but waste the buyer's and their agent's time

BY JAY THOMPSON

July 17, 2019

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Jay Thompson is a former brokerage owner who spent the past six years working for Zillow Group. He retired in August 2018 but can't seem to leave the real estate industry behind. His [weekly Inman column](#) publishes every Wednesday.

Back in 2004, I was showing homes to my second buyer client ever. We pulled up to one, and the client looked over at the sign, and pointed to the sign rider shaking his head.

“Seriously?” asked my client. “Who talks like that? Can that possibly be effective?”

Knowing he was also a fellow grammar nerd, I had to chime in: “Of course, it needs a comma, too. Honey, stop the car! Which of course is imploring your sweetheart, your honey, to stop the car. Without that comma, you’d need a hell of a lot of bees and a *ton* of honey to stop a car.”

He shuffled through the printouts of the listings we were seeing. (Don’t judge. The iPad wouldn’t even be invented for six more years. “Paperless” was something people only dreamed of then.)

“Wow, they even used that, commaless, in the property description too!” the client remarked. “Why?”



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All I could mumble was, “I have no idea.” Even as a very new and green agent, I’d already seen many things in [listing descriptions](#) that made me scratch my head.

That was 15 years ago.

Fifteen years later, those kind of phrases are still being used.

11 other listing cliches

In addition to the silly and useless “Honey, stop the car!” we have these old, tired and confusing words and terms that agents really need to retire.

1. ‘This one won’t last!’

The problem with “This one won’t last!” is agents tend to never revisit their listing descriptions. When your market has an average days-on-market of 30 days, seeing “This one won’t last!” on a listing entering its eighth month on the market will either make a buyer laugh out loud or think, “Hmmm, it did last, so there must be something wrong with it.”

Neither of those are good things.

It’s quite similar to those snow-covered listing photos you see — in August.

2 ‘Needs TLC’ or its partner in crime, ‘the handyman special’

In other words, the home is in disrepair, outdated or has some other issue that needs to be fixed. By leaving those issues to the buyer’s imagination, you might very well be causing buyers to skip right over your listing and move on to the next one.

Handyman special? How special? How handy does one need to be?

Phrases like this can cause buyers to overthink — and to think the worst.

3. ‘Cozy’ or ‘quaint’

This is fluffy marketing-speak. What you’re trying to do is cover up the fact that the home is small. Guess what? Any potential buyer who walks through the front door will swiftly figure out that the home is small. You can’t hide that fact behind *cozy or quaint*.

Why not tell it like it is, and market that listing to *people who want a smaller home*? Yes, that’s going to reduce your potential buyer pool. That’s really no big deal as the small size itself will limit the pool.

People appreciate honesty. They also don’t appreciate having their time wasted.

foundation, it's not better than new. It's new. Well, it's a new home on an old foundation. But you get the point.

“Better than new!” is one of those phrases that makes buyers ask, “What does that even mean?”

5. ‘Good bones’

Even more confusing to consumers. If a buyer isn't an investor, a flipper or a builder, they won't have a clue that's supposed to mean the foundation and framing are solid and in good shape. Of course what the buyer also won't know is that the home's “bones” are about the only thing that's good about the listing.

Stop the code-talk and real estate jargon. You want a buyer? Tell the buyer about the home — in words they understand.

6. ‘Too much to list!’

Your listing is just so full of goodness and wonders that there's too much to fit in the description?

What a load of hooey! Most MLSs these days allow hundreds and hundreds of characters in the description. And of course there's all that other info, such as beds, baths, square footage, year built, type of roof — the list goes on and on.

Simple fact is, there is enough information in listings these days that you probably don't even really need a property description. So don't tell me there is “too much to list.”

7. ‘Show and sell’

Thanks for the suggestion! And here I was, hoping to spend my time showing a property that my buyer won't buy.

8. 'Priced to sell'

I kid you not, I once had a buyer ask, “Should we only consider homes that are priced to sell?”

With a confused tilt of my head, followed by “huh?” The client slid some listings across the table and said, “Four of these say, ‘priced to sell,’ but the other three do not. Should we even bother looking at the ones that are not priced to sell?”

Jeepers. A nonsensical phrase like “priced to sell” has the potential to cull out listings that *don't* include that ridiculous phrase.

It also confuses buyers. That's really something you never want to do.

9. 'Updated'

Everyone wants shiny new things. No one is ever going to buy a home marketed with something like “built in 1965, never updated.” (Wait, that would be “needs TLC!” Or “good bones!”)

Define “updated.” Does a new fridge, the cheapest one the seller could find, constitute an “updated kitchen”? I once showed a home with an “updated roof.” When the buyers and I saw it, the first thing we did was look at the roof and its shingles that were beginning to curl.

“That's not an updated roof,” my client said. I was already calling the [listing agent](#). When they finally returned my call four days later, I was informed that the 8-by-8-foot roof over the back porch was “reshingled a few years ago.”

Meanwhile, my buyers and I were busy setting up inspections for the home they found while waiting to hear from the lister.

what matters.

P.S.: Return your calls.

10. Anything that is somewhere else in the property listing

As mentioned earlier, the listing displays of today show a tremendous amount of information. There is no need to repeat that information in the listing description. Use the descriptive space for info not included elsewhere.

11. ANYTHING — AND EVERYTHING — IN ALL CAPS

PLEASE, FOR THE LOVE OF ALL THE KITTENS ON THE INTERNET, STOP WRITING LISTING DESCRIPTIONS IN ALL CAPS!

It's hard to read, and it LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE SCREAMING AT PEOPLE.

Just stop. If you really need to emphasize something in a system that doesn't use bold or italics, try something like **this** or *+this+*. Fact is, if you write clearly, you really don't need to emphasize words in a listing description.

What should I put in listing descriptions?

Brace yourselves — a whole lot of buyers don't even bother to read listing descriptions. Why not? Because they are typically marketing pitches, and buyers are way smarter than many give them credit for. They don't want to be pitched when they are looking at listings online or in print. They want info on the house.

So give them info on the house. Tell a story about what it's like to live there. Talk to your sellers to see if they know any interesting history of the property that should be shared. The [listing description](#) space is great for including info about the home that isn't already displayed somewhere else.

Give the buyers what they need. Hiding flaws behind flowery copy does nothing but waste the buyer's and their agent's time, along with yours and your seller's time.

People have been using these cliched phrases for years, and buyers are on to it. Put that space to good use, and you might be surprised how well it can help sell your listing.

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SAVE MY SEAT

Jay Thompson is a real estate veteran and retiree in Seattle, as well as the mastermind behind [Now Pondering](#). Follow him on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#). He holds an active Arizona broker's license with eXp Realty.

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COMMENTS

8 Comments

Sort by **Oldest****Stephen Chip**

An excellent read Jay! I think you nailed them all. Best of luck on the semi-retirement. lol

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · 2d**Jay Thompson**

Thanks, Stephen! The semi-retired life is going well.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 2d**Realest808**

Oh, speaking of "too much to list," Jay didn't come close to nailing "them all." But what few he did nail in this op-ed, he hit right on the op-head!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1d**Tom Schwenk**

Some excellent points, typos are my downfall although with dilligence Im getting better
Thanks!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · 2d**Jay Thompson**

Not me, I never maek typos!

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spelling in line.

Like · Reply · 1 · 1d



Becky Laird Gluff

I disagree with many of there as some that do give clues to potential buyers so they don't waste time looking at homes (like Needs TLC when they want a more move in ready home. And "updated" for an older home as long as it truly is updated and not just the fridge). I do agree with the ALL CAPS though....hard to read and annoying.

Like · Reply · 1 · 2d



Jay Thompson

ALL CAPS IS SUPER ANNOYING!

I agree too that some of these *could* be helpful. They just (typically) need more detail and less vagueness. "Needs TLC" is indeed a good indicator against someone wanting move-in ready. **How much** TLC is required is almost always left out. Some detail there might widen the potential buyer pool. Might.

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Matt Thomson

One of the best things I've read on Inman in several months. PLEASE PLEASE write another one about pictures. I love the cell phone wielding agent in the bathroom mirror with the flash reflecting back, or toilet seats up.

Like · Reply · 1 · 2d



Jay Thompson

Ooh, I like that idea!

Like · Reply · 1d



Kay Argabright Hoeprich

Oh please include the photos taken with the water running in the kitchen and bathroom sinks. I think we should be able to assume the plumbing works unless otherwise noted in the remarks.

Like · Reply · 1d



Jeff Stewart

I spent 30+ years in marketing. Two rules separate the rookies from the pro's. 1. Avoid all cliché's. 2. Avoid using superlatives. Both of those are seen as talking at people instead of to them. I'm still very much a believer in good descriptions, but they should be written as a person to person communication and not a bad DJ adlib. Talk to your seller in the description and tell them the absolute truth. If you feel you have to mislead, the

if at all.

Like · Reply · 1 · 2d



Jay Thompson

Well said, Jeff!

Like · Reply · 1d



Joshua Lother

Number 1 thing you can put on the listing is the darn pictures. I can't tell you how many I have skipped over initially (I also kept track of them for a while), then returned a long while later to find them still listed without photos.

Like · Reply · 1 · 1d



Jay Thompson

It's mind-boggling, isn't it?

Like · Reply · 1d



Dennis M. Erickson

Most productive ad I ever ran read: "Buy This Dump" It was a dump. The seller was elated. How about, "It's a house. Buy it." Or, "What did you think we were doing here, ice fishing? Buy the house!" Oh we could have fun with this. Or, "Three bedrooms (yawn) two FULL baths (ho hum) and a Patriot Missile Defense System in the partially finished basement." Now, you'd HAVE to pull the car over to see that, right? Truth in advertising is overrated anyway.

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Stephen Hampar

Excellent and fun article! A couple of more that sort of ties in with "This one won't last " are "Seller is Motivated" and "Seller will look at all offers". Often you see these listings sitting on the market for 180 days!

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