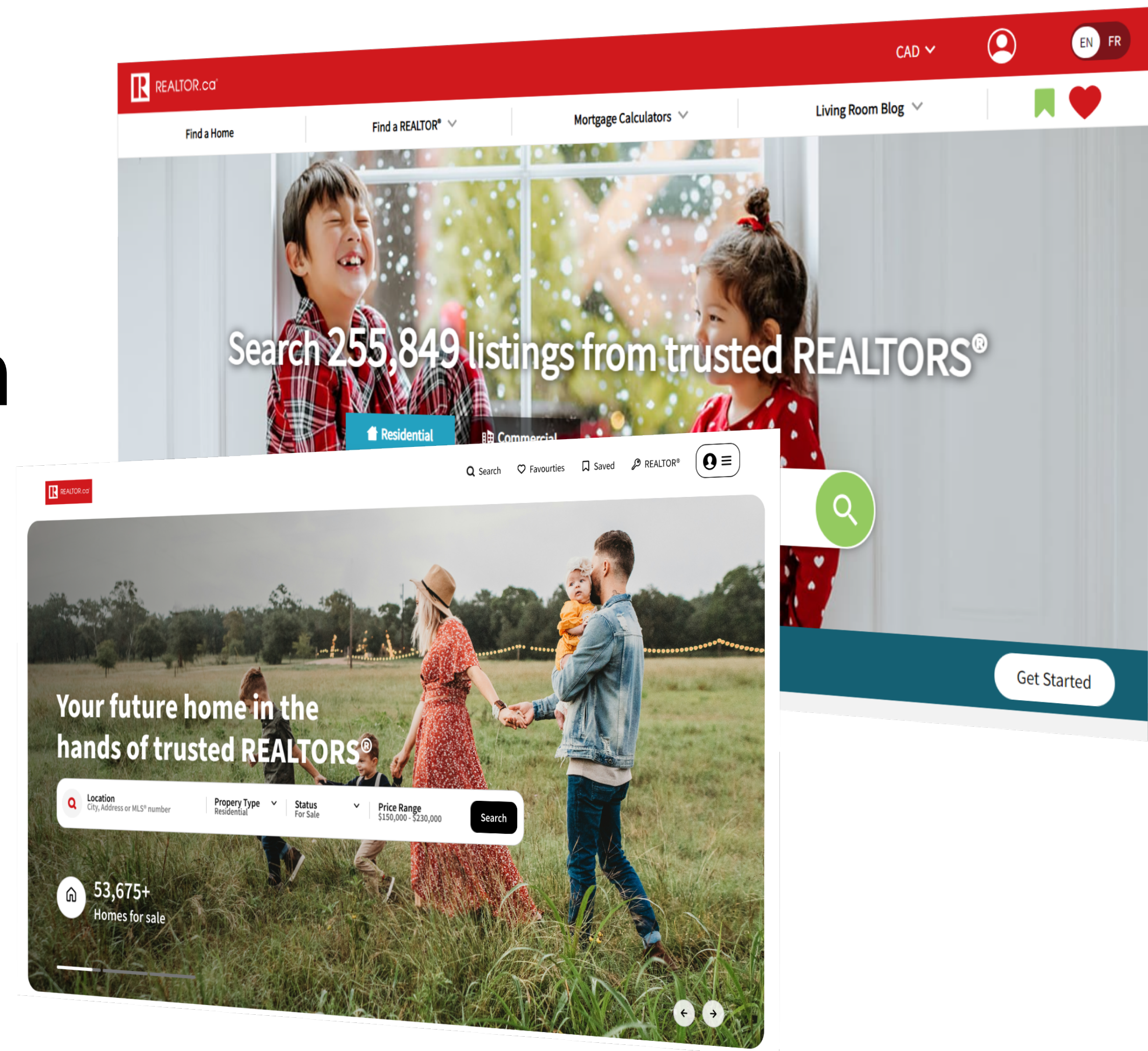


User Experience Research Initiative: R8

# Buyer Search Experience Insights - REALTOR.ca Redesign

Contact: sweber@crea.ca



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# ■ Executive Summary

Project: User Experience Research Initiative: R8

**Objective: Enhance the buyer search experience on REALTOR.ca to inform the R8 Redesign**

## My Role

UX Researcher  
Project Lead

## Duration

6 weeks

## Tools Used

Figma  
UserTesting  
Confluence



## Key Findings

- **Empowering Users Through Education:** All buyers, especially newcomers to Canada, struggle with real estate terms in some capacity. Educational resources can greatly help.
- **Experience Disparity:** New REALTOR.ca users face challenges due to unclear guidance and visuals compared to experienced ones.
- **User-Friendly Filters:** Buyers need easy-to-use filters to navigate listings and stay engaged.
- **Research Transition:** Buyers search behavior move from casual exploration to detailed research but on REALTOR.ca, they find it hard to access sold history on PDP.

## Recommendations

- Implement onboarding for user education.
- Improve filter visibility and usability.
- Enhance REALTOR information and support.
- Provide flexible search options and tips.



## Next steps

Implement changes to the R8 design for further validation testing.



# ■ Introduction

Background information

**This project builds upon our 2023 rental journey research within REALTOR.ca**

## Previous Research

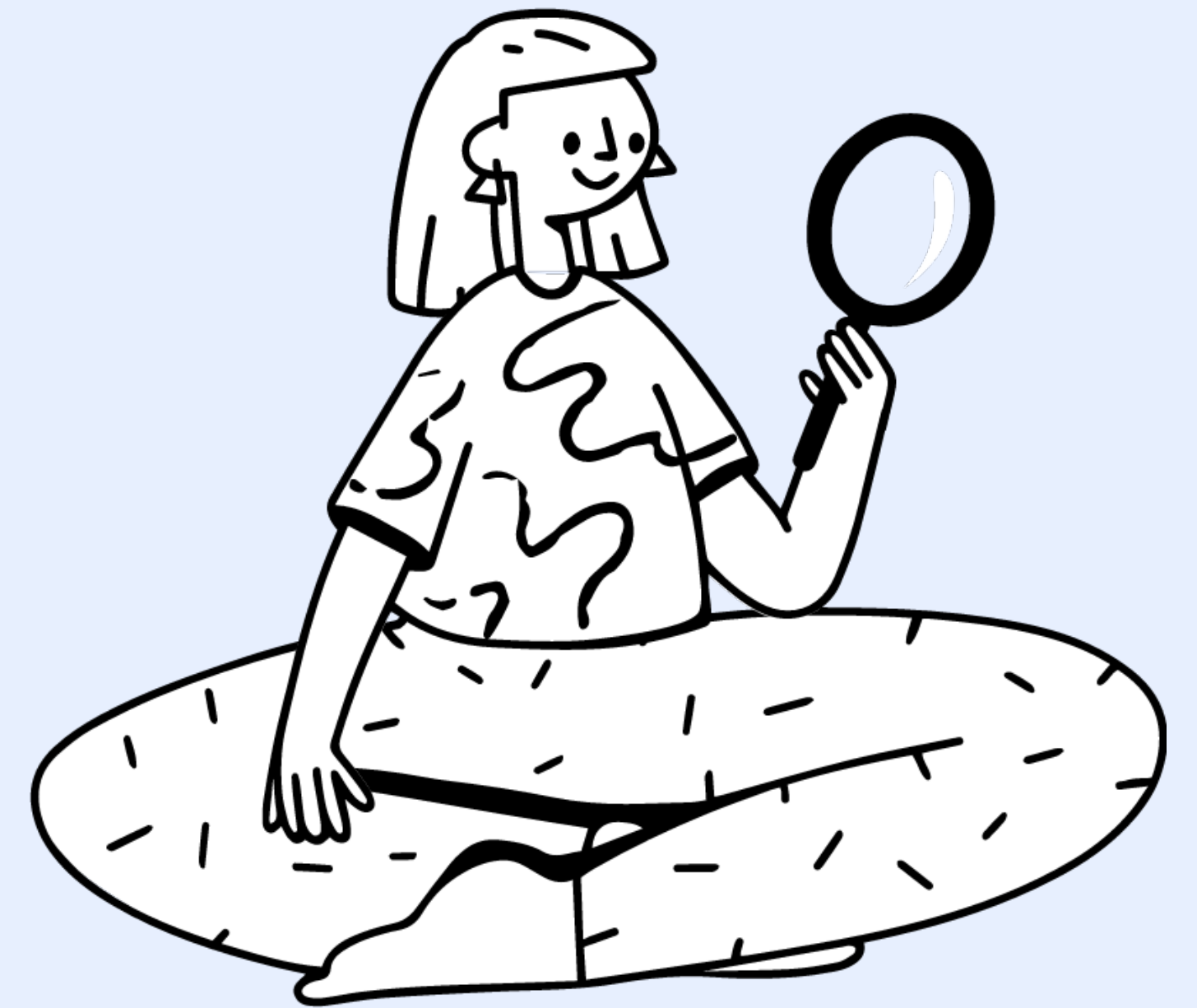
We identified a **significant gap in supporting renters on REALTOR.ca**, marked by insufficient guidance, including **inadequate information, support, and features tailored to rental searches**, leading to the perception **that the platform does not sufficiently support rental searches**.

## Context

As we prepare for the upcoming R8 redesign, it's crucial to **align our buyer findings** with our understanding of renters to create a more comprehensive user experience.

Problem space

**There is a need for a more in-depth understanding of how different buyer personas search for properties within REALTOR.ca.**



## ■ Introduction

Research goal

**To understand and enhance the property buying search experience on REALTOR.ca.**

In order to achieve this, we must:

### Explore

The complexities of the current search journey.

### Understand

The challenges, objectives, and motivations of buyers.

### Evaluate

The effectiveness of the various touchpoints.



## ■ Research method

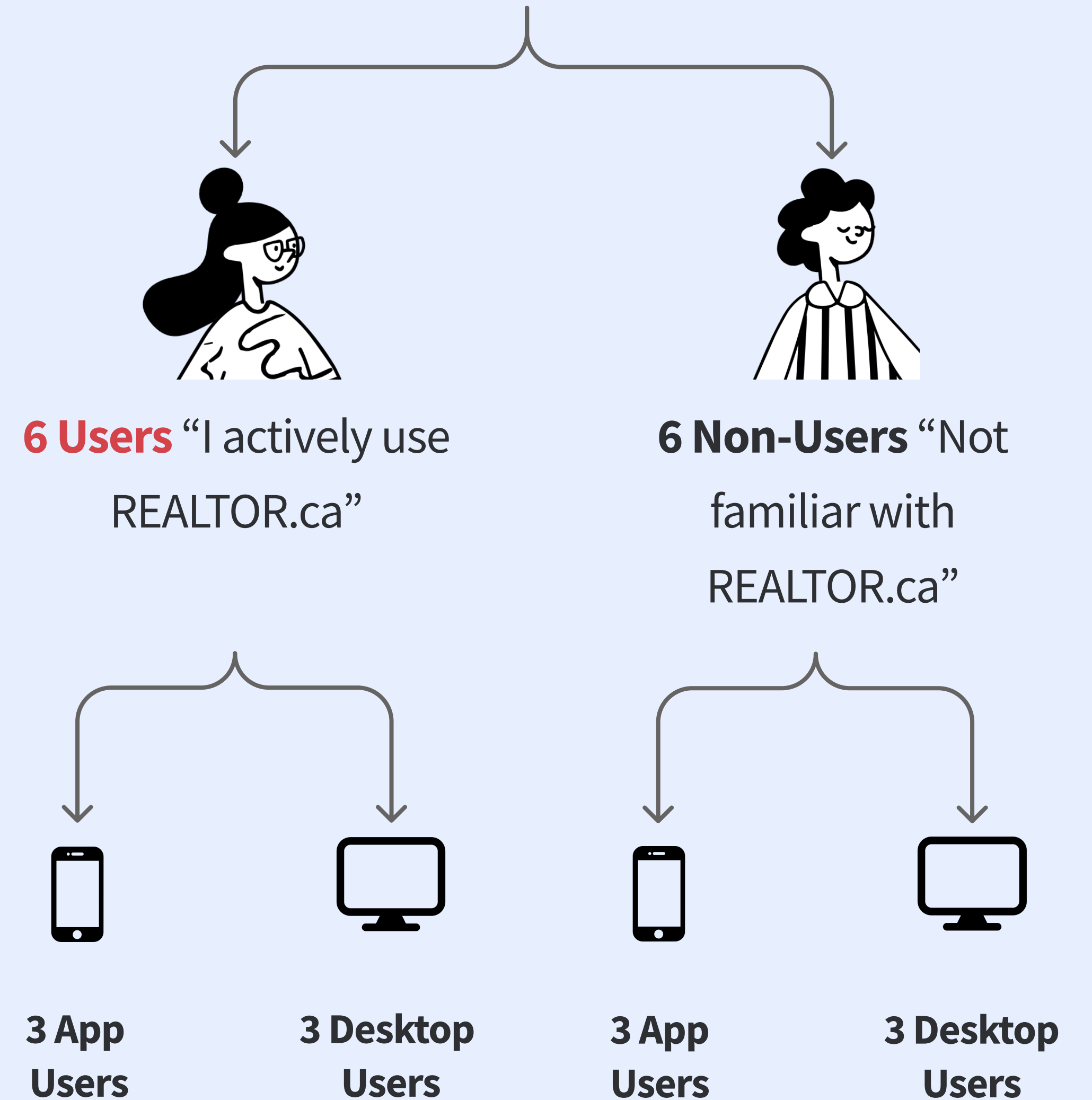
### Research plan

- **1:1 Moderated Interviews**
- **Tool: UserTesting.com**
- **Sampling:**

A **screenner** was used to select 12 participants divided into two groups: the 'User' Group, which included individuals familiar with REALTOR.ca, and the 'Non-User' Group, consisting of those unfamiliar with REALTOR.ca.

Within each group, participants were **further divided into 'App' and 'Desktop' subgroups** based on their preferred method of finding real estate.

### Canadians actively looking to purchase a home in the next 12 months



## ■ Research method

Buyer personas

**We categorized each participant into various **buyer 'types'** based on established buyer personas from previous research. These personas were identified during the study through **self-identification**.**

6

### **First Time Home Buyers**

Purchasing a home for the first time and has not owned a property in the past.

4

### **Repeat Home Buyers**

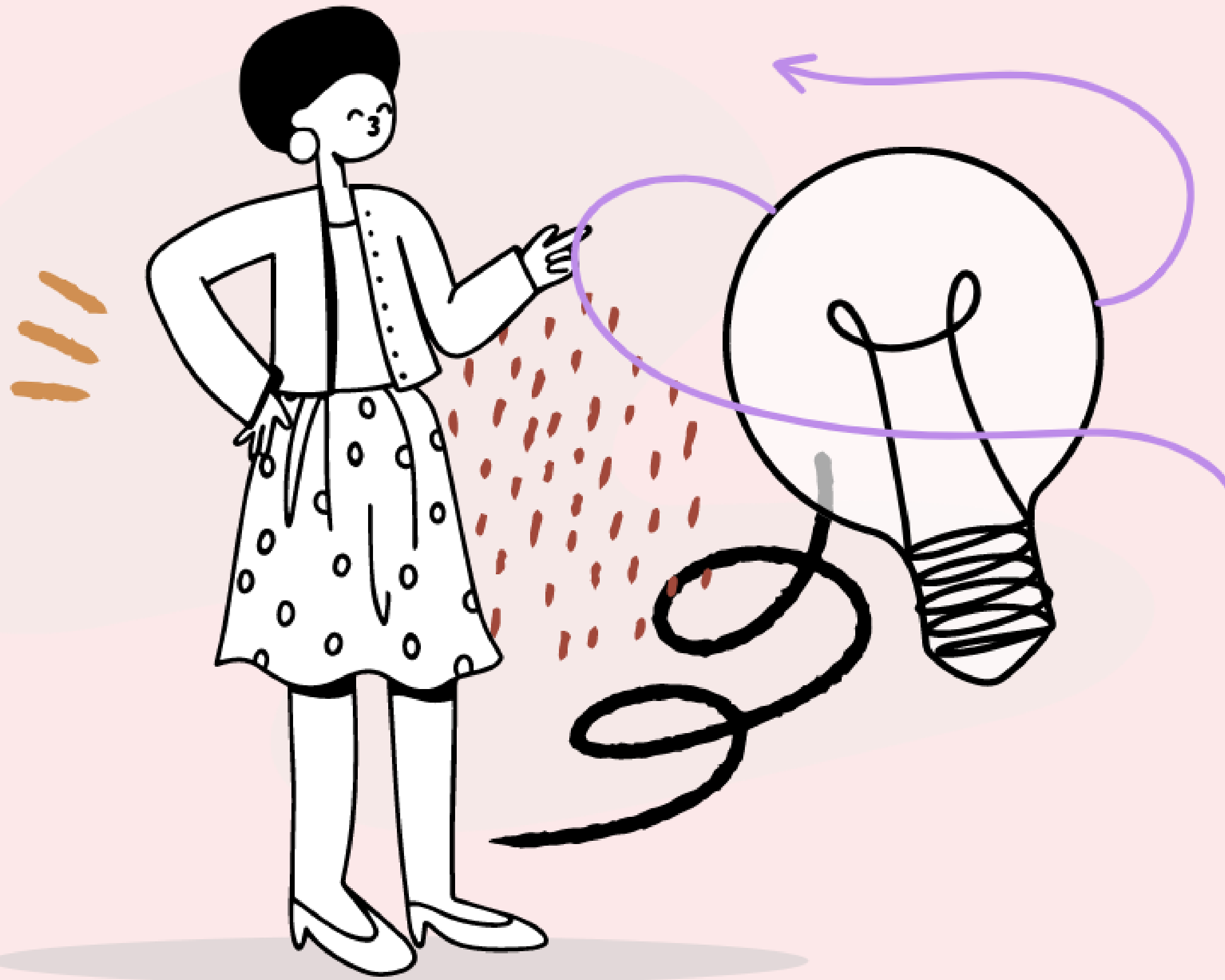
Previously purchased and owned a home and is now in the process of purchasing another property.

2

### **Investors**

Purchases residential properties with the primary goal of generating income or profit.

## ■ Results



Research Results

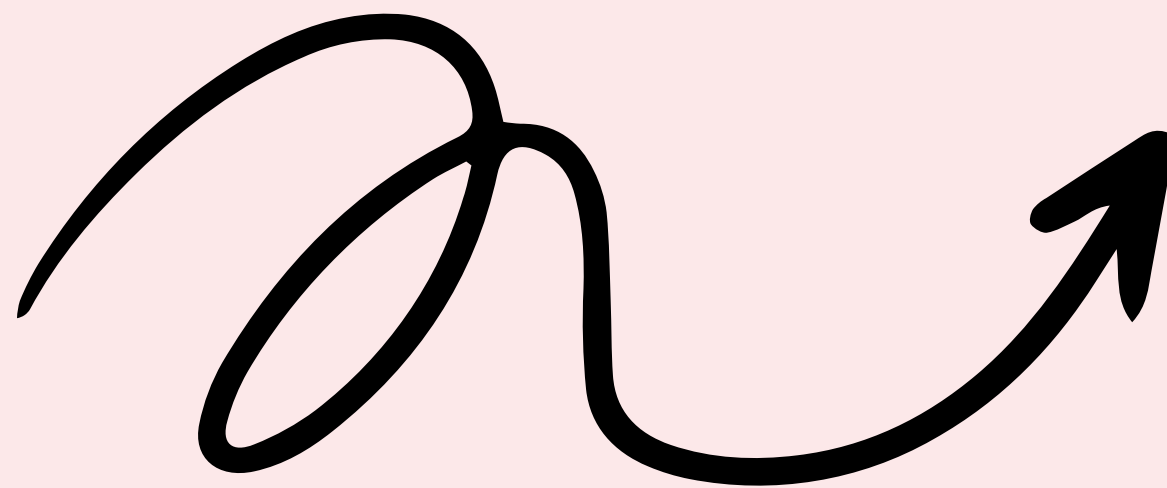
**Integrating buyer and rental insights for R8 recommendations.**



### Journey phases

## Mapping the search journey

We identified two phases in a buyer's journey based on our findings. Note that a buyer may start at any stage or exhibit characteristics of both phases, and these phases help us understand their current behavior and needs on REALTOR.ca at different points in their journey.



Exploratory - 7 participants

**Prospective homebuyers are actively researching and exploring houses in the market.**

Focused Investigation - 5 participants

**Reflects an advanced stage in home buying, with clear preferences and active property pursuit.**

Key Themes

We have taken some key insights and identified common themes that were present among the different buyer types using REALTOR.ca.

- 1. Confidence through Learning
- 2. Optimize search Experience
- 3. Information Delivery (Stages)

### Understanding Diverse Buyer Journeys on REALTOR.ca

Goal 1-2: Understand the current user journey from buyers through identifying key pain points, motivations, goals and behaviors.

#### First Time Home Buyer

<p><b>Motivations</b> 🧡</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Motivated to <b>learn about the real estate landscape</b>.</li><li>2. Requires <b>advice from friends and family</b> as they navigate the real estate space.</li><li>3. Motivated to keep (filter) <b>options open</b> during the exploratory phase.</li><li>4. Prefer minimal filters to avoid feeling overwhelmed.</li><li>5. <b>Interest in learning 'new' features</b> on REALTOR.ca (like mortgage calculator &amp; neighborhood information) to familiarize themselves with the market.</li></ul>	<p><b>Pain Points:</b> 😞</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Onboarding: Newcomers and first-time users struggle <b>with terms</b> like MLS and REALTOR.</li><li>2. Confusing and frustrating homepage search bar, especially for <b>neighborhood or specific building type</b> searches.</li><li>3. Users find filter terms confusing when accessing Advanced Filters.</li><li>4. No Search Results: Initial filter <b>misunderstandings lead to no results</b>, requiring users to pause, think, and troubleshoot, causing frustration.</li><li>5. Lack of guidance: <b>absence of knowledge on first time home buying</b> in Canada leads to reliance on other sources for information.</li></ul>	<p><b>Behaviors:</b> 🖱️</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Onboarding: Users seek external resources and community support.</li><li>2. Search &amp; Filters: Users refine searches, rely on photos, and frequently use quick filters like Price, Location, and #Bed/Bath.</li><li>3. <b>During Exploratory phases:</b> Users use <b>quick filters</b>, scan photos, read property details, focusing on the description before liking.</li><li>4. <b>During serious searches:</b> users revisit the site (PDP), reapply filters, add refined search criteria like Property Type &amp; <b>engage with tools</b> like Mortgage Calculator.</li><li>5. Next steps: Contacting REALTORs for additional information and <b>researching them on their own site</b> is common &amp; Visit <b>open houses</b> to view the listing.</li></ul>	<p><b>Goals:</b> 🚀</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Users aim to <b>confidently navigate the real estate marketplace</b>, utilizing all necessary tools and information.</li><li>2. Users <b>seek quick, transparent, and easy-to-understand information</b> for efficient scanning and curation of preliminary lists.</li><li>3. As users gain more knowledge, <b>they aspire to narrow down their property list</b>, progressing towards informed decision-making and boosting their confidence in the selection process.</li><li>4. Users desire information on listings that <b>accurately matches the real-life characteristics</b>, ensuring a seamless and hiccup-free experience.</li><li>5. Users aim to make well-informed decisions and <b>collaborate with a REALTOR they can trust</b> throughout the home-buying journey.</li></ul>
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#### Repeat Home Buyer

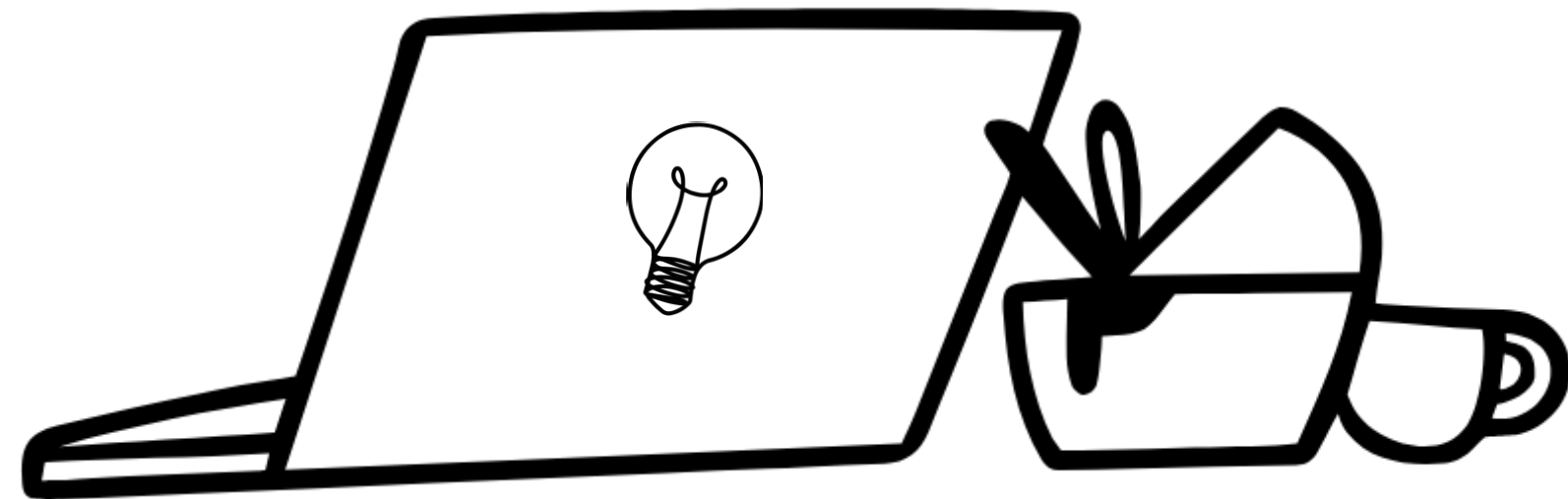
<p><b>Motivations</b> 🧡</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To <b>understand the current market value</b> of their existing home.</li><li>2. To <b>determine the optimal time</b> for buying or selling a property.</li><li>3. Desire for a strategic and purposeful <b>involvement of their existing REALTOR</b> to enhance the effectiveness of the home-buying process.</li></ul>	<p><b>Pain Points:</b> 😞</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b>Users struggle with Advanced filters</b> like "Building Type" or advanced amenities, leading to inefficiencies in their search process.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Users struggle to optimize Keywords when looking for specific property information.</li><li>b. Advanced options like "Ownership Type" are confusing.</li><li>c. Absence of specific advanced filters are missing to help users refine their search.</li></ul></li><li>2. Missing Information: Repeat buyers feel the <b>absence of critical data</b> such as detailed property information and <b>historical data to help with their decision making</b>.</li></ul>	<p><b>Behaviors:</b> 🖱️</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Filters: Resorting to keywords when they can't find advanced filters, leading to frustration and giving up due to a perceived lack of listings.</li><li>2. Seek other applications like Zillow/ House Sigma to understand <b>the current market value of their existing home/ understand the timing</b> of market transactions.</li><li>3. <b>During Exploratory phases:</b> Applying <b>Advanced Filters</b>, scan photos quickly, and read details before liking.</li><li>4. <b>During Focused Investigation:</b> users revisit the site (PDP), visit the properties</li><li>5. Next steps: Engage with <b>existing REALTOR/ their own tools</b> when they have their refined list.</li></ul>	<p><b>Goals:</b> 🚀</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Identify the current market value of existing homes and <b>stay informed about favorable market conditions</b> for buying or selling properties.</li><li>2. Easily browse online listings with refined search criteria to identify properties <b>aligning with specific needs and preferences</b>.</li><li>3. <b>Streamline the search process</b> to minimize time wastage, ensuring that the search is tailored to individual requirements, especially when involving a REALTOR.</li></ul>
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#### Investor

<p><b>Motivations</b> 🧡</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b>Strategically invest</b> in real estate to maximize returns and build wealth.</li><li>2. Conduct <b>comprehensive personal research</b> (leveraging years of experience in buying/selling) and/ or <b>relying on their business partner</b>.</li><li>3. Browse online listings with <b>refined search criteria</b> to find a property that suits their needs.</li><li>4. Recognizing the <b>need for a REALTOR's expertise in specific transactions</b>.</li></ul>	<p><b>Pain Points:</b> 😞</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b>Users struggle with Advanced filters</b> like "Building Type" or advanced amenities, leading to inefficiencies in their search process.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Users struggle to optimize Keywords when looking for specific property information.</li><li>b. Advanced options like "Ownership Type" are confusing.</li><li>c. Absence of specific advanced filters are missing to help users refine their search.</li></ul></li><li>2. Missing Information: Repeat buyers feel the <b>absence of critical data</b> such as <b>investment insights, market trends, and property analysis tools</b>.</li></ul>	<p><b>Behaviors:</b> 🖱️</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Filters: Resorting to keywords when they can't find advanced filters, leading to frustration and giving up due to a perceived lack of listings.</li><li>2. Seek other applications like Zillow/ House Sigma to <b>understand potential renter markets, trends, property risks etc.</b></li><li>3. <b>During Exploratory phases:</b> Applying <b>Advanced Filters</b>, scan photos quickly, and read details before liking.</li><li>4. <b>During Focused Investigation:</b> users revisit the site (PDP), visit the properties, communicating with their business partners.</li><li>5. Next steps: Engage with <b>existing REALTOR/ their own tools</b> when they have their refined list.</li></ul>	<p><b>Goals:</b> 🚀</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Make optimized investment decisions <b>by understanding market dynamics, property values, and financial considerations</b>.</li><li>2. Easily browse online listings with refined search criteria to identify properties <b>aligning with specific needs and preferences</b>.</li><li>3. Establish efficient <b>collaboration with a REALTOR/ partner for effective communication</b> in achieving investment objectives.</li><li>4. Identify and invest in properties that will yield <b>profitable returns</b>.</li></ul>
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1 - Confidence through Learning

**A need for more accessible resources and a quest for knowledge.**



## First Time Home Buyers

Often experience a **learning curve** in understanding the **real estate landscape**, which can be challenging **without sufficient guidance or resources.**

## Repeat Home Buyers

Are challenged with **evaluating their home's market value** and **timing for transactions**, requiring **accurate market data.**

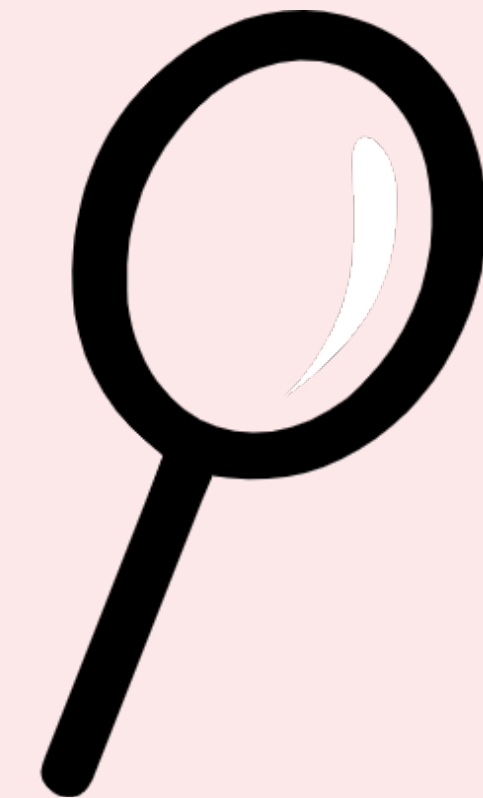
## Investors

Seek to understand **market dynamics, property performance metrics**, and conduct thorough **risk assessments**, emphasizing the need for **comprehensive information.**



## 2 - Search Optimization

**The importance of optimizing the search experience for buyer journey phases.**



### Exploratory Phase

- All buyers **utilize 3-4 filters** to explore various options.
- **FTBH**: focus on **basic criteria** such as bed and bath.
- **Investors and repeat buyers**: use more **‘specific’ criteria** like property amenities.
- **All buyers** start out with a **general list of properties**.

### Focused Investigation Phase

- **All buyers** typically **refine their list** through discussions, open houses, etc.
- **Filters** are used more frequently to **narrow their search**.

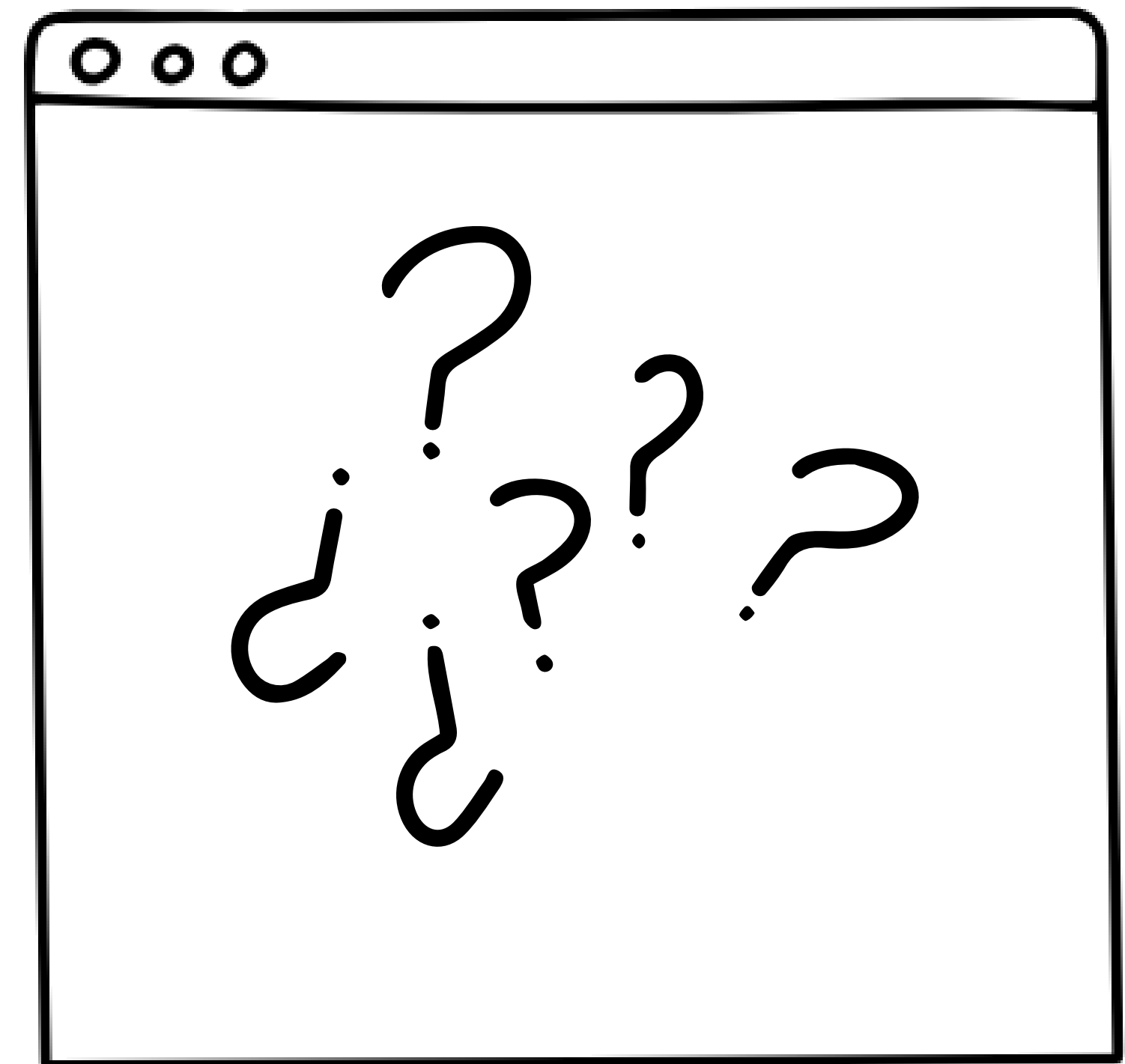
## 3 - Information Delivery

### Buyers

Buyers demonstrate a similar pattern of **quickly searching, scanning, processing, and favoriting** as renters.

### Renters

Renters however, are even more quick to judge since they have a smaller time frame of usually the next month to decide. This means **first impressions are important for all buyer and renters** as they make their first list.



### User Perception in Education

When participants were asked about their trust in REALTOR.ca and their ability to answer questions about home buying, including financial and real estate education,

**91%**

of all participants have a **high level of trust** towards the brand among users and non users of REALTOR.ca.

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**83%**

83% of participants **doubt** REALTOR.ca's ability to **provide guidance** beyond their property search, such as in **finance** and **real estate education**.



### First Time Home Buyers

showed a **greater willingness to explore** and utilize new tools and features to enhance their understanding of the market.

### Newcomers to Canada

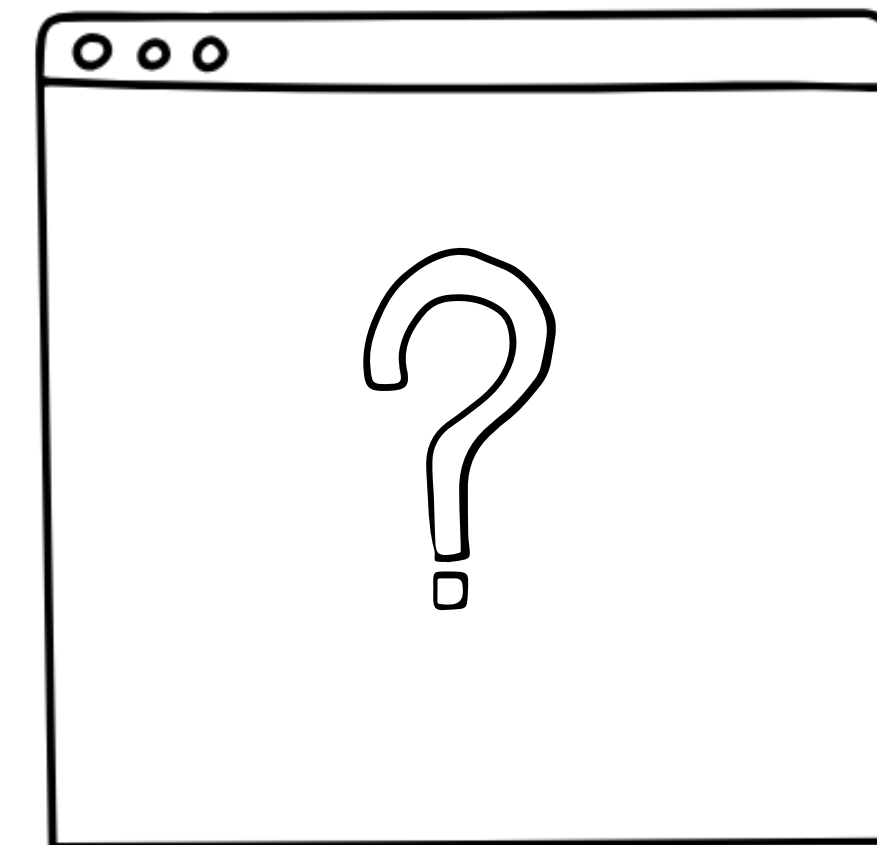
expressed that **learning real estate terminologies** like 'REALTOR' and 'MLS' **added complexity** to their search experience and market understanding, encountering more **barriers and spending extra time in their search**.

### Repeat Buyers & Investors

typically have **more knowledge** or rely on other **reliable resources** they have used in the past.

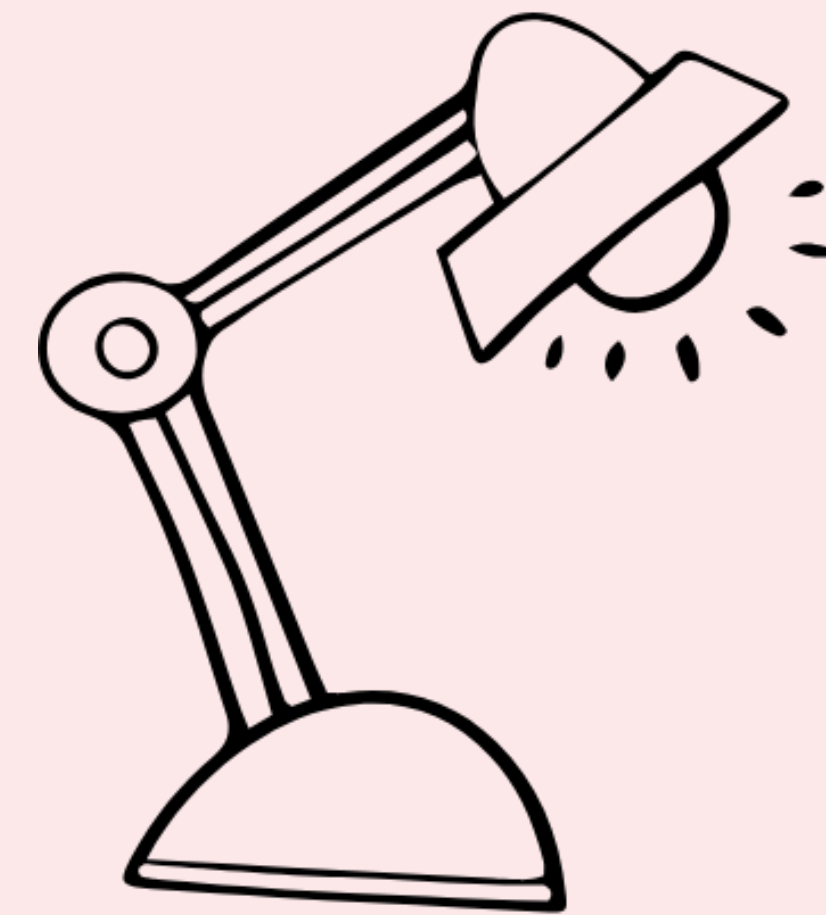
Within REALTOR.ca...

**66% of first-time buyers are uncertain where to find real estate resources like financial help, real estate education, etc. to help them understand the market.**



### User Perception in Education

**Because we know all personas exhibit a desire for knowledge, we can **empower users through education** - especially newcomers who generally experience higher difficulty understanding the market & the terminologies.**



## Previous Finding (Rentals)

- New renters **view REALTOR.ca** as only for **buying and selling**.
- There is a **need for user education** and higher **visibility in rental-specific information**.


## Recommendation

1. Introduce **user-friendly terminologies, descriptions and tooltips** to guide new users.
2. Explore **delivering user-profile content and education**, such as trending listings that can be customized based on user profiles.
3. Alternatively, **ensure the R8 homepage features neutral imagery and language** to cater to both buyers and renters.
4. **Re-thinking the living room blog**, most participants in this study did not acknowledge or had little interest in this area.

### Trending Listings from Your Local Area

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Start your Search



Affordable

School district

+ 2 more

\$730,000

45 mins ago


1450 Boul. René-Lévesque O. #3404

Montréal (Ville-Marie), Quebec H9G0E1

2 Bedrooms

1.5 Baths

1,250 sqft



Affordable

School district

\$1,250,000

16

1450 Boul. René-Lévesque O. #3404

Montréal (Ville-Marie), Quebec H9G0E1

2 Bedrooms

1.5 Baths

1,250 sqft


### Find a REALTOR®


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Location

Name

Office





### Mortgage Calculator

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur.

Payment

Land Transfer Tax

Affordability

## User Guidance

When asked how confident participants feel upon landing on the homepage or landing page of the app,

**58%**

**of all buyers lacked confidence in finding what they need (mostly in terms of guidance).**

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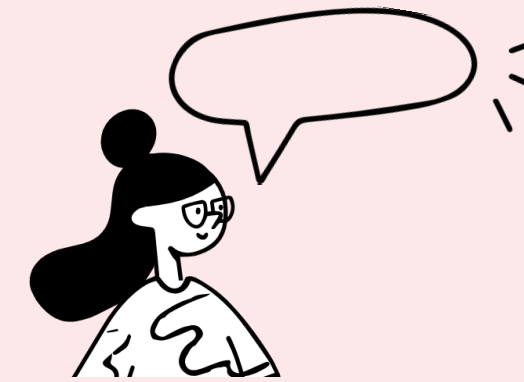


# New Desktop Users

One participant found the **homepage visually busy** and **unprofessional**.

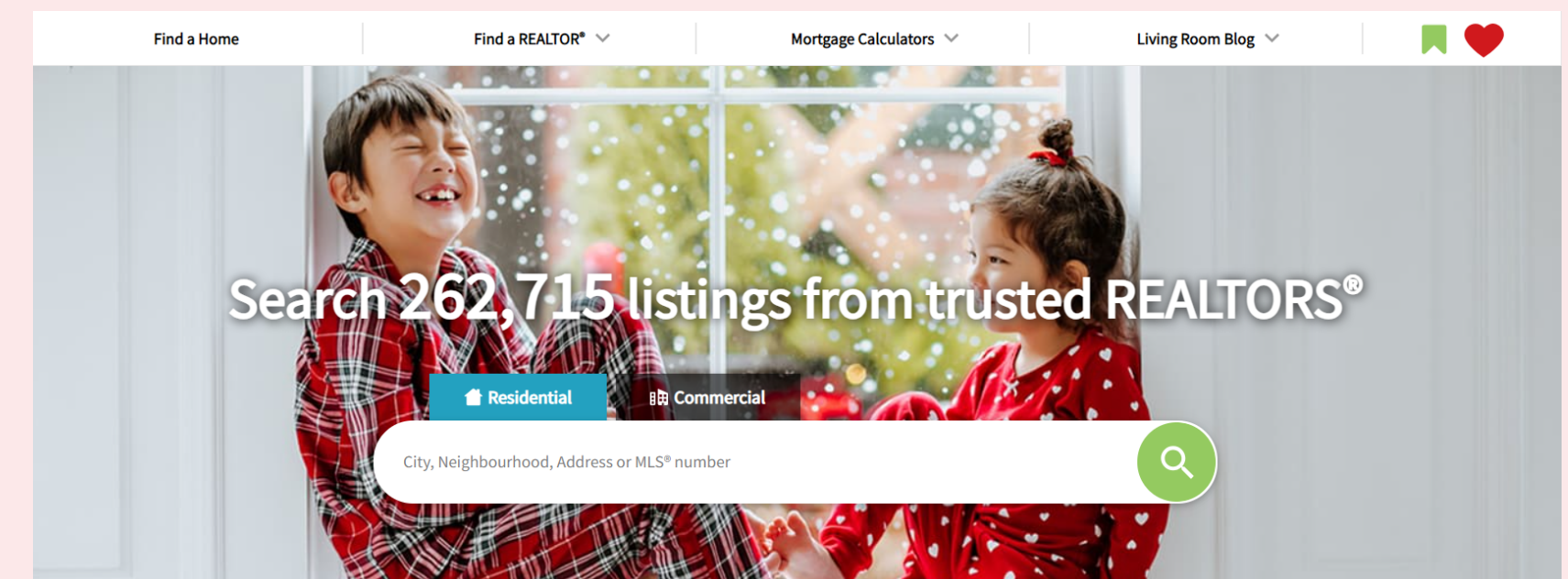
Three participants tried to **search by neighborhood or property type** on the homepage search bar, with **no success** (no results).

Two participants noted the **absence of filters** and suspected they will need to do **more search work** after - which was expressed as not ideal.



*“The (**homepage**) looks very busy and unprofessional.”*

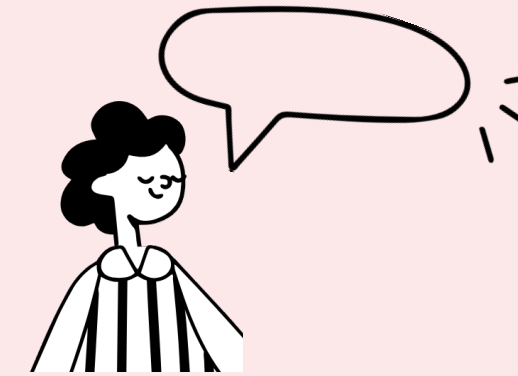
*“I’m not sure what to do from here.”  
(**Search bar error**)*



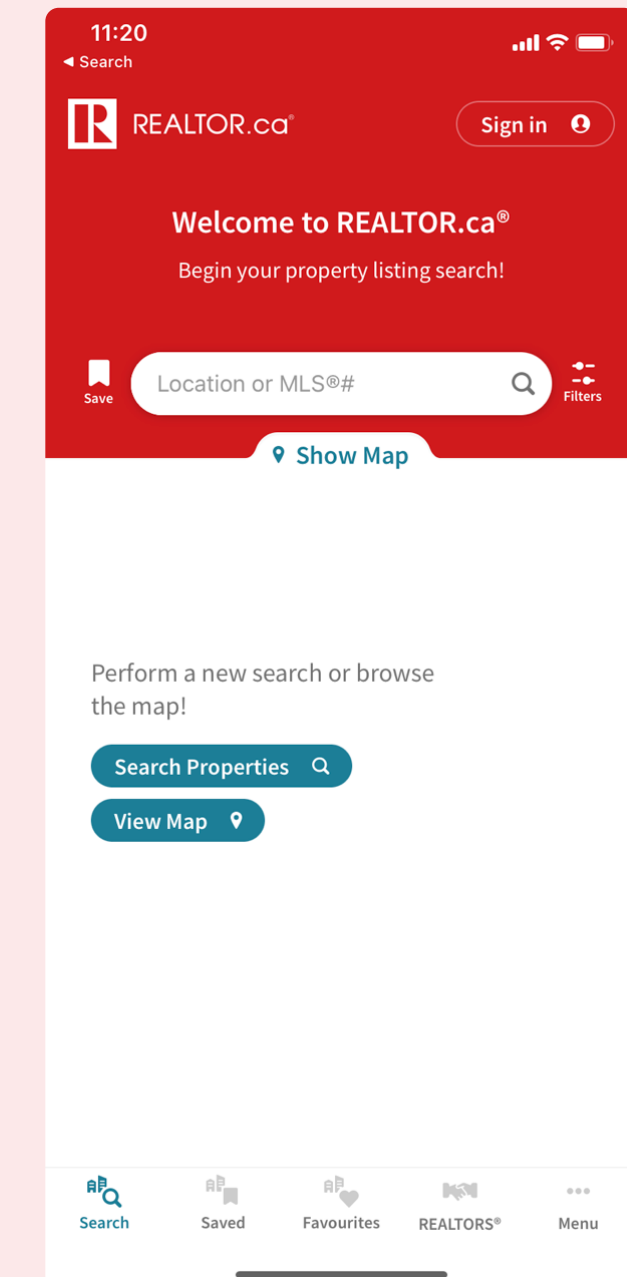
### New App Users

There were **issues with the visibility and accessibility of the Filter** - noting how they almost missed it.

And when their **location was not set** on the main landing page, participants felt **unengaged** to even start a search.



*“I find (**the landing page: no location setting**) not really engaging.”*



Inexperienced REALTOR.ca users and newcomers to the platform or real estate market encounter a **significant disparity in their experience** compared to those that are familiar with REALTOR.ca. The lack of **clear guidance** and **visual cues** poses challenges for new users.



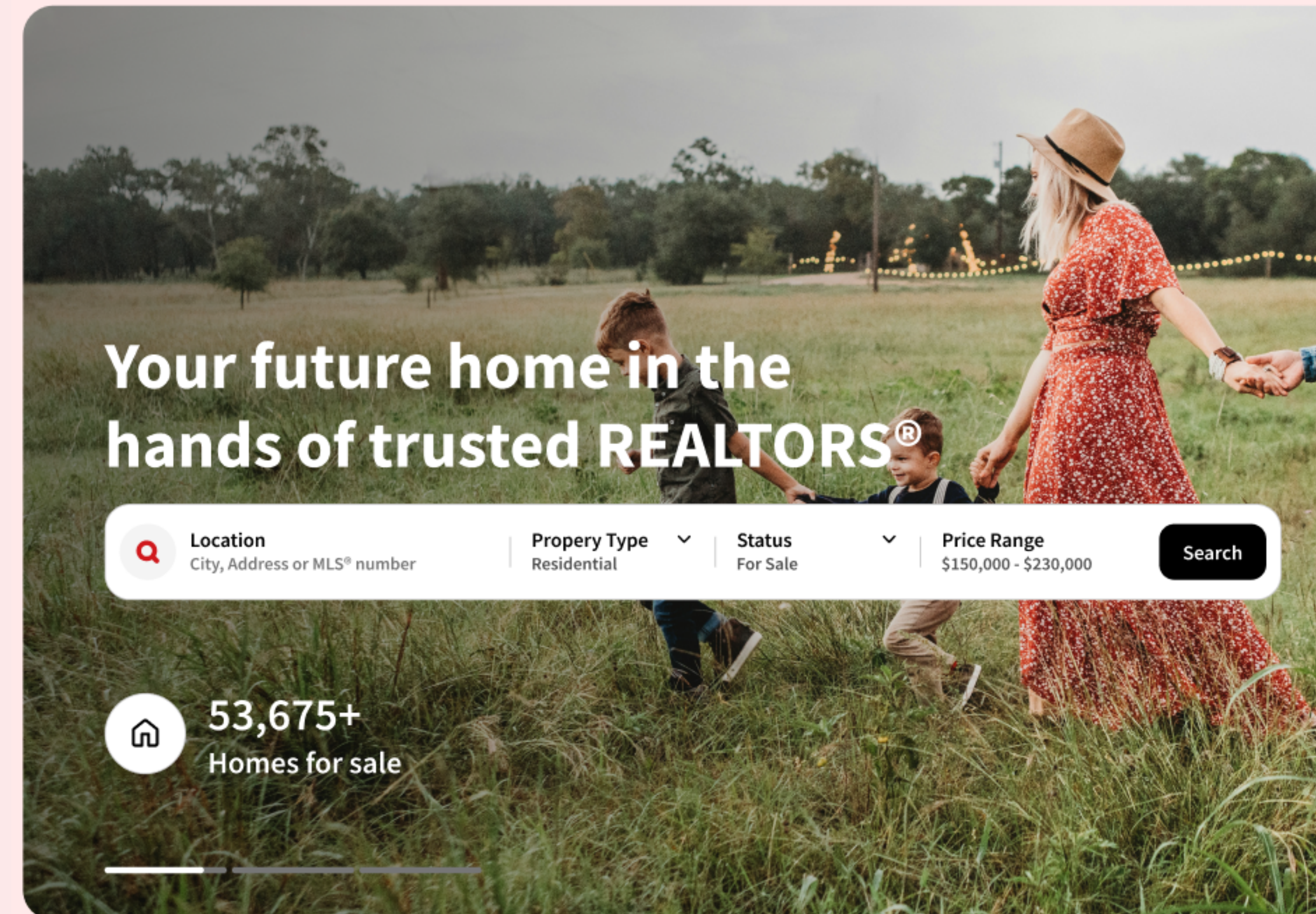


## Previous Finding (Rentals)

Renters found it **challenging to locate available rentals** when they started their search.

## Recommendation

1. Implement **onboarding screens** for user education with best practices for property search.
2. Understanding property details and **introducing key features** that can assist the search.
3. Optimize the **neighborhood search feature** or remove placeholder text.
4. **Accessible and user-friendly filter**, include a 'For Sale/Rent/Sold + Property Type' filter on the Homepage (consider #Bed/#Bath after research).





## Challenges in Information Discovery

When it came to more refined searches,

**66%**

**of participants struggled in their search -  
regardless of familiarity with the platform or  
the type of buyer.**

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## Keyword Issues

Three users struggled with keyword searches, questioning their familiarity and trust with real estate terminology.

One of them was **unsure** if REALTORS put in **accurate keywords** just to get more ads & attention, or if they were actually accurate to the listing.

The other two users said they would **abandon their search**, after trying many times to find results of ‘basement walkout’, and ultimately **assumed** there were no listings available when they were **unsuccessful**.

## Discovery of Filters

**Two participants** found bungalow properties using **photos or text in the listing description**, not realizing there **was a filter available**.

## Confusing Labels

Other challenges were **confusing filter labels** like ‘Listed since’ and ‘Ownership’.

The screenshot shows a real estate search interface with a dark red header. The header includes the text 'REAL' on the left, 'Residential' and 'Commercial' tabs in the center, and 'CAD', 'Sign In', and 'EN' on the right. Below the header is a large search bar with the placeholder text 'City, Neighbourhood, Address or MLS® number'. Below the search bar are several filter sections: 'Transaction Type' with radio buttons for 'For sale', 'For rent', and 'Sold'; 'Property Type' with a dropdown menu; 'Min Price' and 'Max Price' with dropdown menus; 'Beds' and 'Baths' with dropdown menus; 'Land Size' with a dropdown menu; 'Listed Since' with a date input field and a calendar icon; 'Building Type' with a dropdown menu; 'Stores' with a dropdown menu; 'Ownership/Title' with a dropdown menu; 'Year Built' with two dropdown menus and a range selector; 'Open Houses Only' and 'Live Streams Only' with checkboxes; and 'Keywords' with a text input field. At the bottom of the filters are 'Reset' and 'Search' buttons.

# No results

Interestingly, most participants assumed that no results were due to their filtering error.

When asked how they would feel about **receiving tips or flexible results** (for example another listing that met around maybe 70% of their criteria), almost all participants expressed a **preference** for either option or both instead of no results.



***“(If I had no results) I would be disappointed... and maybe even leave.”***

11 out of 12 participants prefer receiving tips or flexible search results over encountering no results.

### No Results

Please refine your search criteria.  
Suggestions:

- Modify your search criteria
- Update your search location
- Broaden your map area
- Modify your keywords

Buyers require **effective, user-friendly filters** and comprehensive navigation guidance to avoid product abandonment.



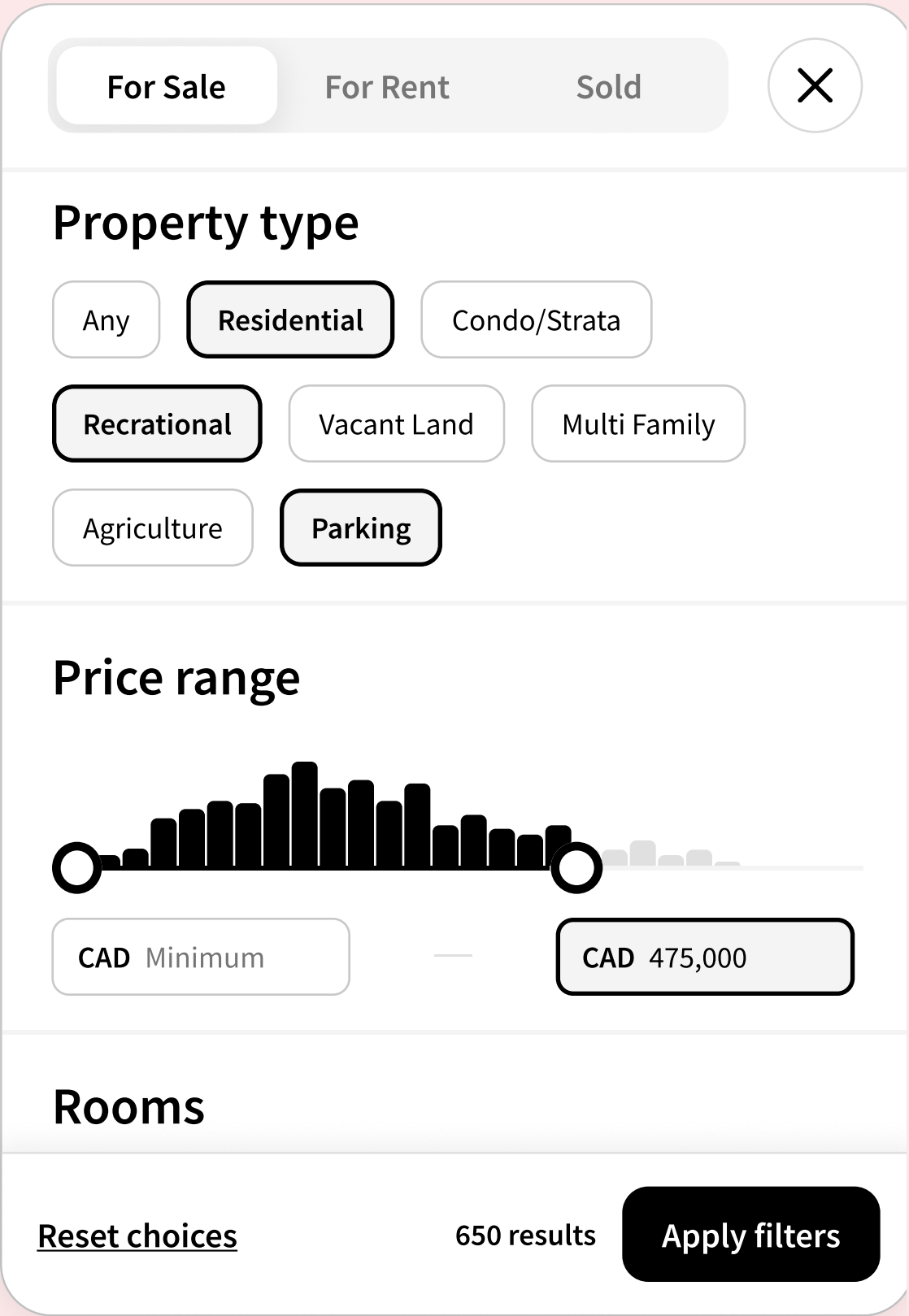
## Previous Finding (Rentals)

Renters found the filtering experience **frustrating** due to **usability issues and misalignment** with rental needs.

## Recommendation

‘Advanced Filters’:

- 1. Explore options to **provide clear guidance** on ‘confusing’ filters by adding tips or revised labels.
- 2. Include advanced **amenities as checkboxes** in lieu of keywords.
- 3. **'No results' support** using tips and/ or flexible search criteria.



### Tailored Information Delivery

When participants were asked about how the information is displayed on the Product Details Page (PDP) during both exploratory and focused investigative phases,

**83%** were satisfied with PDP layout

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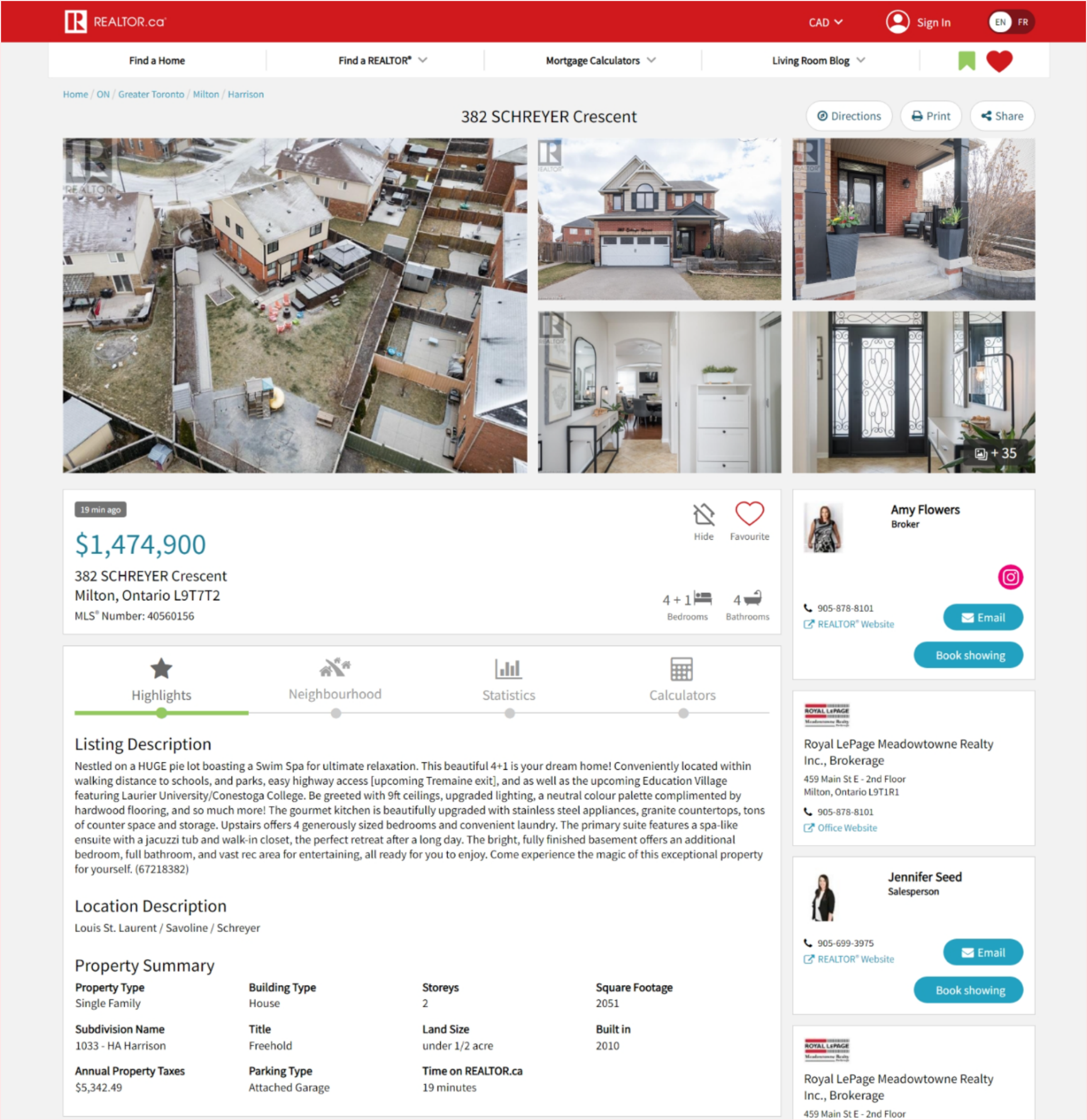
**50%** wanted sold history



# Product Detail Page

When buyers are exploring, most of them **stopped looking ‘below the fold’** (after the Listing Description or Property Summary).

When buyers are **more serious**, they typically will **revisit the site**, go back to their listings and will review the information below the fold.

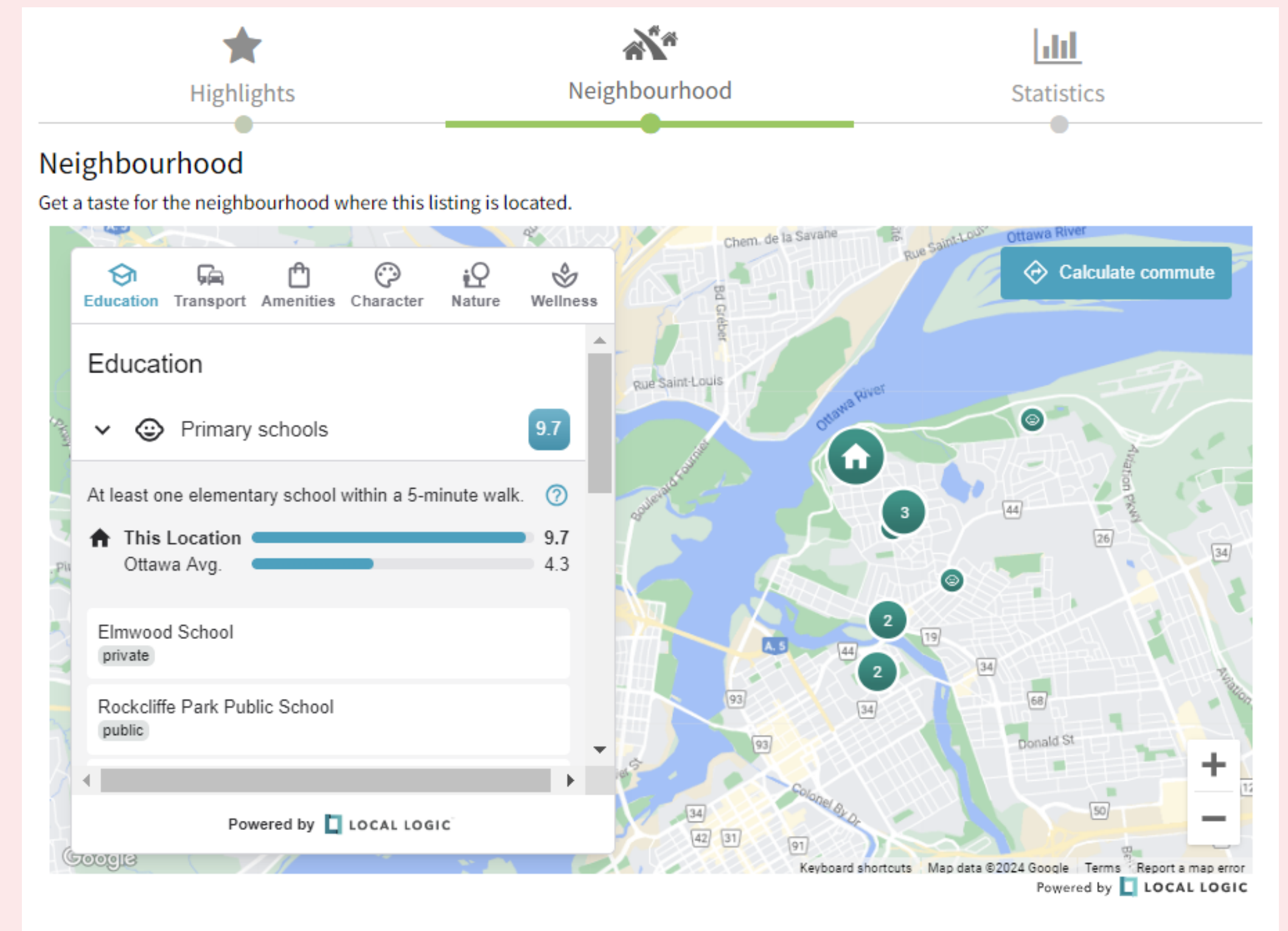


# Neighborhood

Most participants who were serious about their search **valued the Neighborhood feature.**

For first time home buyers, this **helped clear questions** about new neighborhoods they were open to.

For investors and repeat home buyers, they stated this could help them **identify the best opportunities** that align with things like their investment strategies.

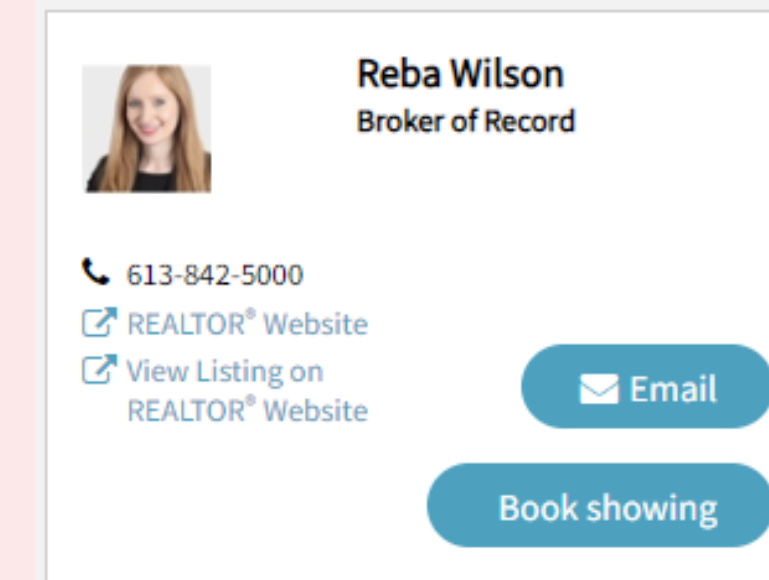




# Involve a REALTOR®

First Time Home Buyers are more likely to contact several REALTORS even **earlier in their exploratory phase.**

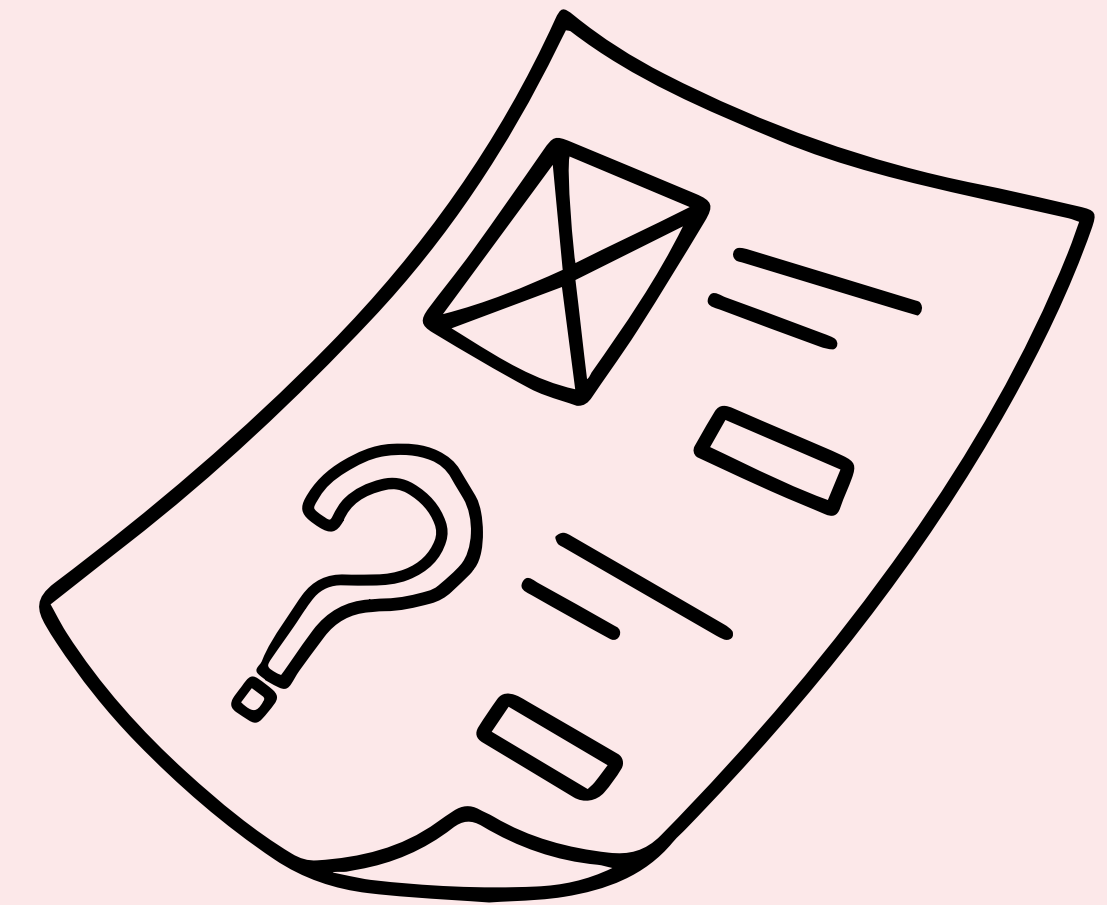
Investors and Repeat Buyers, who are more likely to involve their own REALTOR after they've made their refined list. This is because they don't want to **waste their REALTORS time** with the information before they have a more serious defined list.



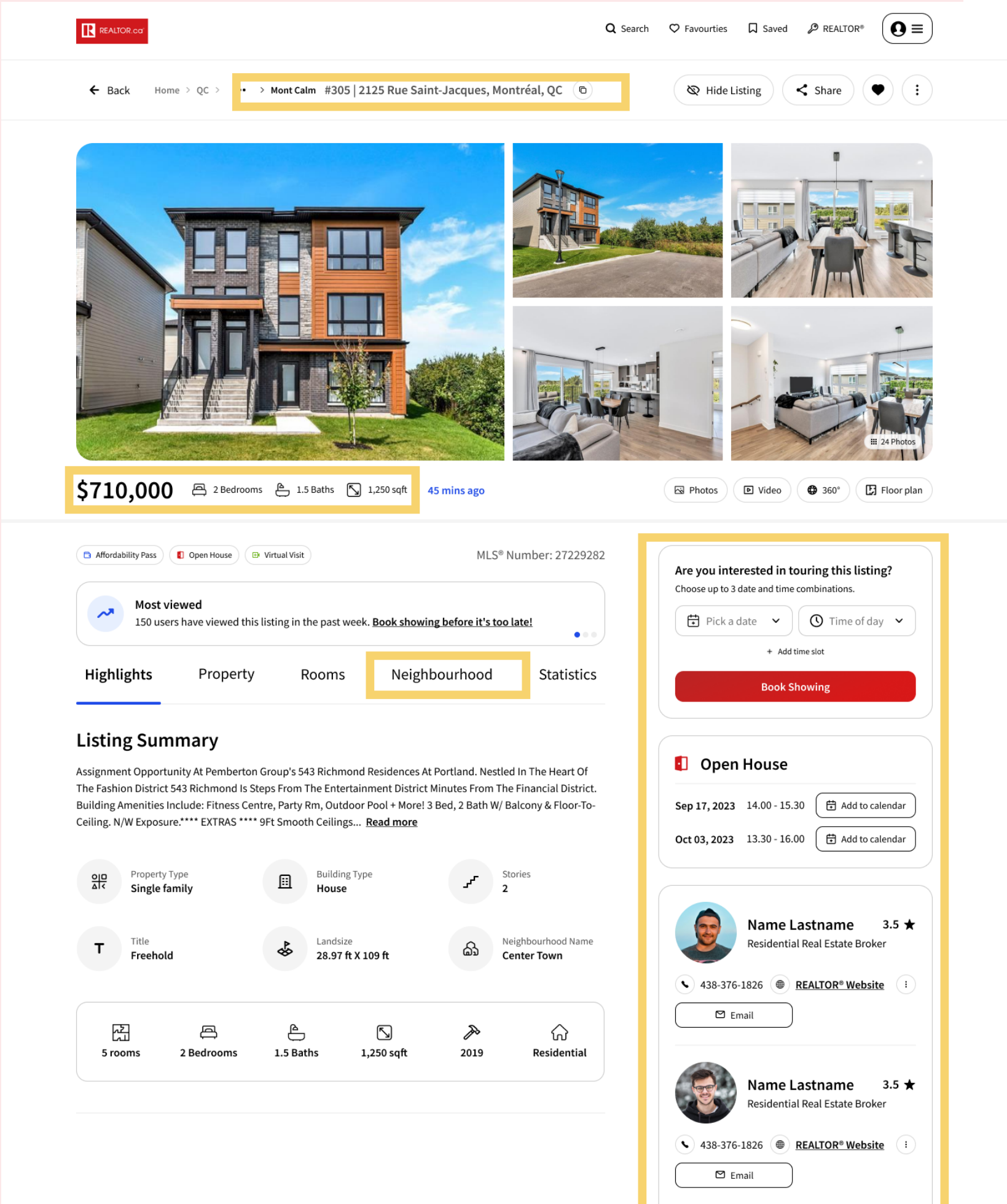
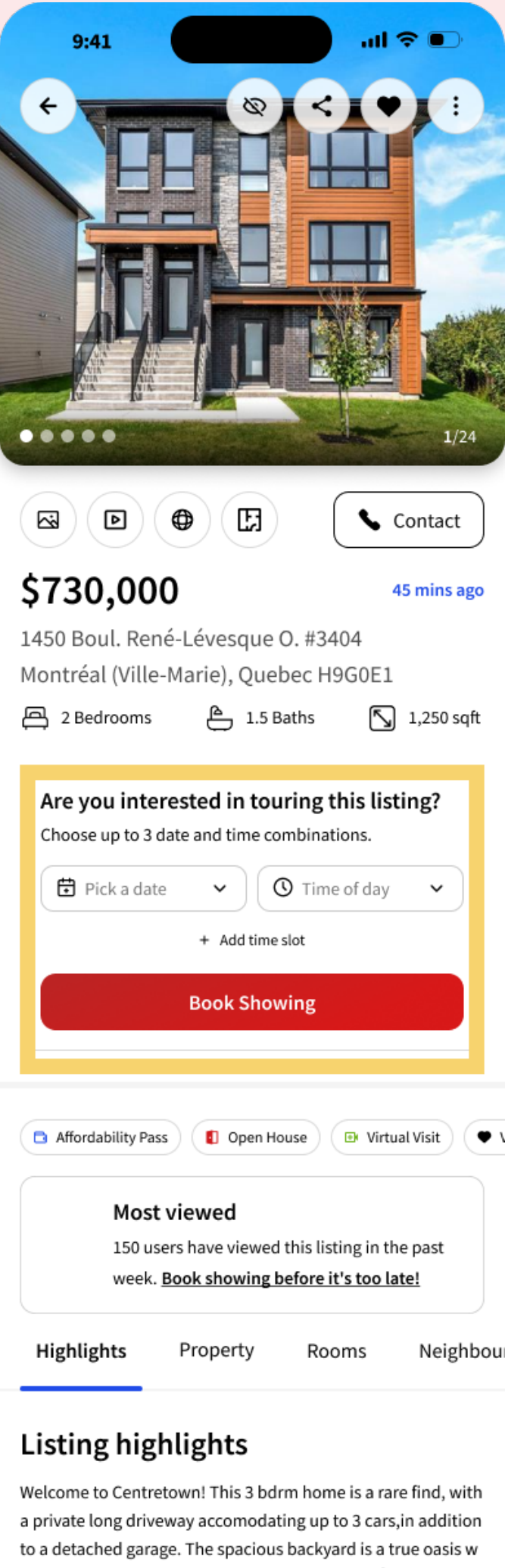
If all buyer types have a REALTOR they know, they may also send the information and let their **REALTOR handle the communication** side, including having the REALTOR book the showing for their client.

Therefore, booking a showing versus contacting a REALTOR **depends on the person** if they have a specific REALTOR in mind, who will book the showing and where they are at in their buying journey.

Buyers start by **casually** exploring properties but later transition into **detailed research**. While the Property Details Page (PDP) supports this transition, serious buyers **miss sold history**, leading them to search elsewhere.



PDP Information Architecture



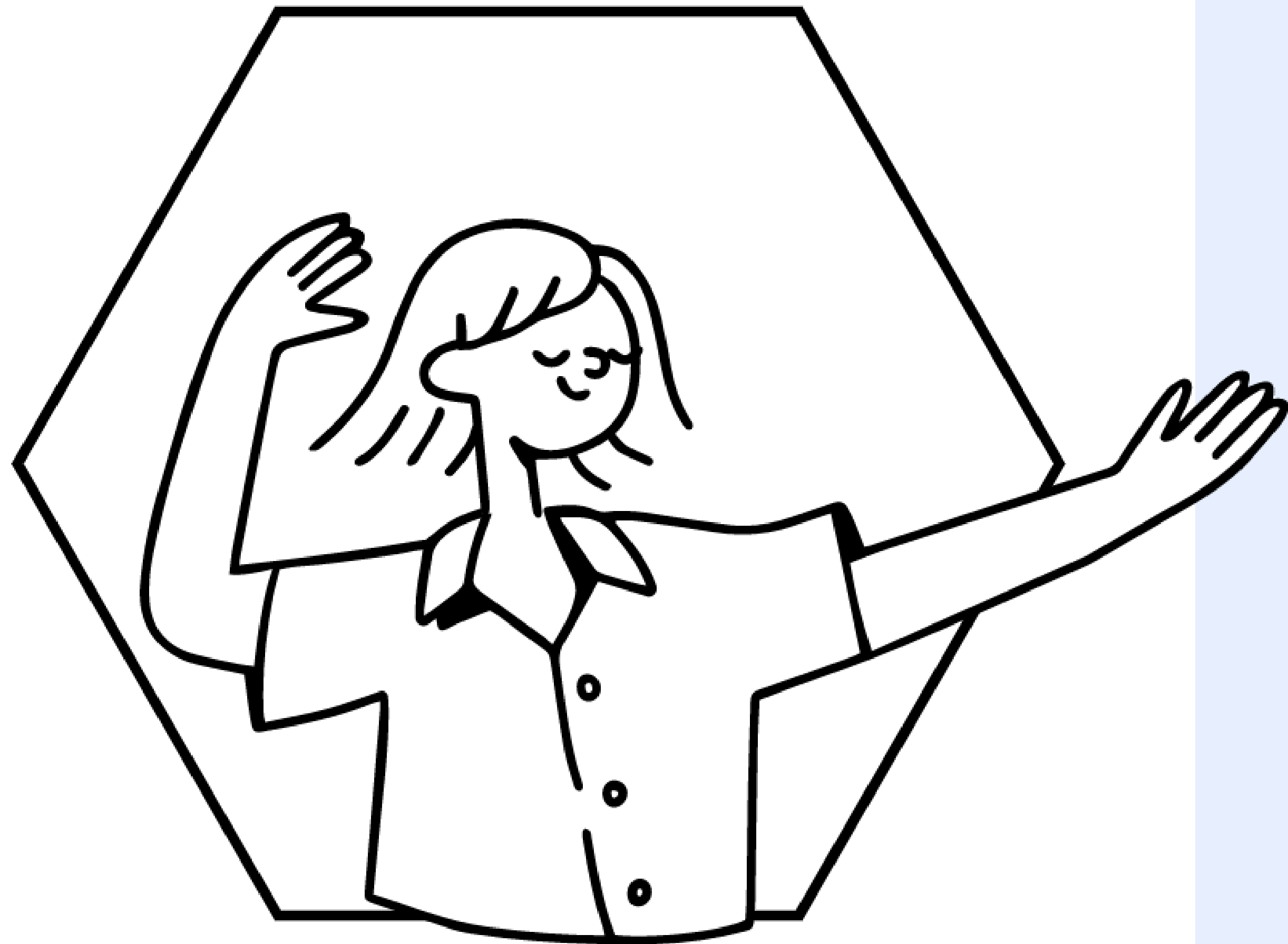
Previous Finding (Rentals)

- Renters prioritize **quick access** to images, concise listings, **days on market, occupancy date, and neighborhood statistics**.

Recommendation

1. Emphasize **location** and **key details**.
2. Enhancing **REALTOR** information (clarify appropriate contact person).
  - 2.1. Make REALTOR **card more clickable**.
3. Showcasing **neighborhood statistics**.
4. Consider additional features like **Move-in Date Availability** and **Sold History**.





# Thank You!

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