

REALTOR® MAGAZINE

The Power of Pets

Once relegated to the shadows, Fido and Fluffy may turn out to be an asset in selling a home.

January 2016 | By [Melissa Dittmann Tracey](#)



The real estate business traditionally has shown scant love for pets. The conventional wisdom held that sellers should conceal all traces of their dogs or cats—the toys, bowls, beds, even the animals themselves—when prepping a home for sale. But those hardline messages are clearly softening, as pets become a plus in the marketing of homes for sale.

The reason for the shift has a lot to do with the numbers: Pet power is rising. Currently 65 percent of households own a pet, up from 56 percent in 1988. A record-breaking 79 million U.S. households now own a pet, according to a recent survey of pet owners by the American Pet Products Association. Indeed, 83 percent of pet owners consider their pet to be a member of the family, according to a Packaged Facts research report.

For real estate practitioners, addressing that pet love means helping buyers scout for homes that meet the needs of their pets or working with sellers to leverage their home's pet appeal.

In fact, pet-friendly agents have found one another—and consumers—on a growing national social platform called the Pet Realty Network. The network, launched in 1997, now boasts about 300 members who pay \$30 annually to be included in the directory and can add to its pet-friendly listings.

“I think the days of hiding your pet are over,” says Rhona Sutter, sales associate with Downing Frye Realty Inc. in Naples, Fla., and founder of the network. “You may not want the boisterous Labrador running to the door to greet a home buyer, but quite honestly, a home that is pet-friendly is an advantage for a house nowadays.”

The pet advantage is notable at every price point. For a \$5 million listing in 2013, the Boutique Real Estate Group in Corona Del Mar, Calif., produced a video showing off a luxury 6,300-square-foot, six-bedroom home all from the perspective of a French bulldog named Rocco. The bulldog even wore a custom-made suede collar in the video, inscribed with the property's URL, 49GoldenEagle.com. Raj Qsar, owner of The Boutique Real Estate Group, says the idea to star Rocco in the video, which came about after the dog took a liking to his team as they toured the space, helped him secure the listing. "They loved the idea," he says.

Joining the pet craze, home builders are touting pet-accommodating floor plans, such as those with pet nooks in mudrooms. Also, luxury condo buildings are marketing amenities to pet-loving households, offering rooftop pet parks and spas (complete with "pawdicures"), dogbone-shaped swimming pools, pet fitness yoga classes and treadmill sessions, and even "yappy hours" social mixers.

Coldwell Banker last year [launched a national campaign](#) called "home's best friend," teaming up with AdoptAPet.com. Its brokerages partnered with shelters and rescue groups to hold events nationwide in an effort to find homes for 20,000 adoptable dogs.

Show Yourself as Pet-Friendly

- **In your networking.** Find fellow pet lovers. Some pet-owning agents are joining play groups or volunteering at animal rescue organizations to bond with prospects over pets. Buyers and sellers can use petrealtynetwork.com to search for pet-friendly agents, pet sitters, and architects.
- **In your questions.** Ask buyers about key considerations for their pets in their new home. Make sure you both are tuned in to any rules from local homeowners' associations or condo boards pertaining to animals (which might include weight, breeds, or quantity). Determine if there is adequate outdoor space for animals and whether there are regulations regarding fence sizes and types. Inquire about the proximity to pet-friendly restaurants or dog parks. Pet-friendly agents may also want to urge buyers to speak with neighbors to be sure the two households—and their pets—can live in harmony if they're sharing a property line. Inside the home, pet owners may seek a mudroom or laundry room by an entrance door so that owners can quickly wash off dirty paws. "There's a lot for pet owners to consider," Sutter says. "It's important to not just fall in love with a house. Owners may also have to think of their dog, cat, horse, even alpaca."
- **In your marketing.** Whether prospecting at dog parks or connecting through other means, some real estate professionals embrace the niche by contributing pet-themed real estate articles to blogs or local newspapers (such as "How to Move With Your Pets"). HIPro Realty LLC in Honolulu bills itself a pet-friendly boutique brokerage and offers a pet health and safety guide on its website where visitors can access information about moving with pets to Hawaii as well as listings of pet-friendly condo buildings and parks. To show off her niche, Sutter uses a photo of her dog instead of her own head shot throughout her marketing. "I

use the head shot to show something different about me,” Sutter says. “People know they’re talking to a pet person when they call me.”

- **In your staging.** Some real estate professionals—mostly in the apartment and condo sectors—are staging properties to show their pet appeal, taking into account existing rules regarding pet ownership in multifamily buildings. The Moore Design Group in Dallas has staged apartment model units with pet accessories, including fluffy pet beds, toys, and dog biscuits, in corners of a room, and even added framed pictures of the current owner’s dog—all not-so-subtle hints that this is the perfect home for a furry family member too.