

THE THREAT OF AGENTIC AI TO REAL ESTATE PORTALS

Navigating the Next Disruption



Contents

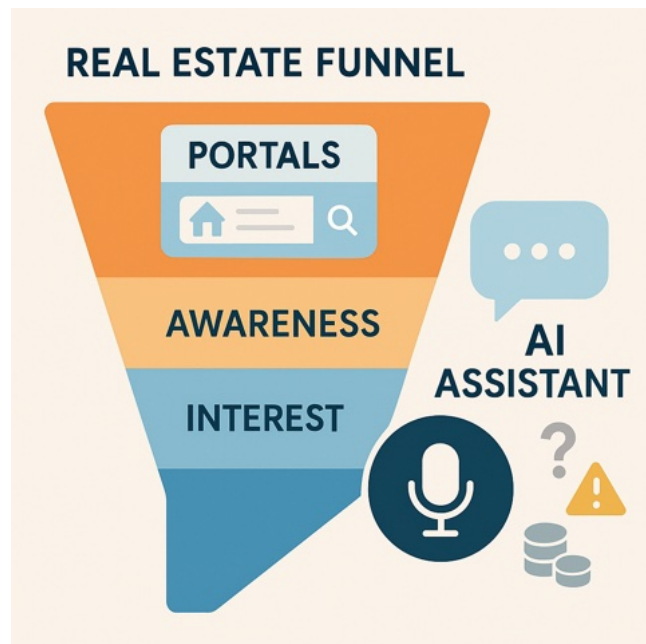
- 1. Executive Summary**
- 2. Background: Portals at the Peak of the Funnel**
- 3. Market Analysis: AI Assistants vs. Portal Usage – A Data-Driven Comparison**
- 4. Real Estate Portals: Traffic and Engagement Remain Robust**
- 5. Historical Parallels: From Directories to Google, from Desktop to Mobile**
- 6. Problem Framing: How Agentic AI Threatens the Top of the Funnel**
- 7. The Next Moat: From Discovery to Transaction – Portals Deepening their Role**
- 8. Overall Conclusion**
- 9. The Devil’s Advocate Perspective**

Appendix

- Case Study – Beagel’s Infrastructure Model for Digital Transactions**

1. Executive Summary

Real estate portals have long dominated the top of the property-buying funnel, capturing consumers at the **Awareness** and **Interest** stages with vast listing databases and user-friendly search tools. However, a new paradigm is emerging: agentic AI assistants (voice- and chat-based intelligent agents) are



poised to disrupt how buyers discover and engage with property information. These AI systems promise unprecedented convenience and personalisation in home search. Yet, despite their utility, they currently lack the structured data access, liability frameworks, and brand control that portals have painstakingly built to ensure reliable and secure experiences.

This white paper examines the looming risk that agentic AI poses to real estate portals' core business—lead capture and consumer attention at the top of the funnel. We draw historical parallels to illustrate how technological shifts can upend incumbents (e.g. Google search overtaking directories, smartphones eclipsing desktop web). We also present quantitative data on AI assistant adoption versus portal usage, the decline of print classifieds in favour of online portals, and the migration from desktop to mobile. These

trends underscore a pattern: platforms that own the consumer interface have repeatedly disrupted those that merely hold information.

Key insights and recommendations include:

- **AI Adoption is Soaring:** Over one-fifth of people worldwide now use voice search, with 8.4 billion voice assistants expected in use by 2024.

Conversational AI tools like ChatGPT reached 100 million users within 2 months of launch, the fastest growth on record. This rapid uptake indicates that consumers are increasingly turning to AI-powered interfaces for information retrieval, including real estate queries.

- **Portals Still Command Engagement:** Leading property portals attract massive audiences and engagement. For example, Britain's Rightmove saw users spend 16.4 billion minutes on its platform in 2024 (equivalent to 31,000 years), capturing 80% of all time spent on UK property sites. Zillow in the U.S. logged 9.3 billion visits in 2024, while newcomer Homes.com (backed by CoStar) rocketed to 110 million monthly visitors by March 2024 after a hefty ad campaign. Clearly, consumer eyeballs are still on portal brands today.

- **Historical Disruption Foreshadows AI's Impact:** Just as Google's search engine displaced web directories and smartphones forced "desktop-first" websites to reinvent for mobile, AI assistants could divert traffic from portals. We detail how newspaper real estate classifieds collapsed by 83% in revenue from 2006 to 2011 as online portals rose, and how mobile apps grew to dominate property searches (e.g. ~64% of Rightmove's traffic is now mobile). These shifts show that when user behaviour moves to a new medium, incumbent platforms must adapt or lose relevance.

- **Portals' Next Moat: Transaction Infrastructure:** To survive the agentic AI era, portals must expand deeper into the transaction process – beyond discovery into facilitation. The future competitive advantage will be built on infrastructure (identity verification, legal compliance, digital offer and escrow systems) rather than just aggregating listings. We provide a case study (see Appendix) of how adopting end-to-end digital transaction platforms – for example, leveraging Beagel's offer-management API – can transform portals from search tools into indispensable transaction partners. By enabling secure digital workflows (e.g. buyer identification, online bidding, contract exchange, payments), portals can maintain control and trust, even if AI becomes an intermediary for search.

Agentic AI is a double-edged sword for real estate portals, it threatens to hollow out the top of the funnel where portals historically thrived, but it also shines a light on where portals need to fortify their business. Portals that embrace deeper integration – supporting the journey from first click to closing – will not only remain relevant but can thrive by offering what AI alone cannot. The following sections provide an in-depth analysis of these points, backed by data and historical context, and outline strategic approaches for C-suite leaders to consider in this pivotal moment for the industry.

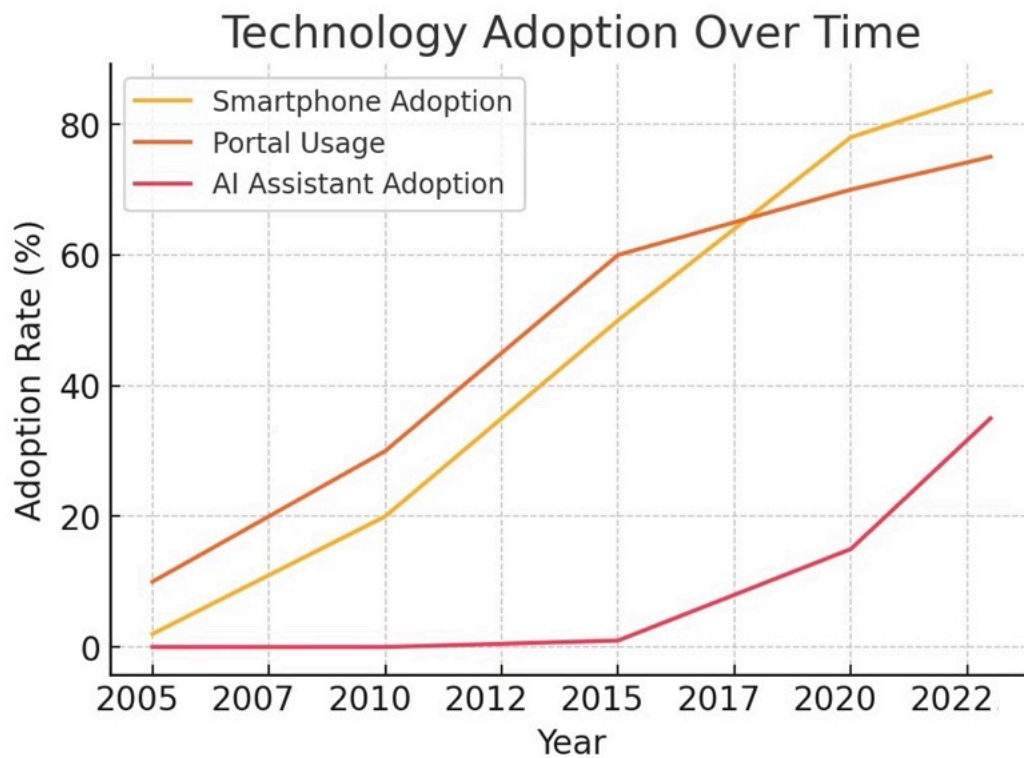


Figure 1: Comparative adoption rates of smartphones, real estate portals, and AI assistants over time. Source: compiled from industry reports and Statista.

PORTALS



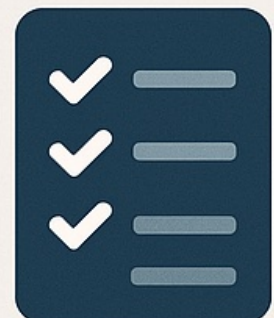
AWARENESS



INTEREST



CONSIDERATION



2. Background: Portals at the Peak of the Funnel

Real estate portals emerged in the early 2000s as the dominant marketplace for property listings, effectively moving classifieds from print to online. In markets like the UK and U.S., the top portals became household names and essential tools for home seekers. These platforms excel at the “Awareness” and “Interest” stages of the buyer’s journey: they aggregate thousands of listings, offer search filters, maps, photos, and content that allow consumers to discover available properties and research market conditions with ease.

Value Proposition of Portals: Portals traditionally provide a structured, curated experience. They ingest listings (often via feeds from agents or Multiple Listing Services), verify and standardise information (beds, baths, price, location, etc.), and present it in a consistent format under a trusted brand. This structured access to data ensures that users can reliably find what they’re looking for. Portals also incorporate legal and community standards (for example, fair housing compliance, fraud detection) creating a sense of safety. Finally, they cultivate brand loyalty through features like saved searches, alerts, and mobile apps – reinforcing that their site is the go-to place for real estate hunt.

Dominance in Engagement: The result of these efforts has been extraordinary consumer engagement metrics. In the UK, Rightmove (the

leading portal) has leveraged its first-mover advantage (launched 2000) to capture by far the most traffic and time spent in the category. By 2024, Rightmove was the fourth-busiest digital platform in the UK overall, behind only giants like the BBC. Users viewed roughly 9,400 properties per minute on Rightmove last year, reflecting an addictive browsing culture often dubbed “property porn.” The portal’s market share of online listings is ~75%, creating a virtuous cycle where more listings attract more consumers, which in turn attract more advertisers (agents). Likewise, in the U.S., Zillow rose to prominence in the 2010s by combining nationwide listings with rich data (Zestimates, neighbourhood info), amassing hundreds of millions of monthly visits. As of 2024 Zillow’s platforms saw about 10 billion visits annually, and competitors like Realtor.com and Redfin trail distantly. These figures underscore that portals have become the default start-point for property search for most consumers.

Revenue Model and Incentives: Importantly, portals monetised this attention primarily through advertising and lead generation. Agents and developers pay for exposure to the portals’ audience – whether via subscription listings fees (common in Europe) or via lead purchase and premier placement (common in the U.S. model). This means the portal’s business model hinges on capturing and holding consumer attention, then routing leads (phone calls, email inquiries, bookings) to the professionals who close the deal. Portals typically do not charge the end-user, focusing instead on being a high-traffic conduit that real estate professionals feel compelled to pay for. For instance, Rightmove’s extraordinary 70% profit margins stem from its ability to

continually raise fees on agents who feel they cannot do business without it.

This dynamic is crucial: portals succeeded by owning the audience and monetising access to that audience.

Evolution and Continuous Adaptation

To maintain their grip on consumers, portals have not stood still. Over the past two decades, they evolved through major technological shifts:

- **From Print to Web:** The initial victory was over newspapers. The decline of print classifieds in the 2000s was dramatic – in the U.S., newspaper real estate ad revenue plummeted from \$5.2 billion in 2006 to just \$885 million in 2011 (an 83% collapse) as sellers and agents moved to online portals. Portals offered greater reach at lower cost, and buyers flocked to the richer information online (multiple photos, search filters, etc.). Newspapers – constrained by limited space and slow update cycles – simply could not compete. This was the first major disruption that portals led.
- **Rise of Mobile:** Next came the shift from desktop internet to smartphones. Real estate search, once conducted on a PC browser, increasingly happened on mobile apps or mobile web. Portals adapted by investing in responsive sites and dedicated apps. By the mid-2010s, traffic was tipping to mobile. For example, as early as 2014 Realtor.com and Redfin were seeing more visitors from mobile than desktop. Fast-forward to today, and mobile dominates: about 64% of Rightmove's and 54% of Zillow's visits now come from mobile devices. Users expect to browse homes on the couch

via tablet, or get instant alerts on their phones. Portals had to ensure a seamless mobile experience to retain users, which most successfully did – though not without significant investment and design overhauls. (Notably, some laggards that were “desktop-first” suffered declines as users migrated to more mobile-friendly competitors.)

- **Data Enrichment and Personalisation:** Over time, portals also layered on more data and tools to keep consumers engaged. This includes automated valuation models (e.g. Zillow’s Zestimate), local market stats, school and crime data overlays, commute time calculators, etc. Recently, portals have even begun dabbling in AI themselves – Zoopla, for instance, uses AI to auto-tag listing photos with features (like “wood floors” or “open plan”) to enhance search filters. These incremental innovations strengthen the portals’ value proposition and stickiness.

Summary:

Real estate portals today are highly-optimised discovery platforms, battle-tested through prior disruptions. They combine comprehensive, structured listings data, strong consumer trust in brand, and features that make property hunting efficient and even enjoyable. This solid footing, however, is exactly what is challenged by the advent of agentic AI interfaces. Portals are kings of web and mobile real estate search – but what happens when users begin to ask an AI assistant to find them a home, instead of visiting the portal directly? The next sections explore this question in depth.

AI ASSISTANTS



Growth of AI assistant usage

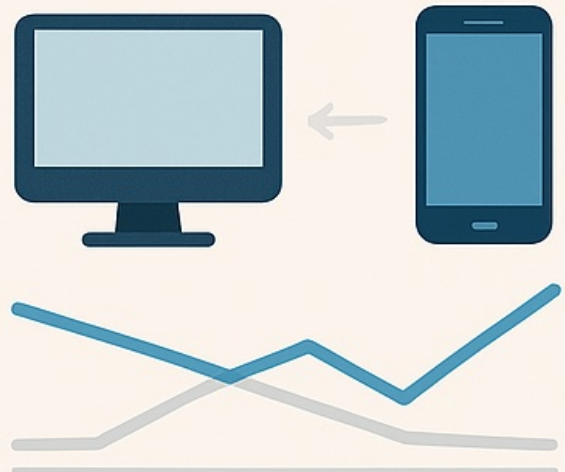
REAL ESTATE PORTALS



Sustained traffic of real estate portals



Decline of print classifieds



Shift from desktop to mobile

3. Market Analysis: AI Assistants vs. Portal

Usage – A Data-Driven Comparison

To understand the disruptive potential of AI on real estate discovery, it's important to quantify current adoption trends of AI assistants relative to portal usage, and to look at how analogous disruptions played out historically.

Below, we present key data on four aspects: (1) the growth of AI assistant usage, (2) the sustained traffic of real estate portals, (3) the decline of print classifieds, and (4) the shift from desktop to mobile.

AI Assistant Adoption is Accelerating

Consumer use of AI-powered assistants (both voice-based like Siri/Alexa and text-based like ChatGPT) has grown explosively in recent years. What started as a novelty a decade ago is now mainstream:

- **Global Voice Assistant Proliferation:** The number of active voice-enabled devices or assistants in use worldwide is estimated to reach 8.4 billion by 2024 – exceeding the human population. This figure (from a Statista study) counts the installed base of voice assistants across smartphones, smart speakers, cars, and other devices. It underscores that talking to an AI (or having it available at one's fingertips) is no longer a futuristic idea but rather an everyday reality for many. In fact, about 20.5% of people worldwide use voice search today. By 2025, just in the United States, 153.5 million people are expected to be regular voice assistant users – roughly 46% of the U.S. population.

- **Usage Frequency and Purpose:** A majority of voice assistant users employ them frequently and for practical queries. Surveys indicate 65% of 25-49 year-olds speak to their voice devices at least once per day. Critically for real estate, a huge portion of voice interactions are local and informational – “near me” searches and finding local businesses account for ~76% of voice search queries. This suggests people are already comfortable asking AI for location-based info (“find a coffee shop nearby”), which is not far removed from, say, asking “find open houses near me this weekend.” Indeed, 71% of consumers report using voice assistants to browse and research products before buying – home buying could logically follow this pattern as the tech improves.

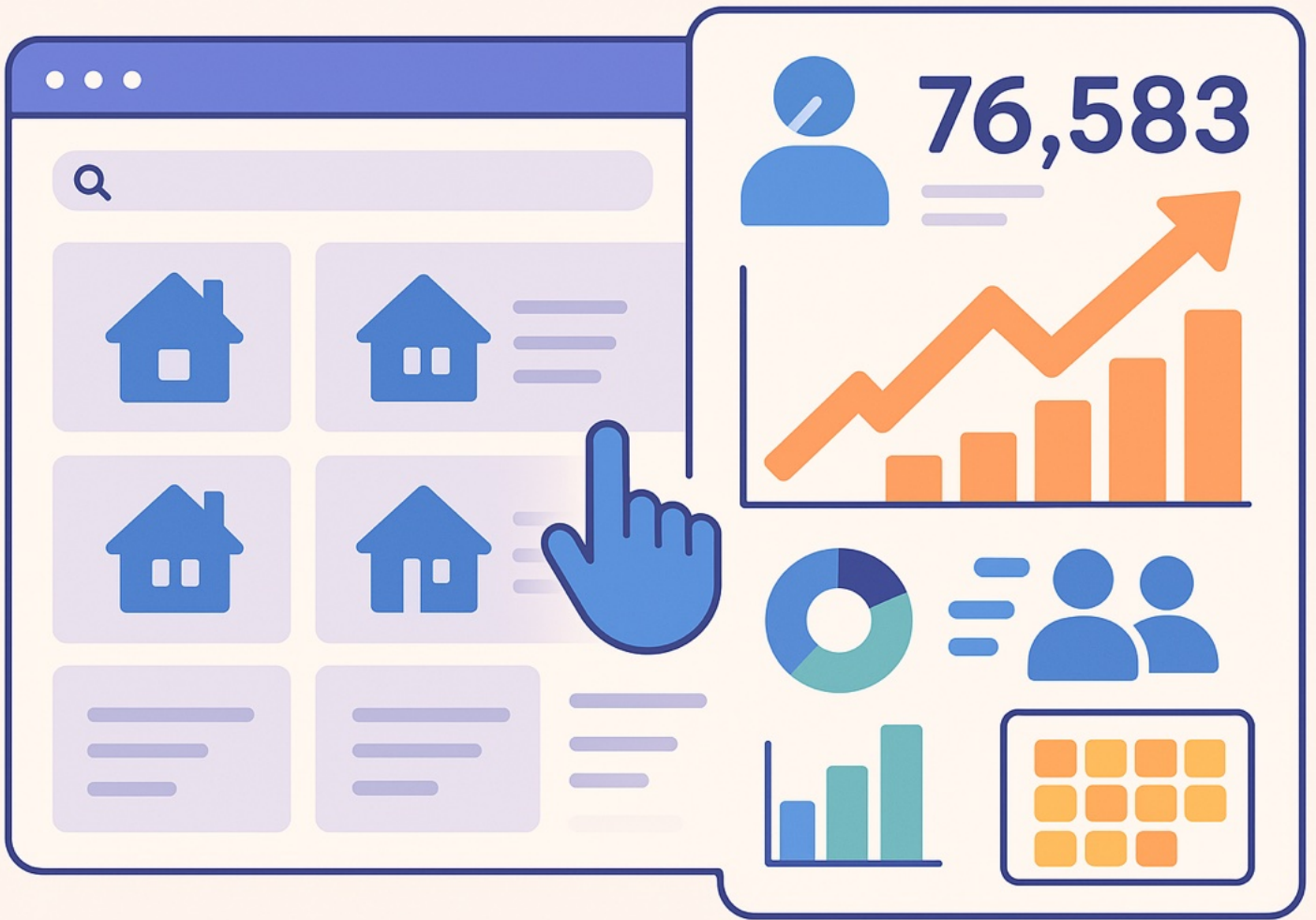
- **Chatbots and Generative AI Boom:** On the text/chat side, the adoption of general AI chatbots has been unprecedented. ChatGPT’s meteoric rise to 100 million monthly users in Jan 2023 (just ~8 weeks post-launch) exemplifies the demand for conversational Q&A interfaces. For context, this user growth outpaced even the fastest-growing social networks. By late 2023, ChatGPT had reportedly grown to over 100 million weekly active users, and other platforms like Bing Chat and Google’s Bard are aggressively ramping up. Consumers are discovering that for many queries, interacting with an AI can be as effective as a search engine – often more convenient, since the AI can synthesise information from multiple sources into a single answer. In real estate, one can already see early adopters asking ChatGPT things like “What is the best neighbourhood in Dublin for families with a

budget of €500k?” or “How is the housing market trend this year?” – questions that the AI will attempt to answer by drawing on its trained knowledge or web data. While today the answers may be generic, tomorrow’s iterations could plug into live data.

- **Projected Growth:** Analysts forecast steady growth in voice/chat assistant usage in the coming years. For example, eMarketer projects U.S. voice assistant users will grow from 145 million in 2023 to over 170 million by 2028. Global trends point toward deeper integration of AI in search – with tech giants embedding conversational AI into search engines (as Microsoft has done with CoPilot integration and Google with Gemini in search results). In other words, the AI assistant is moving from a niche to a default interface for accessing information.

Summary:

The above data paints a clear picture – AI assistants are becoming ubiquitous and consumers are using them for increasingly complex queries. The top-of-funnel in many industries (travel, shopping, etc.) is already feeling this shift as more people ask Alexa or Google Assistant rather than navigate apps or websites. Real estate is ripe for a similar shift, especially for initial research and discovery questions that precede looking at specific listings. The next section contrasts this with portal usage data – showing the status quo that AI is poised to disrupt.



4. Real Estate Portals: Traffic and Engagement

Remain Robust

Despite the rise of AI, current evidence shows that real estate portals continue to enjoy heavy traffic and engagement. They are starting from a position of strength:

- **High User Traffic:** The major portals in each region attract tens of millions of unique visitors per month. Zillow, for instance, averaged ~336 million visits per month worldwide in 2023-24 (making it the most-visited real estate website globally). In total, Zillow's sites saw about 10 billion visits in 2022 rising to a peak of 10.5 billion, before a slight dip to 9.3 billion in 2024 (likely due to housing market cycles). In the UK, Rightmove's monthly visitors are smaller in absolute number (given population size), but engagement is off the charts in time spent. As noted, Rightmove captured 80% of all time spent on property sites in its market, and an aggregate of 16.4 billion minutes in 2024. These figures suggest that consumers are still heavily reliant on portals for property search. Similarly, in other markets: e.g. Spain's Idealista, Germany's ImmoScout24, etc., dominate local traffic with little sign of decline yet.

- **User Engagement Depth:** It's not just visits – it's engagement quality. Browsing property listings can be an engrossing experience (multiple pages per visit, lengthy sessions). The virtuous cycle of inventory and audience means users often browse habitually. In the UK, an average Rightmove user

spends about 11 billion minutes per month (as per 2021 data) on the site, and in 2024 the average daily time spent on Rightmove reached new highs. On Zillow, internal metrics have shown users often look at hundreds of homes over months-long search processes. This deep engagement is a key asset: it means portals have rich data on user preferences and a strong habit formation – things an outside AI interface would have to peel users away from gradually.

- **Multi-Platform Presence:** Portals have extended their presence across web, mobile web, and native apps, ensuring they capture users wherever they are. Zillow, for example, operates 27 different mobile apps (including specialised ones for rentals, agents, mortgages, etc.) and in 2014 reported users spent over 5 billion minutes on its apps that year. Many portals boast millions of app downloads, and a significant portion of loyal users who use logged-in features (favourites, alerts) exclusively in-app. This cross-platform entrenchment is a defensive moat – it's one thing to get a casual user to ask an AI a question, but another to break the habit of an avid portal app user who has saved searches and gets push notifications.

- **Account and Data Lock-In:** An emerging trend (especially in Europe) is portals pushing users to create accounts to access more features – effectively a login wall for certain actions. Zoopla's login wall is a prime example: in recent years Zoopla began requiring users to sign in to view certain content like owner contact details or to use advanced features (e.g. seeing exact property addresses, saving favourites). By forcing account

creation, portals not only gather valuable user data but also increase switching costs (a user with saved preferences on one portal is less likely to start over elsewhere). This plays into the brand control advantage – the portal controls the user experience end-to-end when the user is on its platform, an advantage that is lost if the user interacts only via an intermediary (like an AI assistant that scrapes information).

- **Continuous Marketing and Brand Awareness:** The portal business has high margins and incumbents have been reinvesting in keeping their brand front-of-mind. A pertinent example is CoStar’s Homes.com campaign in the U.S. Homes.com was a relatively small portal that CoStar Group acquired and decided to aggressively grow to challenge Zillow/Realtor. In 2023-2024, CoStar poured an estimated \$1 billion into marketing, including multiple Super Bowl TV commercials, under what its CEO called “the largest marketing campaign in real estate history”. The effect was dramatic: Homes.com’s unaided brand awareness jumped from 4% to 24% in one quarter, and its traffic tripled year-over-year to 110 million monthly visitors in March 2024. While this example is about a new entrant, it illustrates the emphasis on top-of-funnel mindshare. Leading portals like Rightmove, Zillow, etc., similarly invest in constant SEO, SEM, and advertising (though usually not to CoStar’s extreme) to ensure when consumers think “real estate search,” they think of their portal. This kind of brand-building is something AI assistants currently lack – few people know which assistant or skill to “ask for real estate,” they just generically use Siri or Google, so the loyalty is to the platform (Apple/Google/OpenAI) rather than a particular real estate AI brand.

Summary:

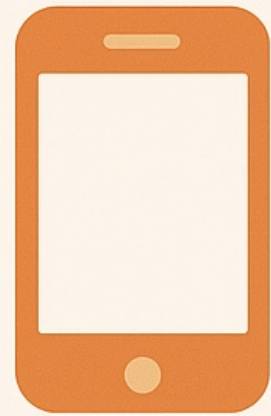
By the numbers, portals are still enjoying near-record usage. There isn't yet a noticeable decline in portal traffic attributable to AI assistants (any recent dips are more correlated with housing market softness). However, the portal leadership should view these numbers as both a strength and a vulnerability. The sheer volume of consumer attention they command is precisely what makes them a juicy target for disruption. Just as past disruptors targeted the incumbents with the biggest user base, AI interfaces are coming for broad, horizontal use-cases – like “find me a house.” The next part of our analysis looks at historical analogies to contextualise the threat.

HISTORICAL PARALLELS



DIRECTORIES

GOOGLE



DESKTOP

MOBILE

5. Historical Parallels: From Directories to Google, from Desktop to Mobile

The potential displacement of portal websites by AI agents has precedents in how earlier technologies changed consumer behaviour. Two analogies are especially instructive: the rise of Google versus web directories in the early internet, and the transition from desktop web to mobile apps in the 2010s.

- **Search Engines vs. Directories:** In the late 1990s, early internet users often found websites through human-curated directories (like Yahoo Directory or niche portals). If you wanted to find a local business, you might navigate a directory tree or use Yellow Pages online. This model was disrupted by algorithmic search engines – most decisively Google. Google’s superior ability to crawl the web and return the most relevant result to a natural-language query caused a mass migration of user behaviour. By the early 2000s, typing a question or keywords into a search box became the default, and curated directories became virtually obsolete. Importantly, Google didn’t necessarily host the content, it was an intermediary that directed you to the right content source (often directly to a business’s site, bypassing directory listings). Real estate portals today could face an analogous situation: a conversational AI could become the go-to “front door” for home seekers’ questions (“show me 3-bedroom homes under \$500k in Brussels with gardens”). The AI might then fetch results from multiple sources (possibly including portals’ data without the full portal experience) and present a

synthesised answer or a shortlist. If that experience is easier or faster, users may no longer start at the portal's own homepage. In effect, the AI becomes the new homepage for real estate search, just as Google became the homepage for the web. This is not far-fetched – Google itself is integrating AI summaries in search results, and one can imagine a not-distant future where an assistant handles property queries end-to-end.

- **Desktop to Mobile UX Shift:** The second parallel is how user interface shifts can dethrone leaders. Many web-first companies that thrived on desktop had to quickly pivot or perish when mobile came to dominate internet usage. In real estate, companies like Zillow and Rightmove successfully made the jump – but consider those that didn't adapt quickly: smaller brokerage sites or listing aggregators that had clunky mobile interfaces lost ground to those with slick apps. Mobile introduced new paradigms (location awareness, push notifications, voice input on the go) that weren't present on desktop. Those who exploited new UX paradigms (like enabling GPS-based home searches “near me” on mobile, or instant alert when a home hits the market) kept users engaged. Those who stuck to old designs saw engagement drop as users flocked to more convenient solutions. An AI assistant is a new UI paradigm as well – it's conversational, possibly voice-driven, and could be ubiquitous across devices (through smart speakers, phones, wearables, even cars). If portals do not figure out how to present their value through these new interfaces, they risk becoming like a desktop-era site in a mobile world – technically still accessible, but increasingly bypassed for a smoother experience. It's telling that 78% of global internet traffic is now mobile, and

similarly one could foresee a future stat like “X% of property searches are now through AI assistants” if the trend goes that way.

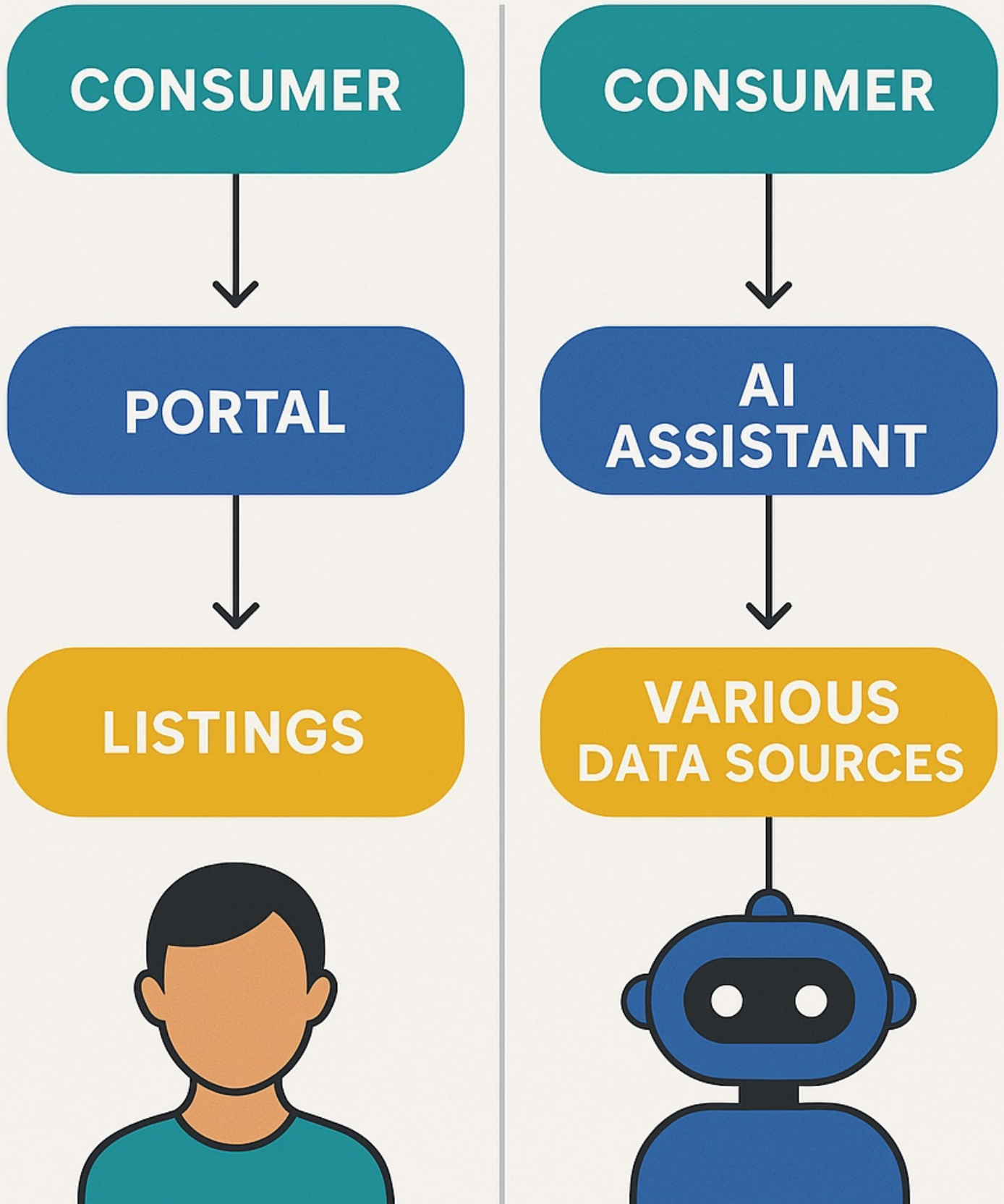
- **New Entrants Capitalising on Tech Shifts:** Often, when such paradigm shifts occur, new competitors emerge by leveraging the new technology to challenge incumbents on experience. For example, when mobile surged, we saw the rise of mobile-first real estate apps (some startups launched app-only property search experiences, though many were acquired or folded into bigger players). In the AI context, we are already seeing early signs: startups offering AI-driven property search or chatbot interfaces for brokers. Even large language model-based real estate advisory bots are being floated by venture firms. These new entrants don’t need to build full portal backends; they can use AI to pull from existing databases (via APIs or scraping) and focus on the interface and engagement. It is analogous to how Craigslist disrupted classifieds (a very simple interface layered on internet connectivity) or how Uber disrupted taxis by layering a better interface on top of existing car-and-driver supply. For portals, the threat is that an AI layer built by someone else could cannibalise the user relationship, reducing the portal to a back-end data source. And if portals refuse to cooperate (to protect their turf), the AI might still find ways via third-party listings data, user-contributed info, or even outright copying, to provide answers. This scenario is not without precedent – just as newspapers initially tried paywalls, only to see free aggregators thrive until they changed strategy, portals will have to balance protecting data with meeting users where they are.

- **Consumer Expectations and Convenience:** History shows that once consumers experience a more convenient method, they rarely go back. Google taught people that they can get answers in milliseconds without browsing multiple sites. Smartphone apps taught people that they can get personalised, on-demand service (like being notified instantly of a new listing rather than checking a website daily). AI assistants promise an even more convenient experience: Why scroll through 100 listings when you can tell an AI your exact criteria and have it do the sifting, possibly even schedule viewings? While the tech isn't fully there yet for such complex tasks, the expectation is being set. A new generation of homebuyers may grow up expecting to simply "chat" with their devices to manage life tasks – and that will include home search. Portals need to be ahead of that expectation curve to avoid playing catch-up when it's too late.

Summary:

These parallels highlight a common theme, the interface to information is as important as (or more than) the information itself. Real estate portals won the last rounds because they controlled both the data and the interface (their websites/apps). Agentic AI potentially wrests control of the interface away, creating a new battleground. The next section frames the core problem and consequences of this shift for portal operators.

The evolving top-of-funnel for property search



6. Problem Framing: How Agentic AI

Threatens the Top of the Funnel

The “top of the funnel” in real estate refers to the stages where a consumer becomes aware of available properties and begins to gather information (before they’ve committed to a specific property or engaged an agent). Portals historically own this phase. The rise of agentic AI challenges that ownership in several ways:

1. Disintermediation of Search and Discovery: If users turn to AI assistants for their initial home search queries, the AI effectively becomes an intermediary between the consumer and the portal. For example, a buyer might ask a voice assistant: “Find me 3-bedroom apartments for sale in Paris under €750,000.” The assistant could parse this and fetch data from one or multiple portals (or other databases) to provide a spoken answer or a curated list. In doing so, the AI might present the results in its own format – perhaps reading out a few options or sending a summary to the user’s phone – bypassing the portal’s interface entirely. The portal in this case provides raw data but doesn’t get to present its branding, capture the user’s click, or show them ads. Repeated at scale, this breaks the portal’s funnel: it no longer has the user browsing and engaging directly. Instead, the AI might deliver leads to agents without the portal getting the chance to monetise the eyeballs (imagine an AI that directly offers to connect you to an agent for a listing it found). This is analogous to how Google’s featured snippets or answers sometimes satisfy

a query without the user clicking through to the source website – except AI could handle more complex multi-step queries.

2. Erosion of Brand Loyalty and Trust: Portals have spent years building consumer trust in their brands as the authoritative source for real estate. If an AI assistant becomes the primary touchpoint, the consumer’s trust may shift to the assistant (“I use Alexa for everything” or “I rely on Google’s AI to get information”). Over time, the portal’s brand could be relegated to a background provider, much like how content sites became back-end providers to Facebook or Google News. This is problematic for portals because brand loyalty is what drives direct traffic (people typing “rightmove.co.uk” directly or opening the Zillow app instinctively). Losing that means having to rely on referrals or paid inclusion. Moreover, if the AI mixes results from multiple sources, the unique identity of each portal’s data blurs in the consumer’s mind. They might not know or care if a listing came from Portal A or Portal B, since “the AI will just find it.” For portal operators in competitive markets, this commodification of their content is a serious concern – it could level the playing field and enable smaller players (or new aggregators) to piggyback on the AI platforms.

3. Threat to Advertising and Lead Gen Models: If the AI assistant is answering questions and possibly forwarding inquiries, it might bypass the advertising setups portals have. Portals typically show display ads, promoted listings, or sell placement in search results – all contingent on users browsing the portal UI. In an AI scenario, a user isn’t scrolling through pages of results

with banner ads; they're getting one synthesised answer or a short list via voice/chat. The concept of advertising within that answer is uncharted (and likely limited, as an overt ad would degrade the user experience with AI). Similarly, if an AI can initiate contact with an agent (say, "Call the listing agent for me" or "Ask if the house is still available"), it might generate the lead without the user ever filling out the portal's lead form that notifies the agent. That cuts the portal out of the loop or at least makes their role much more passive (they provided data but didn't capture the user action). In short, AI assistants threaten to break the monetisation funnel: attention → advertisement → lead. The portal may still provide data but not capture value.

4. Data Scraping and Quality Concerns: One might argue that portals can simply refuse to cooperate with AI platforms or restrict their data. But large language models and AI systems often learn from publicly available data. If a portal's listings are accessible on the web without login, an AI could be trained on that data (to some extent) or scrape it in real-time (much as search engines do). Even if incomplete, the AI might combine it with other sources (like brokerage websites or government property records) to answer user queries. This creates a paradox: the AI's answers might be good enough for many users even if not as detailed or up-to-date as the portal's, especially if the AI is adept at framing and summarising. The portal then faces a dilemma – keep data behind logins or anti-scraping measures (potentially reducing its own traffic and frustrating users) or allow it and see the AI use it freely. Some in the industry foresee negotiations or licensing where AI platforms pay for API access to portal data. But unless the portal has a truly unique dataset or user

must-have (e.g. Zillow's Zestimates or exclusive listings), the AI might try to go around the need to pay, using what it can find. This dynamic was seen in news media, where initially Google News etc. aggregated snippets freely, and only later did some licensing deals emerge. For portals, it's unclear if they have enough clout to force favourable terms – especially if multiple competing AI sources exist. The lack of a clear liability framework exacerbates this: if the AI gives a wrong detail about a listing, who is responsible? Likely not the portal (which wasn't directly engaged by the user), and the AI disclaimers usually waive liability too. This grey area might result in misinformation or mistakes (e.g., mis-stating a property feature or price), which could hurt the portal's reputation indirectly without recourse.

5. “Agentic” Behaviour – Going Beyond Search: The term agentic AI implies AI that can not only inform but act on behalf of the user. We're nearing a point where an AI could conceivably perform tasks like booking a house viewing, negotiating a price, or filling out forms, if authorised. For instance, a future AI could handle back-and-forth emails to schedule a viewing, or even scour mortgage offers once you say you like a house. If portals do not integrate such capabilities themselves, the AI might take on more of the home-buying workflow. This overlaps into later funnel stages (which we discuss as the portal's opportunity, but also a risk if someone else's AI steps in first). Imagine telling your AI, “I'm interested in 123 Maple Street – help me make an offer.” If the AI can interface with some transaction platform directly (not necessarily the portal's), the portal might miss out entirely on the referral or any ancillary product sale (like mortgage or insurance leads). Thus, agentic

AI threatens not just the discovery phase but possibly the handoff to transaction as well, unless portals are proactive.

Limitations of AI (Today):

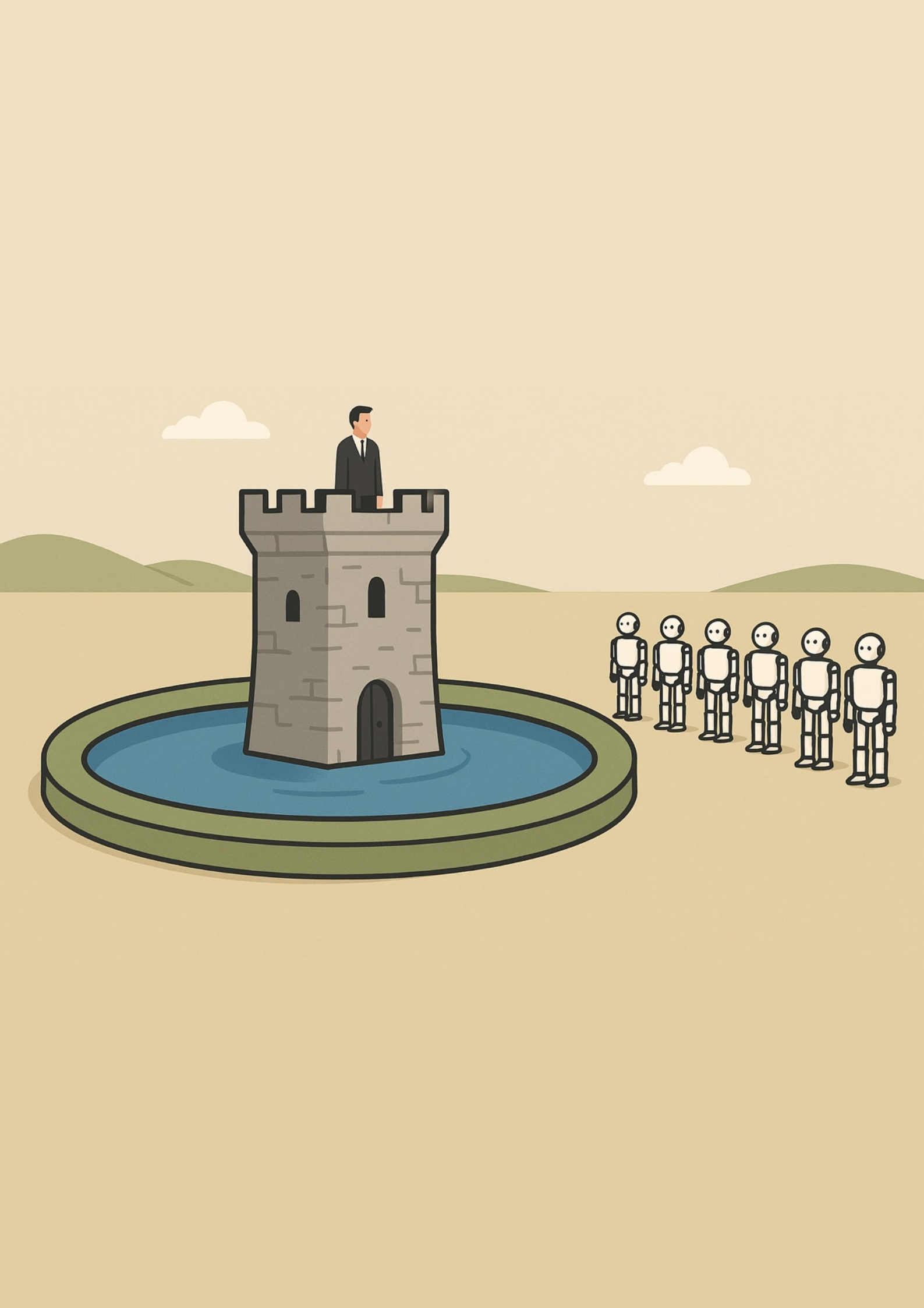
It's important to note that as of now, AI assistants have significant limitations in this domain, which have prevented full disintermediation – but these may be temporary as the tech evolves:

- They often lack real-time and comprehensive access to listing databases (many AI models' knowledge cut off before recent data, though plugins and live feeds are emerging).
- AI can sometimes be inaccurate or hallucinate information, which is dangerous in a high-stakes context like real estate (e.g., quoting wrong prices or misrepresenting property facts could lead to liability issues).
- There's no established liability framework or trust mechanism – consumers might be hesitant to rely on an AI's recommendation to, say, put down an earnest money deposit, without cross-verifying on a known portal or with an agent. Portals can emphasise their trustworthiness (“verified listings, updated daily” etc., which an AI cannot guarantee if sourcing openly).
- From a business standpoint, AI platforms themselves haven't figured out monetisation fully. Portals have a clear model; an AI that just answers questions might not have a revenue stream or might seek to monetise by partnering with the portals or agents rather than against them (at least in the near term).

In essence, AI has not yet supplanted portals because it's early days and because portals are actively shielding their value (through logins, emphasising trust, etc.). However, the trajectory is clear. Each year AI assistants are improving in access to data and reliability. For instance, Microsoft's Bing AI can already search live listings and present a condensed answer with links. Google's Duplex (an AI voice agent) has shown it can make phone calls to perform tasks like booking appointments, which could extend to calling agents to schedule viewings. The competitive threat is not one of sudden replacement but a gradual siphoning of user engagement. Even a 10-20% reduction in top-of-funnel traffic to portals (in favour of AI alternatives) could have outsized impact on portal revenues, given the high margins and sensitive network effects in their business.

For C-suite operators, the core problem is thus: How do we ensure our portal remains the primary gateway for consumers in the face of an enticing new gateway (AI assistants)? And if we cannot be the only gateway, how do we at least participate in or co-opt the AI interfaces so that our business model remains intact?

The answer, we argue, lies in doubling down on what AI cannot easily replicate or replace – the infrastructure, integrations, and assurances needed to actually complete a real estate transaction. We explore this strategic response next, backed by data on why moving down-funnel is both necessary and potentially very rewarding for portals willing to evolve.



7. The Next Moat: From Discovery to

Transaction – Portals Deepening their Role

If AI threatens to commoditise the discovery phase of property buying, real estate portals must migrate their value capture to deeper phases of the funnel – namely the transactional and service layers that follow discovery. In other words, portals should strive to become not just the place where a buyer finds a property, but the platform through which they buy the property (or at least navigate the steps to purchase). This strategic shift builds a new moat that AI alone would struggle to cross, due to the need for compliance, human touch-points, and complex integrations. Several data points and industry moves support this direction:

Consumer Journey Digital Drop-off: Research shows that while the initial stages of home-buying are largely digital, the later stages revert to offline or fragmented processes. HSBC's Beyond the Bricks report highlighted that 89% of people search for homes online and 86% research prices online, but when it comes to actually interacting with an agent and proceeding with a transaction, a lot of it still happens offline – only 41% of those interactions are mostly or completely online. This indicates a “digital drop-off” after the discovery/interest phase. Portals have already captured the discovery phase (nearly 9 in 10 buyers start online); the opportunity is to carry that momentum forward seamlessly, rather than letting it drop off at the agent engagement stage.

Opportunities in a Streamlined Digital Process: If portals can extend their platform to cover more of the buying process (while keeping agents and users engaged), they stand to benefit immensely. By maintaining a digital connection from search to closing, portals can create new revenue streams and fortify user relationships. For example:

- **Online Offer and Negotiation Systems:** Enabling buyers to place offers online and negotiate through a portal-managed interface. This keeps buyers and sellers (and their agents) in a controlled environment. Data suggests that introducing online bidding can increase participation. A case in point: Beagel, an online bidding platform, found that moving bids online led to higher volumes of bids with minimal disruption to agents' workflow. In Ireland, Beagel's system surpassed €6 billion in online bids processed, signalling strong adoption once such infrastructure was available. By integrating such capability, a portal could capture the moment of transaction initiation and potentially charge for it or derive data from it (e.g., to power market analytics).
- **Secure Identity and Document Verification:** One key value a portal can add is to verify users (facilitating ID checks, mortgage pre-approvals, etc.) to make transactions smoother. AI assistants won't handle a person's identity or funds, but a portal can. Portals in some markets are experimenting with identity verification to view certain details or to make offers (to cut down on fraud or non-serious buyers). This creates a safer marketplace. A verified buyer making an offer

through the portal's system is a strong value proposition to a seller and speeds up the process. Moreover, once verified, that user might use the portal for more services (like applying for a loan or insurance through portal partners), because the data re-use is convenient.

- **Transaction Management and Workflow:** The real estate transaction involves many steps: offer, acceptance, inspections, financing, legal contracts, escrow, closing. These are often managed by different systems (email, phone calls, standalone transaction management software). A portal that provides an integrated transaction management suite (possibly white-labeled via APIs from providers like Beagel or others) can keep all parties interacting on the portal's platform. This increases stickiness significantly – the portal is no longer just about the initial search but is now facilitating progress toward closing. Importantly, longer digital engagement opens opportunities for cross-monetisation. As an online marketplaces analysis noted, a buyer might ignore home insurance offers while just browsing, but if they are mid-transaction on a portal-managed workflow, they are very likely to purchase insurance, mortgages, moving services, etc., at the right moment. This timing is key: control the transaction timeline and you can present value-add services at the point of need.

- **Compliance and Liability Handling:** Real estate transactions are heavily regulated (think fair housing laws, anti-money laundering checks, etc.). Portals that develop the capability to facilitate these compliance aspects (for instance, verification that an offer is accompanied by proof of funds, or that offer forms comply with local

law) will earn the trust of industry participants. It essentially means the portal becomes part of the formal transaction pipeline, not just an advertising platform. AI, on its own, will not easily assume legal responsibility or navigate local regulations without being explicitly programmed to – which is unlikely in the short term. Thus, portals can maintain an edge by being the trusted, compliant intermediary that stands behind the process, giving both consumers and professionals confidence to use digital tools.

Industry Moves – Early Signs of Transition:

We are beginning to see portals and property marketplaces invest in deeper integration:

- In the UK, Zoopla introduced a feature called My Home and other tools that inch toward personal finance and transaction management (tracking your home's value, offering home improvement financing, etc.). While not full transaction enablement, it indicates a desire to extend relationship beyond just search.
- Some European portals under groups like AVIV (which owns brands in France, Germany, etc.) are exploring providing digitised rental contracts and tenant vetting – again, moving beyond listing into transaction execution.
- The case of CoStar's Homes.com push also hints at future directions: CoStar's CEO has explicitly talked about not following Zillow's lead-gen monetisation model, but instead potentially monetising via adjacent services. Given CoStar's expertise in commercial real estate data, they might leverage that to provide transaction analytics or tools to users of Homes.com. Their

willingness to spend on traffic now is likely to later introduce new transaction-related revenue streams.

- In the U.S., Zillow itself attempted a bold move downstream with Zillow Offers (iBuying, where Zillow would directly buy/sell homes). That venture ultimately was pulled back, but it showed portals trying to capture the transaction value (in that case, acting as principal). While iBuying had challenges, the data from it did give Zillow insight into the pain points of transactions and consumer expectations for speed. Zillow has since refocused on a “housing super-app” vision – a one-stop place where you can find a home, finance it, and close on it digitally. They are rolling out integrations for mortgage pre-approval and a showing scheduling app (ShowingTime) etc., to create a seamless flow on their platform.

Beagel’s Infrastructure Model – A Case in Point:

See Appendix for a detailed case study. In brief, Beagel provides an open-API, white-label offer management system that can plug into any property portal or brokerage site. It demonstrates how portals can outsource or partner for transaction tech rather than building from scratch. By integrating such a platform, a portal allows buyers to place bids online, agents to manage offers in real-time, and all parties to remain informed. The result is greater transparency and efficiency: Beagel’s data shows more bids per property and faster deal cycles when done online. Crucially, it keeps the interactions on the portal (or affiliated system) rather than dissipating into private emails or phone calls. For a portal, adopting this kind of infrastructure could mean instead of losing a lead to an agent and not knowing the outcome, the portal stays

involved through to the sale, potentially earning a referral fee or upselling other services.

Why AI Can't Easily Replicate This (Yet):

An AI assistant could certainly assist a user through some steps (like remind them to sign a document or even autofill forms via voice instructions), but coordinating multiple parties and ensuring propriety is another matter. Portals have the opportunity to become indispensable by handling the messy, bureaucratic, yet necessary parts of transactions. If a buyer's agent, the seller's agent, the buyer, and seller are all using a portal-mediated system to negotiate and complete a sale, an AI trying to intervene would actually have to interface with that system, likely through the portal's APIs or not at all. In that scenario, the portal remains the backbone, and the AI might actually enhance rather than replace the experience (e.g., an AI might help the user navigate the portal's transaction checklist). This is a far stronger position for the portal than being a passive data source.

Building Moats via Ecosystem: By going deeper, portals also change their identity from just a media company (selling ads) to a fintech or proptech platform enabling transactions. This often comes with new revenue models: facilitating mortgages (earning lender fees), title services, moving services, etc. It also may foster network effects beyond listings – for example, if agents find that running offers through a portal gets them better results or saves time, they will insist on using that portal for their clients, reinforcing the portal's position with the professionals (who are the paying customers). It becomes

much harder for an AI-only solution to break in if the industry professionals are saying: “Please use the portal’s system to submit your offer – that’s our standard process.” In essence, the portal can become part of the standard toolkit of buying a home, not just a place to shop.

User Experience Consideration: The ultimate goal is a more integrated user experience where a buyer might: find a home on the portal → click “I’m interested” → get guided through next steps (schedule visit, talk to a mortgage advisor, make an offer, etc.) all within the portal’s environment. If portals achieve this, then even if an AI assistant initially introduced a property to the buyer, the assistant would hand off the user to the portal for the heavy lifting. The portal retains the user through to close. It’s a handoff analogous to how some travel aggregators hand you off to actually book on an airline’s site – the airline’s site handles ticketing (transaction) because it must, and aggregator can’t issue tickets on its own easily. Similarly, the complexity of a property deal might naturally force a handoff back to the portal or integrated systems at some point – and portals want to make sure they are the ones catching that handoff, not some new transaction startup.

Quantitative Case for Deeper Integration: In the European real estate market, portals primarily generate revenue through subscription-based models, where real estate agents pay fixed fees to list properties. This approach contrasts with per-lead payment systems prevalent in other regions. An Online Marketplaces study analysing over 600 real estate portals globally

found that 39% operate on a subscription model, with agents paying monthly fees for listing services and enhanced exposure.

The European real estate sector is substantial, with the EU-27 residential real estate transactions market projected to reach a transaction value of \$1.15 trillion by 2025. This vast market presents significant opportunities for portals to expand their revenue streams beyond traditional listing fees.

Portals stand to not only defend their position, but potentially gain significant new revenue if they capture transaction services. To illustrate with a simple comparison: an agency might be worth, say, €500-€1,000 per month in fees to a portal. But a home transaction involves thousands of euros in commissions, plus thousands more in ancillary services (loan interest, insurance, legal fees, etc.). If a portal can even capture a small slice of those via package upsell, or services cross sell, that could dwarf advertising revenues. It's the classic argument of moving further up the value chain. Now, portals likely won't become brokers en masse (regulatory burden, conflict with agent customers), but they can still take pieces: marketplace fees for services, premium consumer subscriptions for concierge service, services cross sell etc. The addressable market of real estate transactions (multi-trillions globally) is orders of magnitude larger than real estate advertising (mere billions). The strategic question isn't just defence (against AI) but offence: can portals grow into this larger market? Those that do will be far less fragile to traffic shifts at the top of funnel.

The threat of agentic AI can be a catalyst for portals to reinvent themselves as transaction-centric platforms. By focusing on what AI cannot do well –

ensuring data accuracy, compliance, human collaboration, and a trusted process – portals can retain relevance and even increase their importance. The next decade could see leading portals transform into full-stack real estate ecosystems, where Agentic AI is a gateway rather than a competitor. The final section provides a concise case study of such a transformation model in practice (Beagel) and wraps up with key takeaways for C-suite leaders plotting their path forward.

AI assistants may excel at aggregating data and assisting with property search, but they cannot replicate the intricate workflows, compliance, and security requirements that are essential to closing a real estate deal. This is where portals have the opportunity to redefine their role and create an unassailable moat.

Deeper Integration = Transaction Positioning

The crucial moment in any property transaction occurs once an offer is made. At this point, the portal or platform managing the transaction becomes embedded in the system. While AI may direct users to listings and help narrow down options, it cannot manage the legal, financial, and regulatory intricacies that follow once an offer is placed. This is the real space that portals can occupy.

Offer Handling and Secure Transactions

For portals, the next step in securing their role lies in the offer process. By providing tools for agents and buyers to make and manage offers digitally, portals can ensure that they remain an integral part of the transaction, not just

the property search. This includes managing real-time bids, allowing buyers to securely submit offers, and providing sellers with an accurate, transparent view of the current market interest. In the absence of this infrastructure, AI assistants will bypass portals and send leads directly to agents, bypassing the platform altogether.

Portals must ensure that this process is seamless, secure, and compliant. Facilitating agents in identity verification, proof of funds, compliance documentation, and escrow services will make portals indispensable throughout the entire lifecycle of the transaction.

Escrow and Regulatory Flow

Real estate transactions require strict adherence to regulatory standards. Portals that can integrate secure escrow systems and ensure agents regulatory compliance will solidify their role as trusted intermediaries. By facilitating essential steps like contract generation, deposit handling, and ensuring all parties meet legal requirements, portals can maintain their relevance even as AI assistants dominate the early stages of search.

Additionally, these features—offer handling, proof of funds, and compliance—are difficult to scale without robust, localised infrastructure. AI assistants, in their current form, are ill-equipped to navigate these complexities. They cannot provide the level of data security or the liability assurances that portals can. The audit trail, contract generation, and legal documentation needed for a real estate transaction are critical and cannot be easily bypassed by an AI

agent. This gives portals an opportunity to establish themselves as essential infrastructure in the transaction process.

Smoothing the Journey Beyond Qualification

As buyer intent solidifies and the offer stage is reached, portals can drive the transaction forward, creating a unified workflow from offer submission to deal closure. This is where AI's capabilities—limited to surface-level data processing—fall short. Agents, however, still require a reliable, transparent, and secure platform for managing offers, overseeing regulatory processes, and ensuring that funds are securely transferred.

Portals that move beyond search and listings into this deeper transaction space are establishing themselves as transaction facilitators, not just information sources. This is where the true value lies. AI assistants cannot handle these workflows. They cannot facilitate payments, verify contractual agreements, or ensure compliance with fair housing laws or anti-money laundering regulations.

Integrating Deeper Infrastructure

Some portals have already started to make this transition. For example, MyHome.ie has evolved beyond listing properties to deliver live offer workflows, agent-facing tools, and infrastructure that sits inside the actual deal. The ability to manage offers, facilitate buyer identification, and track compliance within the portal transforms it from a simple listing platform into a trusted transaction partner.

The more integrated the platform, the harder it becomes for AI to bypass it. As real estate transactions become more digitally native, portals have a

significant opportunity to own the critical stages of the process, ensuring that buyers and sellers interact within a secure, legally compliant environment.

The Move from Lead Capture to Transaction Facilitation

The AI threat is clear: AI-driven assistants are becoming smarter and more capable, but they will never fully replace the transaction infrastructure that portals can offer. While AI can certainly guide consumers to listings and help them narrow their choices, it cannot replace the value of secure, compliant transaction management.

Portals must move from the business of capturing leads to facilitating entire transactions. This includes integrating identity verification, offer management, payment processing, and legal compliance into their platform. In doing so, they will turn their platform into the only place consumers and agents need to be, moving deeper into the transaction and thereby reducing the threat of AI disintermediation.

The future of real estate portals will be shaped by their ability to become part of the transaction infrastructure—from the offer stage through to closing. By facilitating secure, compliant, and seamless transaction workflows, portals can ensure that even in a world dominated by AI assistants, they remain essential to the real estate ecosystem. The time to move beyond just listings and into full transaction support is now. The next moat for real estate portals lies in the digital backbone for the entire property transaction lifecycle.



8. Overall Conclusion

Real estate portals sit at a crossroads. On one side is the status quo which has been lucrative: serving as the indispensable gateway for home seekers and charging the industry for access to this audience. On the other side is a rapidly approaching future where AI-driven assistants mediate how consumers search and make decisions, threatening to erode portals' gatekeeper position. The analysis in this paper makes it clear that while the risk from agentic AI is real and cannot be ignored, portals are not helpless. They have assets – rich data, industry connections, trusted brands, and domain expertise – that generic AI entrants lack. But to leverage these assets, portal operators must act decisively to innovate their business model and technology stack.

Key conclusions and recommendations:

- **Anticipate the Shift, Don't Dismiss It:** C-suite leaders should acknowledge that a portion of users will begin to use AI as their first touch for property search. Just as mobile didn't kill portals but changed how they had to deliver content, AI will change user expectations. Portals should experiment with integrating AI (for instance, offering their own chatbots or voice search features within their platforms) to meet users halfway. However, they must also prepare for traffic patterns possibly shifting and have strategies to collaborate with or supply data to AI channels in a controlled way (perhaps via APIs that include branding or referral links so that an AI answer still points back to the portal in some fashion).

- **Double Down on Data Quality and Trust:** In an AI-saturated information landscape, being the source of truth becomes a competitive advantage. Portals should continue to invest in data quality – fast updates, verified listings, rich media – and highlight these in messaging. If an AI gives a wrong answer about a listing but the portal is known to have up-to-the-minute verified info, serious buyers will cross-check. Marketing the portal as the “accurate, trusted” source (perhaps even providing an AI fact-checker on their site to counter AI misinformation) could channel users back when it matters. Portals might even explore legal avenues to protect data from unauthorised scraping, though that is a complex route; a better approach is making the user want to come to the official source for depth and certainty.
- **Build/Buy Partnership Capabilities:** To execute on the transaction integration vision, portals can either build in-house or partner. Given time is of the essence, partnering with specialised proptech firms (like Beagel for offers, or others for digital contracting and escrow) can accelerate the timeline. Corporate development teams should scout for startups or vendors that provide modules of the transaction that can integrate with the portal’s user accounts and workflow. The goal is a one-stop user journey. If building in-house, prioritise features that keep buyers and sellers engaged post-discovery (e.g., a “Make an Offer” button, a deal-room for each listing once an offer is in, etc.).

- **Educate and Onboard the Industry:** Any portal-led push deeper into transactions will involve real estate agents and brokers, who might be wary or see it as encroachment. It's crucial to get industry buy-in by positioning these tools as enabling, not replacing, the agent. For instance, online offer systems can be sold to agents as a way to get more instructions and simplify their paperwork, rather than a way to cut them out. Training, customer support, and perhaps flexible models (allow the agent to control some settings, etc.) will ease adoption. The more agents endorse a portal's end-to-end platform, the more consumers will flow into it by default upon an agent's recommendation. In parallel, keep regulators in the loop to ensure any new services comply with local laws (e.g., handling of earnest money via an online system must meet escrow regulations, etc.).
- **Monitor Metrics Beyond Traffic:** As portals transition, success should be measured not only in classic terms (unique visitors, page views) but also in new metrics: number of offers submitted through platform, number of transactions closed with portal involvement, attachment rate of mortgages or services sold, user retention from search to offer, etc. These will indicate if the portal is truly capturing more of the funnel. Over time, one might even accept a scenario where raw traffic from Google or SEO might drop (as AI takes some share) if the portal is making more revenue per user through deeper engagement on-platform. The business model mix could shift from

predominantly advertising to more transaction-driven revenue. This shift can be positive for those who manage it – transactions and services revenue can be more stable or higher margin in some cases than advertising, and less dependent on constant lead flow.

In facing agentic AI, portals should heed the lessons of those who faced disruption before: embrace the new technology's capabilities, but anchor them to your strengths. A portal might integrate AI into its interface (like a natural language home search that feels like ChatGPT but is powered by the portal's own engine and data). At the same time, it should leverage the one thing an outside AI lacks – the willingness of market players to transact on a secure, neutral platform. Portals can be that platform.

The roadmap ahead likely involves a portal experience that is part marketplace, part transaction facilitator. In such a future, a consumer might converse with a portal-provided AI assistant that knows the user's preferences (via their account data) and has controlled access to the portal's listings and transaction tools. That is a powerful combination that could outshine a generic assistant. Achieving this will require investments in AI, partnerships in fintech/ proptech, and possibly reimagining the portal's revenue model. But for those who succeed, the reward is not just defending their turf, but expanding it – potentially capturing value from the entire real estate transaction lifecycle, not just the advertising slice.

Summary

Agentic AI is a wake-up call for real estate portals. The threat to top-of-funnel dominance is real, but it is also a catalyst to innovate. Portals must evolve from being online directories of listings to being platforms for transactions. The winners in the next era will be those who manage to marry the convenience and personalisation of AI with the structure, trust, and comprehensive service of a full-stack real estate platform. For C-suite operators willing to take up this challenge, the path forward is challenging but clear – go deeper, offer more, and make your portal indispensable from the moment a buyer imagines their new home to the moment they close the deal.



9. The Devil's Advocate Perspective

AI's Impact Might Be Overstated

- **Risk of Overhype:** The paper places heavy emphasis on the imminent threat posed by AI assistants like ChatGPT and Siri, especially in the context of top-of-the-funnel disruption. While it's true AI adoption is rising, its capacity to meaningfully replace portals—especially in the near term—may be overstated. AI assistants can handle certain queries, but complex property searches, particularly for investment properties or high-value homes, often require human oversight and deeper market insights that current AI systems cannot provide reliably.
- **Consumer Trust in Portals:** Trust and brand loyalty remain massive strengths for established portals. For most consumers, portals like Rightmove, Zillow, and Zoopla are not just databases—they are trusted brands. AI assistants might supplement but not necessarily displace the direct experience of engaging with a reputable, structured portal.

Riposte to Critique

While there are valid points regarding the current limitations of AI and the trust consumers place in established portals, the reality is that the technology doesn't need to fully replicate or replace portals to disrupt them. As technology continues to advance rapidly, driven by Moore's Law, what might seem insufficient today could become the norm in as little as 18 months—an incredibly short period in the real estate industry but a long one in the tech space.

AI's potential lies not in fully replacing portals but in disrupting the top of the funnel where simple queries, initial property searches, and customer engagement are currently dominated by portals. AI assistants are already "good enough" to handle a significant portion of these tasks, often with greater speed and convenience. This shift is not about replacing human insight—it's about streamlining the early stages of property discovery.

Portals, no matter how trusted, cannot compete with the scalability and 24/7 availability of AI. Consumers are increasingly expecting more convenience, and AI-powered assistants can deliver faster, more personalised responses without the limitations of human intervention or manual database searching. Over time, as AI systems improve and evolve, the gap between what AI can offer and traditional portals will continue to narrow, making them a viable competitor in the consumer journey.

Trust and brand loyalty remain important, but these factors won't be enough to keep portals at the top of the funnel if consumers find AI-based solutions to be faster, more efficient, and more in line with their expectations. The disruption will happen not when AI replaces portals, but when AI starts capturing market share at the top of the funnel, forcing portals to adapt.

The argument that AI's impact is overstated underestimates the speed at which technology evolves. While portals' trusted brands may still hold significant sway, the competitive landscape is shifting quickly, and

portals must find ways to integrate and leverage AI to remain relevant in the coming years.

Portals Might Not Need to ‘Go Deeper into the Transaction’

- **Skepticism on Transaction Facilitation:** While the paper argues portals should delve into transaction facilitation, this may not align with the core value proposition for many portals. Traditionally, portals make money by advertising and lead generation. Adding transaction layers might introduce unnecessary complexity and regulatory burden. Portals like Zillow’s failed iBuying experiment show that jumping into the transaction side can lead to operational and financial headaches. Portals may choose to remain in the “discovery” phase because it’s a much simpler, less risky business model.
- **Lack of Clear ROI:** It’s unclear how profitable such transaction-based moves could be. While real estate transactions generate substantial amounts, portals would need to compete directly with brokers and real estate professionals who are experts in managing these processes. Moving into these areas could dilute their brand and potentially alienate partners—agents, for example—who are integral to their business model.

Riposte to Critique

The concern that portals moving into transaction facilitation could introduce unnecessary complexity and regulatory burden is valid but overlooks a crucial aspect of real estate’s future evolution. Portals must consider expanding into transaction facilitation for the agents to maintain their relevance in a rapidly changing market. This is less about creating new revenue streams and more about protecting their client base. As AI continues to disrupt the industry, portals need to adapt their service offerings or risk being bypassed by smarter, more

agile competitors. It's not about becoming the agency, it's about giving tools to the agency. How they use them is, as always, up to the agency. The portal is not, and probably never should, at scale, be the agency.

Indeed, portals already have diverse revenue models across regions—some in the U.S. are lead-based, while the UK follows a subscription model, and markets like REA in Australia operate a seller-paid listing model. The key here is localisation: each market has unique dynamics that must be taken into account when designing new offerings. Portals that have established presence of mind through strong brand recognition and market share must leverage that to smooth the customer journey and protect themselves from being disintermediated by AI tools that make transactions more seamless.

The evolution into transaction facilitation doesn't mean portals must become brokers. Instead, they should focus on streamlining processes that support the agent and consumer—such as verified buyer identities, digital offer management, and escrow capabilities. AI is capable of disrupting the current funnel if portals do not act now to secure their position and broaden the scope of services offered to users. By using their established presence to expand into transaction workflows, portals can create a deeper moat before AI-driven competitors can erode their control over consumer interactions.

Rather than waiting for a new revenue model to emerge, portals must recognise that localising deployment to suit market demands—along with staying ahead of AI disruption—ensures they can stay in the

transaction process while still empowering agents. This isn't about diluting brand value, but defending it against future disintermediation. Portals that can combine their existing presence of mind with transaction facilitation will ensure they're positioned as indispensable partners in the real estate ecosystem, even as AI reshapes the landscape.

Potential Fragmentation in the Real Estate Space

- **Bigger Markets May Not Bite:** The report assumes that moving into deeper transaction management is a “natural” evolution for all portals. However, markets are highly fragmented—especially in regions like Europe—where property laws, cultural norms, and customer expectations vary widely. Some portals may find that local regulations and market conditions are barriers to integrating deeper transaction services. For instance, in some countries, the legalities around escrow or the verification process can be so complicated that even the best technology stack would fail to overcome the hurdles.
- **User Demand vs. Tech:** Do users really want portals to manage every aspect of their property transaction? Many homebuyers and sellers are still comfortable with traditional processes and might prefer leaving the transactional side to agents or specialists, not a portal. The push for portals to “do everything” could backfire if the tech doesn’t add significant value beyond what’s already available.

Riposte to Critique

The concern about potential fragmentation in the real estate market, particularly in diverse regions like Europe, is understandable but overlooks a crucial nuance: there is no “one size fits all” solution. The future of portals moving into deeper transaction facilitation is not about imposing a universal model on every market. Instead, it’s about understanding the local dynamics—property laws, consumer expectations, and the needs of agents—and facilitating the journey

from discovery to transaction in a way that works within those specific contexts.

In fragmented markets, such as Europe, where property laws and customer preferences can vary significantly, portals must work with local stakeholders—agents, regulators, and consumers—to smooth the journey rather than disrupt it. The core value proposition isn't to replace agents or create friction, but to empower them. The agent remains the relationship manager, owning the customer and the sale, but portals can help by providing infrastructure and support to streamline processes, from verified buyer identities to seamless offer management.

For instance, portals can facilitate the transaction process in markets where traditional steps are complicated or inefficient. The brand value attaches where the user wants it—whether through a more seamless experience for both buyers and sellers or through trusted agents navigating the transactional side. This shift is not about displacing agents; it's about empowering them further into the journey, just as portals currently deliver leads. By extending their role, portals can support agents through additional services, ultimately ensuring they remain in control of the transaction while still benefitting from streamlined processes.

In short, localisation is key. There is no presumption that all markets should adopt the same approach, but tailored solutions that account for local regulations, user needs, and agent preferences will allow portals to evolve without overwhelming the market or creating unnecessary

friction. It's about working alongside agents to enhance the transaction process, rather than forcing a blanket solution on every market.

Appendix



Offer 1 \$

Offer 2 \$\$

Offer 3 \$\$\$

Case Study – Beagel’s Infrastructure Model for Digital Transactions

Background: Beagel is an Irish proptech company offering a white-label platform for real estate offers and transaction management. Beagel observed that while property search had moved online, the offer and negotiation process was often stuck in the past (phone calls, emails, and secrecy). They built an open API-driven solution that any portal or real estate agency can integrate to handle offers digitally, with features like real-time bid updates, identity verification of bidders, and audit trails for compliance.

How Beagel Works: A portal or agency that integrates Beagel essentially adds functionality for users to submit offers online on a listing. All parties related to that property (the selling agent, the seller, and other bidders) can then track the offers in real time through a dashboard. The system can send instant notifications of new offers or changes, and it allows bidders to increase offers securely. Agents retain control – they can set offer parameters, deadlines, or require approval for certain thresholds – but they benefit from the efficiency (no more playing phone tag to inform everyone of the latest offer). The portal benefits by keeping the user on-site and recording all that valuable data.

Adoption and Impact: Beagel’s platform gained traction in Ireland and has been piloted or adopted in other markets by forward-thinking brokerages and

portals. As noted earlier, it processed over €6billion in offers, indicating strong market appetite for online offers. User feedback has shown that it increases trust in the process – buyers appreciate the transparency (they know exactly how many offers are in and where they stand) and sellers often get higher prices due to the competitive but fair environment. Agents, initially cautious, found that it didn't replace their role but rather freed them from administrative burdens and expanded their reach (a buyer can place an offer 24/7, not just during business hours, making agencies effectively “always open”).

One real-life example involved a regional estate agency that white-labeled Beagel's tech. They reported that properties using the online offer system received on average 20% more offers than comparable properties using traditional offline offers (attributed to the ease of participation for buyers) and the time from listing to a deal agreed reduced significantly.

Key Takeaways for Portals:

Beagel's case illustrates a few important principles:

- **Plug-and-Play vs. Build:** Rather than developing an online offer system from scratch (which could take years and require change management expertise), portals can partner to quickly add this capability. This means a faster response to the market demands for digital transactions, important in staying ahead of AI or new entrants.
- **Maintaining Control and Brand:** Even with a third-party solution, portals can keep it under their brand umbrella (white-labeled). Users making an offer through, say, “PortalX Offers” may not know the underlying engine is

Beagel – to them it’s a service provided by PortalX. This preserves the portal’s brand value and user relationship. It’s a contrast to, for instance, telling the user “go use this other site for offers and let us know how it goes,” which breaks continuity.

- **Data Insights:** The data generated from online offer flows is incredibly rich. Where data protection laws allow, portals can see not just property views, but actions, at what price points the interest spiked, how quickly the market responded, etc. In Ireland, Beagel’s data is being used to provide market intelligence for agents, brokerage owners and clients. This kind of data is something AI cannot gather on its own (since AI can only analyse what’s published, and offers data is typically private unless done on such a platform).

- **User Experience and Trust Gains:** By handling a sensitive part of the process, portals position themselves as a more integral part of the transaction. Users of a portal’s offer system likely need to create a verified account, provide identity details, etc., which increases the seriousness of the engagement. A side effect is that it also filters leads – casual browsers won’t go through ID verification just to toy around; those who do are high-intent users. Agents then get more qualified leads/offers. Everyone wins in terms of efficiency. And notably, no AI assistant today can replace the reassurance a buyer gets knowing their offer was officially recorded on a trusted platform and that they will get a recognised confirmation of the offer. It addresses the emotional aspect of one of life’s biggest purchases: people want to know the process is legitimate and fair.

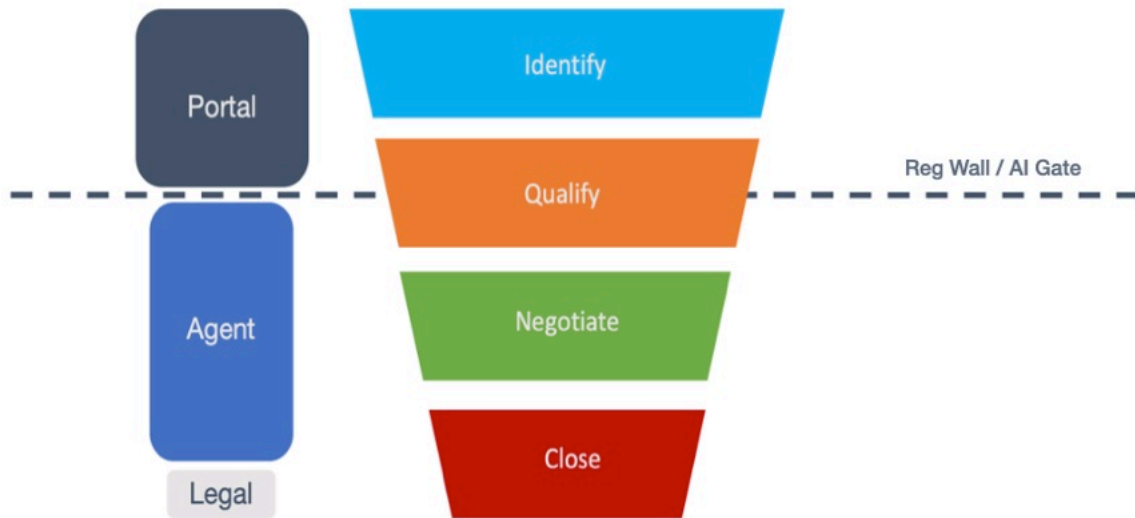
Future Extensions

Platforms like Beagel are evolving. Where marketplaces demand it, extending into full transaction management – after an offer is accepted, opening a secure portal for contract uploads, financing updates, escrow and eventually closing paperwork. A portal that has this integrated would basically facilitate everything except the physical move. At that point an AI assistant isn't competing against a static website; it's up against a transactional pipeline that has multi-party network effects (buyers, sellers, agents, banks, all interacting). For an AI to disrupt that, it would have to either replicate all those integrations or convince all parties to switch simultaneously – a very high bar.x

Conclusion

Beagel's success in its niche demonstrates that digital infrastructure can enhance the real estate process without displacing the human professionals. It provides a template for portals: by serving as the digital backbone of transactions, they remain indispensable. This case also underscores the broader thesis of this paper: that the next competitive moat for portals will be built not on owning the eyeballs alone, but on owning the rails on which property transactions run. Agentic AI might change the locomotive (how consumers are finding things), but if the rails lead into the portal's station, the portal still ensures the journey's completion and collects the tickets.

Customer Journey Illustration





About Beagel: Beagel is a white label, enterprise grade, real estate bidding engine, connecting buyers, sellers, their agents, and their teams live in transparent, trustworthy transactions.

With Beagel, offers can be placed, received, countered, accepted or rejected worldwide, 24/7 regardless of the regulatory environment, even outside office hours. Beagel turns real estate agencies into globally active, always-on businesses with services that are available when consumers want them. This technology increases agent efficiency, improves customer experience and increases agency productivity.

For more, go to beagel.com.