

## After a big 2023, make no mistake: Artificial intelligence is here to stay

A year after ChatGPT burst onto the scene, real estate professionals told Inman that AI and AI-backed companies are on the way to becoming a baked-in part of the modern real estate business



Canva

BY JIM DALRYMPLE II

December 26, 2023

On Nov. 17, chaos erupted at OpenAI.

For the preceding year, OpenAI had been one of the most famous companies in the world, thanks to its ChatGPT and DALL-E 2 artificial intelligence tools. Both tools had opened up to the public in late 2022, quickly going viral for their ability to create text and art, respectively, that felt surprisingly natural.

Then in mid-November, OpenAI's board of directors voted to remove founder and CEO Sam Altman. The conflict had to do with differing views about the technology's safety, but soon hundreds of the company's staffers signed a letter

demanding Altman's return. The pressure campaign worked; within three days Altman was back.

Though the world has since moved on, the kerfuffle represents a critical turning point for AI. After Altman's company opened its platform to the public last year — and numerous other firms followed suit — the sector was the subject of nearly limitless hype. Everyone experimented with AI. It was discussed endlessly in Facebook groups, including those dedicated to real estate. And there seemed to be no technological corner that might not be improved by artificial intelligence.

But the November chaos at OpenAI removed some of the luster, effectively ending a period in which AI was seen as a kind of technological multitool for every imaginable problem. It was, in other words, a kind of coda for AI's first big hype cycle.

Against that backdrop, Inman wanted to know how real estate professionals' use of AI has evolved over the course of 2023. Are industry pros still psyched about AI? Are they still using it day-to-day? Has the technology lived up to its early potential?

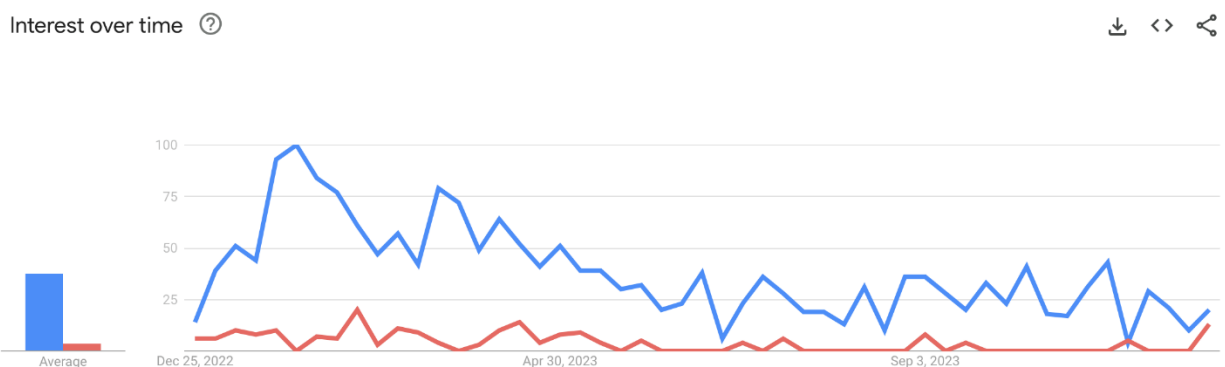
To find out, we reached out to the same people who spoke with Inman for a series of articles on AI earlier in the year. The idea was to see if the early adopters were still believers in AI and, if so, how they were using it all these months later.

Perhaps the most telling sign that times have changed is that many of the real estate professionals who were excited to talk about artificial intelligence early in 2023 did not respond to Inman's requests to reconnect in December. Clearly, a significant amount of enthusiasm has abated.

But some individuals did respond, and for the most part, they said that they're still using AI in real estate. Their use has evolved, becoming more specialized and nuanced. Although they generally agreed that the hype has died down, they also said AI remains useful for real estate professionals, and will for the foreseeable future. It's not, in other words, going away any time soon.

## By the numbers

Before getting into what real estate pros had to say about AI, it's worth looking briefly at the numbers, which do show the topic losing what's sometimes called "mindshare," or how much of public consciousness it occupies. The chart below, for instance, shows Google searches for news on "ChatGPT," in blue, and "chatbot," in red, with interest in both terms peaking in mid to late winter and falling ever since.



Credit: Google

General searches for "artificial intelligence" have held more steady, but they too peaked months ago, in April. There was a notable uptick in search traffic in late October, but that appears to have coincided with a Biden Administration Executive Order on safe AI development — a newsworthy moment, but hardly something that represents a growing interest in the practical use of artificial intelligence technology.

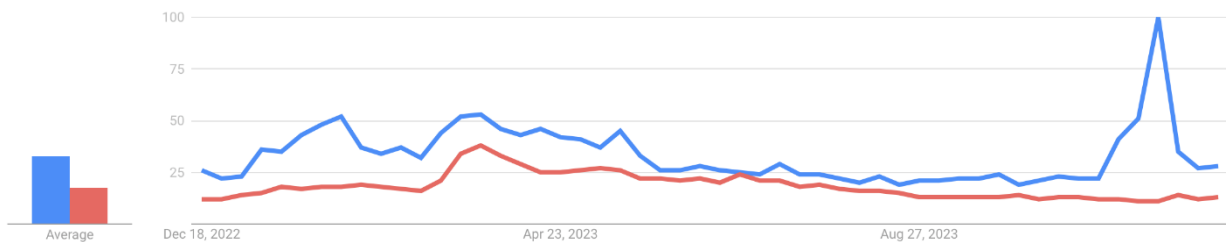
Interest over time [?](#)



Credit: Google

Searches for OpenAI have similarly waned over the course of 2023, with a notable exception coming in November during the Altman fiasco mentioned above. Interestingly, searches for Midjourney, an AI image generator that is widely considered to be better than OpenAI's DALL-E 2, have followed almost the exact same trajectory, despite ongoing advancements and praise.

Interest over time [?](#)



Credit: Google

None of this is to say that AI isn't still a buzzy topic.

Instead, the point is to remember just how buzzy AI was in early 2023. With major world events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine taking up

fewer headlines, there were few topics getting more attention than artificial intelligence.

Over the course of the year, however, other events, such as the war in Gaza or the imploding Oceangate submarine, gradually consumed more media attention. This was particularly true in real estate; the first half of 2023 was dominated by interest in things like AI headshots and listing descriptions. But by mid-year, headlines were dominated by a scandal at the National Association of Realtors and a major verdict in a high-profile commission lawsuit. In light of those major news events, AI was pushed to the back burner.

### **Persona-hood**

So how has this shift in mind share impacted the way real estate pros use AI?

In short, it's forcing them to go deeper.

When ChatGPT debuted, one of the first things many people did was go to the tool's URL and start talking to the bot. Initially, it was an almost magical experience as a computer responded conversationally to questions and provided smooth copy in a variety of genres.



Dean Cacioppo

But Dean Cacioppo — founder and CEO of real estate marketing firm One Click SEO, who first spoke with Inman about AI in April — said that using AI in this way has limitations.

“What ChatGPT is doing is flooding the world, the web, with a bunch of content that all is very, very similar,” he explained. “It doesn’t stand out so you really need to have a particular voice.”

Cacioppo said the repetitive use of certain words in AI-generated content has come to function almost like a watermark; for people in the know, it’s easy to quickly notice those words and realize a bot wrote the copy.

This “watermark” version of AI has led to a few different developments. On the one hand, Cacioppo said numerous new companies are popping up right now that have ChatGPT baked into their technology’s architecture. In other words, many people are still interacting with AI chatbots today, but fewer may realize it because the bots are working in the background on third-party sites.

“We’re seeing people move in the direction of specific products that are creating an interface where you can just put information in,” Cacioppo added.

The other new development Cacioppo has seen and participated in is what he called “personas.” This is an old marketing idea, wherein companies try to imagine their ideal customers. But in the case of AI, the persona is more fleshed out and, for lack of a better term, real.

“You can train it so it can write and act and have the essence of a particular person,” he added.

Cacioppo provided an example of a writing persona he has been creating for a doctor. The initial prompt that he fed into ChatGPT ran more than 1,000 words

and included numerous details about the doctor’s background and practice. ChatGPT responded with nearly 200 words, and thereafter Cacioppo and the bot engaged in a lengthy back-and-forth in an effort to create both an accurate and voice-appropriate persona. Cacioppo said the process took multiple months, but that gradually bots can be trained to write in complex, personalized ways.

“We create this person within a chat by feeding it information,” he added.

Cacioppo’s process is significant here because it highlights the more complex — and time-consuming — ways users are turning to AI now, compared to the beginning of the year. Whereas ChatGPT was once a one-and-done tool for writing quick copy — and still is for some users — people like Cacioppo are now turning to the tech to build deeper systems that require months of work. And in Cacioppo’s case, he remains a believer in the potential of AI to improve the real estate business.

### **The chatbots and the chat notes**

Nick Niehaus, co-founder of real estate training firm Business Video School, also first spoke to Inman about AI in April, when the technology was regularly making headlines. This month, he told Inman that the buzz around artificial intelligence has indeed died down since then, though that doesn’t mean people are abandoning it.



Nick Niehaus

“The hype cycle is dying but that also means there are several million people who are deep into it,” he said.

Like Cacioppo, Niehaus’ use of AI has become more complex over the course of 2023. For example, he told Inman that he recently built two tools that incorporate ChatGPT and which can potentially live on clients’ own websites. One of those tools is a video ideas generator and the other is a neighborhood matchmaker.

Niehaus said he created the tools as experiments and side projects, but the response from students of his training program has been positive — and he’s discovering the tools have serious potential for businesses.

“We’ve generated a couple thousand leads,” he said.

Niehaus is an enthusiastic user and early adopter when it comes to AI, though he did say his thinking has shifted somewhat this year regarding the technology’s potential dangers. Though he doesn’t especially fear a “Skynet scenario” — a reference to the apocalyptic robot uprising from the *Terminator* movies — he does think that AI could ultimately replace human jobs.

“There’s an attitude that it’ll create jobs, but I don’t know that I buy that,” he said. “We might be getting to a point where a lot of the stuff we don’t want to do could be automated. I think it’s going to be really good for business, but I could see it having a negative impact on the employee side of things.”

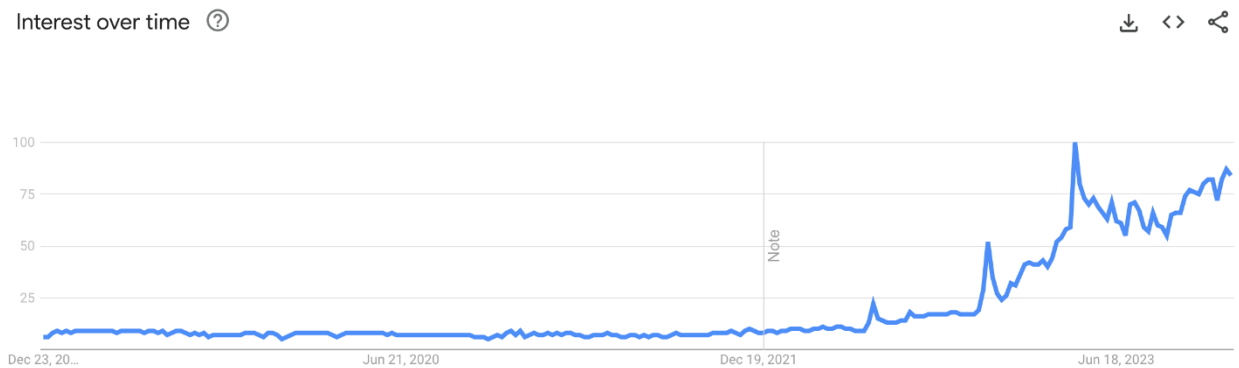
These comments highlight the fact that it’s still early days when it comes to AI, and that, while many early adopters remain enthusiastic, we just don’t know where exactly this technology is going over the long term.



## The machine mindset

The charts above show that AI's grip over the hearts and minds of the public has loosened somewhat during 2023.

But it's also worth noting at this point that the topic is still in an entirely different place compared to just a few years ago. The chart below, for instance, shows Google search interest in the term "artificial intelligence" over the last five years. What's obvious here is that, while interest has ebbed, it remains elevated compared to earlier in the decade.



Credit: Google

The reason this matters is because the end of a hype cycle can lead to different outcomes. In some cases, a new tech bauble fizzles and is forgotten. Good examples of this phenomenon are the now-forgotten conversation app Clubhouse and Amazon's Alexa Skills — both buzzy technologies in their day that are now relegated to the ash heap of history.

But there's another outcome that sees hyped-up technology simply fade into the fabric of everyday life, and that's how Dave Jones, co-owner of Windermere Abode in Tacoma, Washington, described AI. Jones was also among the cohort who spoke with Inman earlier this year about AI and, during a new conversation

this month, said he's still using the tech. But he compared it to Wikipedia or Google, sites that due to their success and ubiquity don't really inspire buzz anymore — but which are permanent and massive parts of the internet's infrastructure.



Dave Jones

“The way I think about it is, it's so ingrained in my daily life now,” Jones said. “I crossed that bridge probably in August, going into the fall.”

As an example, Jones briefly walked Inman through AI-powered meeting software Read.ai which, among other things, takes and transcribes notes from meetings. Jones said the technology effectively allows him to “be in two places at once.”

Jones envisions a future in which ever-advancing AI is built into the tools that everyone uses all the time, arguing that “it's going to be integrated into so many things that we're not going to have a choice.”

For real estate professionals, that'll likely mean AI will increasingly handle things like forms, marketing and even management of spreadsheets. In his own life, Jones said he couldn't even remember the last time he Googled something; instead he simply uses AI to find any information he needs.

“It's like an ebike,” he explained. “It helps me get to the places I'm going faster.”

The way AI has become baked into Jones' life and work offers a preview of the way it might gradually permeate the broader real estate industry, and life in general. And while for many people that isn't a reality yet, Jones urged real estate professionals in particular to start experimenting with the tech now.

"I would say be curious," Jones advised, "and take time to figure out where it can help you."