

K: BUSINESS

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Are Realtors at risk of being replaced by AI?

Experts say Colorado professionals need to incorporate the technology to survive

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Katie Birkholz poses for a portrait at her home in Boulder on Thursday. Birkholz used AI real estate platform Ridley to sell her family's home in Boulder last fall. HYOUNG CHANG — THE DENVER POST

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There is a lot Anna McCaffery dislikes about artificial intelligence.

For one, she worries children can't write a proper sentence without generative AI programs like ChatGPT.

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"Particularly for kids, it's dumbing things down that shouldn't be dumbed down," she said.

But the 73-year-old trusted AI to sell her Denver home instead of using a traditional real estate agent, and her experience warmed her opinion of the industry-disrupting technology.

"In this situation with selling my house and using the Ridley website, AI is a great addition," McCaffery said. "It's a great use of AI without abusing it. I'm coming around to AI."

Boulder-based AI real estate platform Ridley says it provides the services offered by traditional real estate agents — comparative price analysis, home preparation advice, listing on the MLS, marketing assistance, deadline and document tracking, and access to human experts if need be — for a flat fee instead of the traditional 6% commission. Fees range from \$1,500 to \$6,000, depending on the level of service.

AI is not new to the industry. Even human Realtors are incorporating artificial intelligence into their day-to-day operations — a move experts say is necessary if agents want to stay competitive in the rapidly evolving business. But Ridley is one of the first companies to tap into the niche of AI home-selling. The platform touts that sellers who use their service save more than \$40,000 on average.

"Colorado is a breeding ground for innovation. ... We have a lot of great real estate startups and new companies that are pushing the envelope and advancing the industry," said Cooper Thayer, a Realtor based in metro Denver and market spokesperson for the Colorado Association of Realtors.

Thayer doesn't believe the technology spells doomsday for human real estate agents. To succeed in the real estate business of the future, Thayer said agents should pass off the grunt work to AI and allow their humanity to shine with advice and advocacy that a computer program can't replicate.

"Most agents don't need to be concerned by being replaced by AI," Thayer said. "They need to be concerned by being replaced by agents who are utilizing AI. I think we're a long ways away from this profession being fully replaced by AI. I don't see that happening in the near term. Now, it's adopt or you'll be left behind." Note

Frustrated by fees

McCaffery met Prince Charming later in life, but he lived in Oklahoma. With the equity she amassed in the Cherry Creek four-bedroom, two-bathroom Craftsman bungalow she'd lived in since 2003, she said it made the most sense to sell and move states to be with him.

After investigating, McCaffery felt frustrated by her Realtor options. She bought and sold enough homes in her life to understand the process, she said, and felt gobsmacked by the commission she'd be paying a traditional Realtor. Note

"It's not rocket science, but you pay a huge amount of commission when you sell your home," said McCaffery, who estimated she'd pay tens of thousands in Realtor commission fees. "A real estate agent should make some money, but it seems overblown."

The Denverite heard about Ridley in the newspaper, placed a call to learn more and was impressed to get a call back from founder Mike Chambers.

In the spring of 2025, Chambers couldn't find a real estate agent willing to list his Boulder home for what he thought the property was worth. Plus, he said he was looking at paying a Realtor more than \$100,000 in commission.

"It was hard to wrap my head around how I was going to be receiving that much value," Chambers said. "I live in a neighborhood where homes sell themselves."

Chambers decided to sell the house himself and document the experiment on Instagram under the handle @realtorshateme to show people "the process wasn't nearly as complicated as we've all been led to believe."

He ended up featured in the New York Times — a product of "tapping into this ubiquitous frustration with the industry," he said.

Chambers didn't have a background in real estate, but his work in the software industry showed him a hole in the market — an AI agent that could help someone sell their home.

"Our intention with Ridley has never been to eliminate real estate agents," Chambers said, noting that Ridley can connect customers with human agents, too. "The role of every professional is going to evolve as a result of this AI shift."

In its first year, people using Ridley sold more than 300 homes. The average price of a Ridley customer's house is around \$1 million, Chambers said.

When Katie Birkholz and her family wanted to sell their \$1.9 million Boulder home last fall, she balked at the idea of paying more than \$50,000 in commission.

"We didn't feel like we needed the full-service hand-holding even though that's what we felt like we were getting with Ridley," Birkholz said.

Birkholz found Chambers' social media posts lamenting the traditional Realtor route and was sold. She chose Ridley and upgraded to a plan that included the regular AI offerings plus a licensed agent for pricing, negotiations and closing, all for a flat fee of \$4,000.

"We were thinking, 'Well, it's really not that expensive. What are we getting? Should we do this?'" Birkholz said. "We even had our mortgage broker try to sway us away from it, and I think he just wanted the business from the Realtor, and we were turned off by that. It reinforced the fact we were doing what was right for us."

Birkholz's south Boulder home sold for \$1.86 million after 44 days on the market. Birkholz said they listed the property a bit higher knowing they would bump down and attract more buyers.

"I don't think the AI missed a beat," Birkholz said. "It was laid out so well. I understand people might be scared to jump into it because they feel they need more guidance, but you get plenty of guidance."

Oh, the humanity

For at least a decade, Vivek Sah has warned real estate agents at conferences and trainings that their role is changing. The director of the University of Denver's Franklin L. Burns School of Real Estate and Construction Management said only agents who adapt will survive.

"If you're just offering pushing paperwork and opening doors and all those basic services which can any day be replaced, you cannot survive, so you have to evolve with the times and become more of an adviser providing valuable advice rather than just paperwork or doing the mundane chores that come with it," Sah said.

AI can be great for organizing emails, managing scheduling, spitting out price comparisons and writing marketing materials, Sah said.

A dedicated real estate agent must remind customers exactly what a human brings to the table. — Not

"The successful agent — the human agent — would be the one who would bring his or her expertise, understanding of the market, understanding of buyers and sellers, along with these AI tools," Sah said.

That was Brandi Wolff's intention when the Colorado Realtor co-founded Real AIQ, an AI platform created by licensed real estate agents that answers buyers' and sellers' questions for free and connects them with human agents, lenders, home inspectors and more.

Wolff, born and raised in Golden, was perturbed by the number of people using ChatGPT to guide them through real estate transactions.

"That can be really risky," Wolff said, pointing out that an AI platform is not a lawyer. "Ours is more of an educational platform to get people through a transaction and connect those buyers and sellers with real

professionals. We are not cutting out the real estate agent. We are pointing people to them when those people need those services. We don't think AI can completely replace real estate professionals in any meaningful sense."

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Real estate agents can often double as housing therapists, Wolff said. Managing a client's emotional wants and needs throughout the home-buying or -selling process is critical and best left to someone with a prefrontal cortex.

"AI can tend toward sycophancy," Wolff said. "A human can help someone whose judgment might be clouded by excitement stop and pause and say, 'Hey, I don't know that you're looking at all of these other factors. Let me help you understand.'"

McCaffery acknowledged that a first-time homebuyer may prefer using a traditional Realtor, but said she felt properly supported by her AI agent.

She secured five showings the day Ridley listed her Denver home.

The former marketing employee opted to write her own copy for the listing but appreciated running her words past the AI as another pair of proverbial eyes. The AI helped find a local photographer for her listing — one who called her back within minutes for a consultation, she was pleased to report.

After a month, McCaffery bumped the listing price down to \$915,000 from \$925,000. After two months, she had enough offers that she could pick which best suited her. She even got to know and form a relationship with the buyer, which she said was something that real estate agents had prevented in the past.

"This new way of selling a home probably works better for everybody," McCaffery said.

Thayer, with the Colorado Association of Realtors, said he believes real estate agents are more excited and curious about AI than fearful about it stealing their jobs. He said he doesn't feel like he's training his replacement by incorporating the technology into his practice.

"There is always going to be a little bit of fear and uncertainty when it comes to tech changing, but even those who have been around a long time seem to be pretty excited about AI and can see the value in automating the lower-level tasks to allow them to do the human things," Thayer said. "These transactions are so complex that we will always need people. The change in the industry is how many people we will need."