

A SHORT BOOK

Just Look

The birth of homvo

EDDIE CHANG

Why the biggest purchase of your life still expects you to answer the phone, and what an outsider decided to do about it. About forty minutes to read.

Before we start: my friend's daughter

A friend of mine, about my age, told me over dinner that his daughter messages him from her bedroom. Same house. Two floors apart. She wants to know what time dinner is, and his phone buzzes. He said it as a joke, and everyone at the table laughed, and then one by one they all admitted the same thing was happening in their houses. Nobody's teenager comes downstairs to ask. Nobody's teenager rings. They message, and they wait.

I went home and could not stop thinking about it. Not about the messaging. About everything else that girl does from that room.

She orders food and it arrives at the door. She buys clothes and sends half of them back. She has a bank account she has never seen a branch for. She watches short videos for an hour, some of them of houses she will never buy, in cities she will never live in. She checks things, prices, scores, the weather, what her friends are doing, constantly, effortlessly, and not once in the whole day does she speak to a stranger. She does not have to. Nothing she wants requires it.

And one day, not far off, she will want to know what her parents' house is worth. Or she will want to see what a flat near her first job looks like inside. And she will find that this one part of her life still expects her to fill in a form and wait for a phone call.

She will not fill in the form. I know this because I did not either, and I am thirty years older than her.

This book is about that gap. It is about why some things get born when they do, why the biggest industry in most people's lives has kept a gate that everyone else has taken down, and why an outsider, someone who had never sold a house in his life, ended up being the one to try and build the thing that sits before the gate.

I have kept it short. You can read it in one sitting. That is rather the point.

PART ONE

Why things get born

Nobody asked for it

I spent several years building an app for the insurance industry, and the thing I said most often in that time, to my team and to anyone who would listen, was this: the hard part is not giving customers what they ask for. The hard part is giving them what they cannot yet put into words.

Nobody asked for the iPhone. There was no petition. People were reasonably happy with their phones, and many of them thought a phone with no buttons was a silly idea. Nobody asked for a bank with no branches, or for a shop with no shop, or for a way to watch a stranger's kitchen renovation for three minutes at eleven o'clock at night. Nobody asked, because you cannot ask for something you have never seen.

What actually happens is quieter than that. A habit changes first. It changes in small ways, in living rooms and on buses and in bedrooms, and it changes for years before anyone with a product notices. Then somebody builds the thing that fits the habit that already exists, and to everyone else it looks like magic, or luck, or genius. It is usually none of those. It is somebody paying attention to a habit that had already moved.

Paying attention sounds easy. It is not, because the habit that has moved is invisible from inside the industry it is about to change. Travel agents in 1998 could not see that people had started comparing prices for fun. Bank managers in 2015 could not see that a twenty-year-old would rather open an account on a sofa than be welcomed into a branch. The people who saw it were, almost always, either very young or from somewhere else. They had no loyalty to the way things were done, because they had never done them that way.

I want to walk through three of those moments, three waves, because I lived through all of them and because I think the pattern is obvious once you see it laid out. Then I want to point the same pattern at houses, and show you what I saw.

If you already know the history, skip ahead. It will not take long either way.

The first wave, and the one that built Rightmove

I was already working in technology when the web arrived properly, in the second half of the nineties. It is hard to explain now how strange it felt. Amazon sold books, then everything. eBay let you buy a stranger's old camera. Expedia and Hotels.com put every hotel in the world on one screen, and suddenly the travel agent on the high street looked like a relic. Then, in 2004, Facebook.

The first wave taught people one thing above all: everything in one place. Search it, compare it, filter it, sort it by price. Before this, information was scattered and you went to a person to get it. After this, information was gathered and you went to a screen. The unit of the first wave was the listing. The great products of that era were great lists.

In Britain, in 2000, four large estate agency groups put their listings on a single website and called it Rightmove. Before that, if you wanted to know what was for sale in a town, you walked the high street and looked in windows, or you bought the local paper on the day the property section came out, or you registered with three agents and waited for envelopes of particulars to arrive in the post. Every agent held their own stock and their own secrets, and a buyer's first job was simply finding out what existed.

Rightmove ended that in about five years. It did to the property section of the local paper what Expedia did to the travel agent, and it did something subtler to the agents themselves. It took the one thing they had always guarded, knowledge of what was for sale, and made it public. What was left to the agent after that was the part the website could not do: the relationship with the seller, the valuation, the negotiation, the trust. The industry did not entirely notice that this had happened. It kept behaving as if the stock was the asset, when the stock had just become a commodity on somebody else's screen. By 2006 it was on the stock exchange. By 2018, people were spending a billion minutes a month on it. Last year it was nearly seventeen billion minutes for the year, and it holds close to nine tenths of all the time British people spend on property websites.

I am going to say something now that may surprise people who know what I do for a living. I think Rightmove is one of the best consumer products ever built in this country. If full marks is a hundred, it is a hundred and twenty. It does exactly what a first-wave product should do, and it does it better than almost anything else of its kind in the world. Nobody needs to beat it, and I would be suspicious of anyone who says they will.

Hold on to that thought, because it matters later. The gap I found is not in Rightmove. It is somewhere Rightmove was never designed to look.

The second wave, the phone in your pocket

In 2007 the iPhone arrived, and within a few years the web stopped being a place you went to and became a thing you carried. WhatsApp in 2009. Instagram in 2010. YouTube, which had existed since 2005, only really became a habit when it was in your hand on the bus. Uber, Airbnb, Deliveroo, all of them built on the simple fact that everyone now had a camera, a map and a card in the same small object.

The second wave taught two things.

The first is that the picture became the language. Before, you described things in words, or you read descriptions. After, you showed. A photo of the meal, a photo of the view, a photo of the flat. Instagram turned an entire generation into people who think first in images and only second in sentences.

The second is that the message replaced the call. This one happened to me without my deciding anything. Somewhere around 2012 or 2013, I noticed I had stopped ringing people. Not because I had a policy, but because a message was easier, quieter, and did not demand that the other person stop whatever they were doing. Everyone I knew went the same way at the same time. Nobody announced it. The habit simply moved.

There is a small test I use to tell which wave a business belongs to. Ask what happens at the moment a customer wants to act. If the answer is "someone will call you", the business is first wave, whatever its website looks like. If the answer is "you tap and it happens", it is second wave or later. Uber passed that test in 2012. Most banks passed it around 2016, kicking and screaming. The restaurant industry passed it the moment Deliveroo arrived and it discovered that people who would never ring to order would happily tap.

The estate agency industry noticed this wave, in its way. Agents got Instagram accounts. Listings got more photos, then better photos, then drone shots. But the way you actually did business with an agent did not change at all. You still rang, or you filled in a form and they rang you. The industry decorated itself with the second wave and kept its first-wave engine. It failed my small test, and it is still failing it today, in almost every branch in the country.

The third wave, the bedroom

The third wave is the one my friend's daughter lives in, and it is the one I think most people my age have not fully taken in, because it did not arrive with a single product the way the iPhone did. It crept.

TikTok, from about 2018 in this country. Monzo, Revolut and Starling, banks that exist only as an app, that a whole generation opened as their first account without ever considering the alternative. Uber Eats and Deliveroo, so that food is a tap, not a phone call. Amazon by tomorrow, or by tonight. Vinted, so that clothes go round in a loop between bedrooms. And now, since 2022, something that answers your questions in plain English, so that even looking things up no longer requires a search.

Ofcom measures this every year. In its latest report, an adult in Britain spends about four and a half hours a day online outside work. An eighteen to twenty-four year old spends six hours twenty minutes. Three quarters of that time is on a phone. YouTube alone is fifty-one minutes a day for the average adult, and for younger people TikTok is nearly the same again.

The third wave has one rule, and it is a rule the first two only hinted at: nobody in the loop. You do not speak to anyone to do anything. The food arrives, the money moves, the clothes come and go, the answer appears, and at no point is there a person you have to negotiate with, wait for, or explain yourself to. Looking is free. Looking asks nothing back. You can look at a thousand things and buy none of them and nobody will ring you to ask why.

That girl in the bedroom has grown up inside this rule. It is not a preference for her. It is the shape of the world.

Try a day of hers, from the inside. She wakes and the first thing in her hand is the phone. Breakfast is a video, three of them, seven of them. She pays for the bus with the same phone and the money leaves an account she opened in eight minutes on a sofa. At lunch she buys a jacket she saw someone wearing in a video that morning, and in the same minute lists the jacket she is wearing for sale. She checks whether her friend has read her message, and the answer is a tick. Dinner is ordered while she is still on the bus home, and the rider's little icon crawls across the map towards the house. In the evening she watches a stranger walk through a flat in Manchester, a barn in Wales, a house two streets away, and she saves the last one, for no reason, the way you might keep a postcard.

At no point in that day has she been asked to wait for a person. At no point has she been asked to prove she is serious before she is allowed to look. Every service she touched let her look first and decide later, or never. That is not laziness, and it is not rudeness. It is simply the standard she has been taught by everything she has ever used.

And property, the biggest purchase of her life, the thing her parents talk about at dinner, is the last large part of that world that still expects her to pick up the phone.

PART TWO

The person who does not answer

Twenty-three percent never answer

I did not need a survey to know what my friends' children were doing, but it turns out there is one, and it is worth quoting.

In April 2024, Uswitch asked two thousand British adults about their phone habits. Among eighteen to thirty-four year olds, twenty-three percent said they never answer the phone. Not rarely. Never. Sixty-one percent said they would rather have a message than a call. Sixty-eight percent said a call should be arranged in advance, by message, before it happens. And fifty-six percent said that when the phone rings unexpectedly, their first assumption is that something is wrong.

Read that last one again. For more than half of young adults, an unexpected call means bad news. So when a business rings them because they filled in a form, the feeling the business creates, before anyone has said a word, is dread.

Now look at how the property industry has worked for the whole of my time in Britain. You want to know what your home is worth. You find a form. The form asks for your name, your email and your phone number, and then it says someone will be in touch. That someone is an estate agent, and their job, quite reasonably, is to turn your curiosity into an instruction to sell. So they ring. And they ring again. And the person on the other end, if they are under forty, is looking at the screen and letting it go to voicemail.

Look at it from the agent's side for a moment, because it is no better there. A form comes in at half past nine. The agent rings at ten. Voicemail. Rings again after lunch. Voicemail. Sends an email that is never opened. Tries once more on Thursday and gets a curt "just curious, thanks" or nothing at all. The agent has spent four attempts and most of a week on a person who wanted a number and was never going to speak to anyone, and has learnt, reasonably, that online forms are full of people who are not serious. Both sides walk away with a slightly worse opinion of the other. Nobody has done anything wrong. The design has simply set two people against each other who had no quarrel.

This is not a criticism of agents. The form-then-call model was a perfectly good design in 2005, when a phone call was a normal thing to receive. It is a first-wave habit talking to a third-wave person. The problem is not the agent. The problem is that the door was built for a visitor who no longer comes.

Thursday, two hours

I should tell you how I actually used Rightmove for more than ten years, because I think it is how most serious buyers use it, and nobody talks about it.

I made an appointment. With myself. Thursday evening, come home early, two hours, laptop open, phone face down. Set the filters, price, bedrooms, radius. Open the map. Save the ones worth a second look. Next page. Next page. Adjust the filters. Start again.

It is not an interesting job. It needs time and it needs concentration, and if you want the detail, that is the price. I think that is fair. A house is expensive and the information should be thorough. But I noticed something only much later: the start is the hard part. The first Thursday is a mountain. You do not know the area, you do not know what a good price looks like, every listing looks the same, and after twenty minutes your eyes glaze over. Most people I know never got to a second Thursday. They waited until they had to move, and then they did the whole thing in a panic over a fortnight, which is the worst way to make an expensive decision.

I watched a colleague do exactly this. New job, ninety miles away, start date fixed, family to move. He had never looked at a house in that town in his life. He had a fortnight of evenings, and he spent them squinting at floor plans of streets he had never walked down, ringing agents who were closed, and filling in forms that produced calls at the wrong moment. He found somewhere. He was never sure he had found the right somewhere. That is what a first-wave tool does to a person who arrives at it cold. It is not the tool's fault. The tool assumes you have already done the looking. He had not, because nothing had ever invited him to.

So for a decade, the picture in my head of looking at houses was a chore you schedule. Work. And I never questioned it, in the same way you never questioned that the bank closed at four.

Then, without meaning to, I started watching estate agents on Instagram.

The agent on my phone

It began the way most things on a phone begin: an accident. A short video of a house. Not a slideshow of photos with music over the top, but an actual person, an agent, walking through the front door and talking. Here is the hallway, look at the ceiling height, this is the bit everyone falls for, the garden is bigger than it looks from the road. A minute, maybe ninety seconds. Then another one, from a different agent, in a different style. Then another.

I was not looking for a house at the time. That is the whole point. I was watching the way I might watch a cooking video or someone restoring an old motorbike. It was entertainment. And it reminded me of something.

When I was younger, there were television programmes that did nothing but walk you through homes. Houses in the country, apartments by the sea, lives you would never live. They ran for years, decades, because people never get bored of looking inside other people's homes. Instagram had rebuilt that programme, except now it was local, it was daily, and the presenter was a real agent with real houses on his books, ten minutes from where I lived.

Here is what happens when you watch someone like that for a year. You learn his voice. You learn which streets he thinks are underrated and which he is cool about. You see him on a wet Tuesday with the lighting wrong and you like him more for it. And when the day comes that you need an agent, he is not a stranger from a list. He is someone you feel you already know. The relationship was built while you were being entertained, which is the only way most relationships get built now.

The agents worked this out before I did. Between January 2020 and February 2021, the share of homes for sale on Rightmove with a video went from two percent to thirty-four percent. Some of that was the pandemic. Most of it stayed. The agents are not stupid. They saw that the video did what the branch window used to do, and did it for people who never walk down the high street.

Link in bio

And then I tapped the link.

You know the one. Every Instagram account gets one link, in the bio, at the top. So after a year of watching this agent's videos, I finally wanted to do something, and I went to his profile and tapped the link, and one of three things happened.

Sometimes it went to the agency's corporate website, where he was a name and a headshot in a list of twelve people, and the videos were nowhere. The house I had just watched him walk through was a set of photographs and a floor plan, exactly as it appeared on the portal, with a form at the bottom.

Sometimes it went to one of those link-in-bio pages, a menu of five buttons, none of which was the thing I wanted.

And sometimes it was simply dead. Wrong page. Expired. Nothing.

All that trust, built up over a year in ninety-second pieces, and at the exact moment I wanted to act on it, the road ran out. The video was on Instagram. The agent was on Instagram. But the place where you could do anything about it was somewhere else entirely, and it was built for the first wave.

I remember sitting with the phone in my hand thinking: the missing thing is not a better portal. The missing thing is a page. His page. With his videos on it, his houses on it, his patch, and a way to do the next thing without a form. It sounds almost too small to be a business. It took me a while to see that it was the whole business.

Think about what that page has to be. It cannot be the agency's corporate site, because the person I trust is the agent, not the company, and because corporate sites are built by committees and updated twice a year. It cannot be Instagram, because Instagram is where you watch, not where you act, and because everything on Instagram belongs to Instagram, not to him. It has to be his. A single address he can put on a sticker in the window, in the bio, on the board outside a house. A place where the videos he has already made, hundreds of them in some cases, are gathered under his name instead of scrolling away into the feed. A place where a curious person can do one small thing, like ask what a house is worth, without being asked to identify themselves first.

None of that is difficult to build. What was difficult was noticing it was missing, because everyone in the industry was looking at the portal and everyone outside the industry was looking at Instagram, and the gap sat exactly between the two.

PART THREE

Two markets nobody serves

Just curious

Let me come at it from the other side, the seller's side, because that is where the gate is highest.

In March 2025, Zoopla published a survey of a thousand homeowners. Seventy-eight percent said they did not really know what their home was worth. Sixty-four percent were undervaluing it, a third of them by more than a hundred thousand pounds. And people who had owned their home for a long time said they checked its value about four times a year.

Four times a year. Not because they were selling. Because they wanted to know. It is the same instinct that makes you check your savings, or step on the scales, or look at what the neighbour's house went for. Curiosity, with a bit of pride and a bit of worry mixed in.

Where I grew up, the banks used to give you a valuation over the counter, free, no questions, and people went in every month or two just to look at the number. It was a small pleasure, like checking a share price. Nobody at the bank thought of it as selling. It was simply a service, and because it was a service, when those people did eventually need a mortgage, they already had a bank.

Here, that number costs a phone number. So the curious person does one of two things. They withdraw, and go without the number, and go on undervaluing their home by a hundred thousand pounds. Or they set up a second email address, put a made-up name on the form, and play along, and then ignore the calls. I have done both. I suspect most people reading this have done at least one.

Now think about what that means for the industry. The forms are full of people who only wanted the number. The agents ring them, and they get voicemail, or a made-up name, and they conclude that online valuations are poor quality. They are not poor quality. They are the wrong door. The valuation form was built to catch sellers, and what it mostly catches is the curious, who are not sellers yet, and who are made to feel like they have done something wrong by being curious.

There is a second, quieter dishonesty in the form, and it is the number itself. Most of the instant valuations you get, once you have handed over your details, give you a single figure. Four hundred and twelve thousand pounds. It looks precise, and it is nonsense. No one can value a house they have never seen to the nearest thousand, and everyone in the industry knows it. The single figure exists because it looks confident, and confidence gets the phone call answered. But the curious person is not stupid. They know the number is a guess. What they wanted was an honest guess, a range, this much to this much, so that they could stop undervaluing their own home by a hundred thousand pounds. Give them the range and they trust you more, not less, because you have told them the truth about what you know.

That is a very large group of people. It is most homeowners, four times a year. And nobody serves them, because the only way anyone has thought to serve them is to charge them a phone call.

Just look

The buying side has the same shape, and the numbers are even bigger.

Back in 2018, a housebuilder surveyed two thousand people about how they use property websites. Sixty-one percent said browsing homes online was a hobby, something they did for pleasure. More than half did it at least once a week. Nearly a third were regularly looking at homes well above anything they could afford. One in five had more than two property apps on their phone.

There are a little over a million residential property sales in this country in a normal year. There are close to seventeen billion minutes of looking. Do the division however you like. The overwhelming majority of looking never becomes a move. It is not meant to. It is the same thing as watching the television programme about houses by the sea. It is dreaming, planning, comparing, keeping an eye on the street you would like to live on one day.

And nothing is built for it. The portal is built for the mover. It is a magnificent tool for someone who has decided to buy, has a budget, has a radius, and has two hours on a Thursday. It is a poor tool for someone who wants to lie on the sofa on a Sunday and look inside a few homes. It gives that person photographs and floor plans and a filter panel, and the person quietly goes back to Instagram, where the agent is walking through the hallway and talking.

I have a simple test for whether something is built for the looker. Can you use it lying down? Not as a joke. Lying on a sofa, one hand, no typing, no deciding anything in advance. A filter panel fails the test. A search box fails the test. A form fails it before it starts. A video that plays, and then another one, and then another, passes it. Almost everything that the third wave built passes it, which is why the third wave won. Almost nothing in property does, except the agents' own videos, on a network that was never designed for houses.

Nobody built for the looker. The looker went and found the agents' videos on their own.

Same person, one habit

Here is the thing I want you to take from this book if you take nothing else.

The person checking the value of their home four times a year is the seller in three years' time. The person watching house videos on a Sunday is the buyer next spring. They are not a different population from the movers. They are the same people, earlier. Curiosity comes before intent, every single time, and there is a long quiet stretch between the two where nobody is paying attention to them because they are not yet worth a phone call.

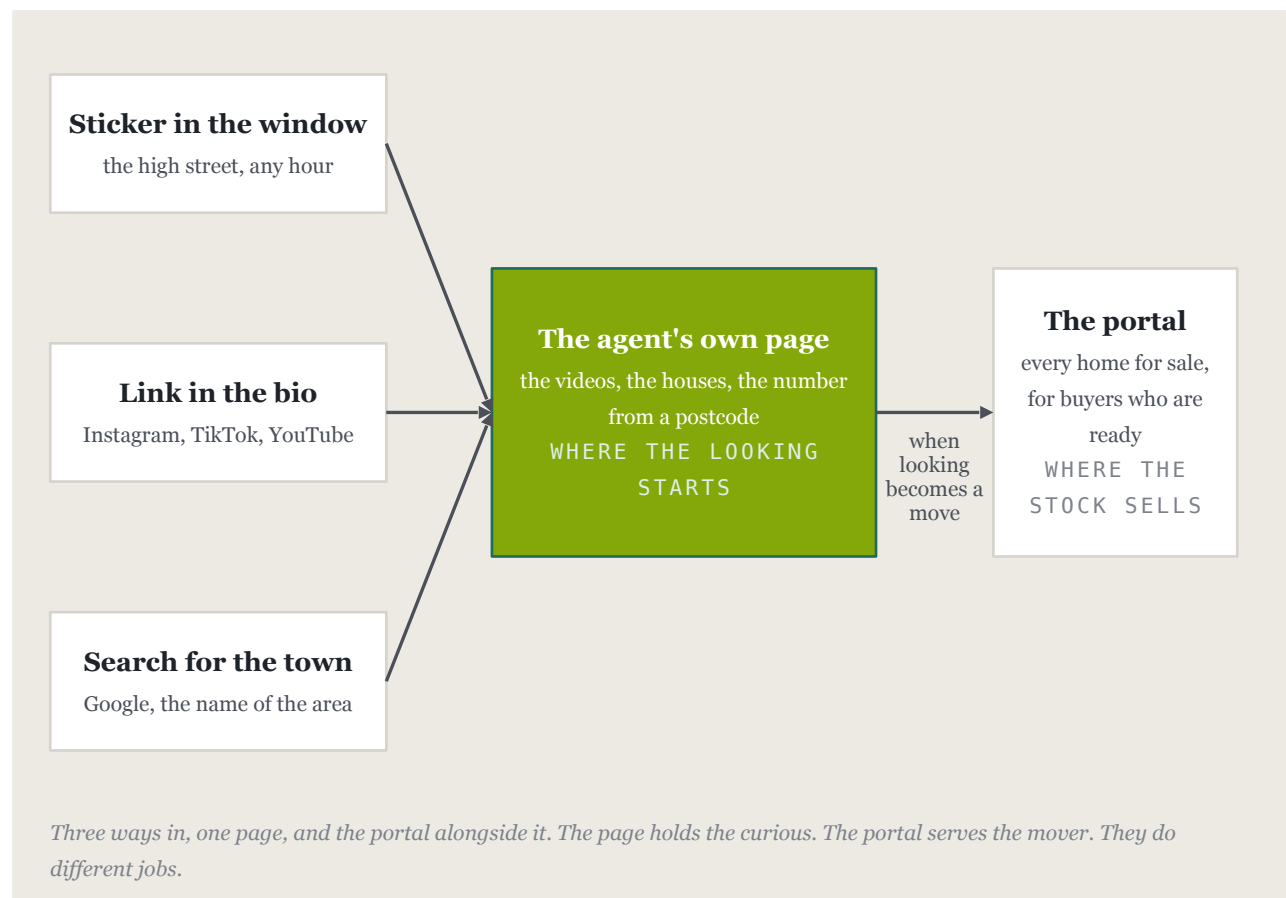
Whoever is there in that quiet stretch, without asking for anything, is the one they remember when the stretch ends. The agent whose videos they watched. The place that gave them the number without making them lie. That is not a marketing theory. That is how my friend's daughter chooses everything. She has never once chosen a service that rang her first.

It is also, if you think about it, how the high street branch always worked at its best. The good independent agent on a good high street did not win instructions by ringing people. They won them by being there. In the window every day, at the school gate, in the pub, sponsoring the football team. Years of being seen and not asking for anything, and then one day someone walks in because it never occurred to them to go anywhere else. The video on the phone is that branch window for people who no longer walk down the high street. The number without the gate is the friendly chat at the counter. What I am describing is not new behaviour. It is the oldest behaviour in the industry, moved to where the people are.

The portal cannot serve this, and it is important to be clear about why. It is not a weakness. Rightmove is built to sell an agent's stock to buyers who are ready, and it does that better than anyone. Serving the curious would mean giving things away to people who are not buying, which is the opposite of what a portal is for. It would be like asking a supermarket to be a good place to sit and read.

So the thing that serves the curious has to sit before the portal, not against it. Where the looking starts. On the agent's own page, reachable from the window sticker, from the link in the bio, from a search for the name of the town. The videos live there. The number lives there. When the curious person becomes a mover, they go to the portal, as they should, and the agent's stock is there waiting. The two things work side by side. One catches the looking. The other sells the stock.

I have drawn this, because it is easier to see than to read.



The stone age of finding sellers

There is one more thing I noticed from the outside, and I mention it because it explains why the gap has lasted so long.

The buying side of this industry got its great tool in 2000. Every home for sale, on one screen, for everyone. The selling side, finding the next person who wants to sell, has barely moved since 1990. It still runs on a branch on the high street, so that people trust the name, and on hoping that the next seller pushes the door open. There are leaflets through letterboxes. There are boards outside houses. There are comparison sites that will sell an agent a seller's details, which is at least something new, though it is the same phone-number gate with a middleman on it.

That is roughly where booking a flight was before Expedia. It works. It has always worked. But it is expensive, it depends on the high street staying alive, and it has nothing to say to a person who lives on their phone and never walks past the window.

It also explains something about the agents I have come to admire most, the independents. A big chain can afford to lose the curious. It has the branches, the brand and the marketing budget to be found anyway. The independent on one high street, with one window and one name, lives or dies by being remembered by the people in a mile's radius, and those people are now indoors, on their phones. The independent has the most to gain from being found there, and the least help getting there. Every tool built for this industry in the last twenty years has been priced and shaped for the chain.

I do not think there is one answer to this. I think there should be many, and the industry has barely started trying. The agents' own videos are one answer, and they found it themselves. The number without the gate is another. A page that belongs to the agent, not to the corporate site and not to Instagram, is the thing that joins those two together. There will be others. But those two, put in one place, are where I decided to start.

PART FOUR

Why me

What insurance taught me

I am not an estate agent. I have never sold a house for anyone. Before this, I spent years building software for the insurance industry, which sounds as far from property as you can get, and from the outside it is.

From the inside, they are nearly the same business.

Both are people businesses. Not product businesses. The policy is not the thing, and the house is not the thing. The agent is the thing. In insurance, people buy from the adviser they trust, and the adviser wins that trust over years, across coffee tables, at weddings, in follow-up calls nobody wants to make. In property it is identical, except the coffee table is a branch and the weddings are boards outside houses. Both are high value, both are a decision people make a handful of times in a life, and both depend on a person being present and remembered at the moment the decision arrives.

The one idea I carried across came directly from that. In insurance, I built each adviser a page of their own. A small site, their name, their face, what they do, reachable from anywhere, so that a client could find them, and come back to them, without the two of them having to be in the same room. It was obvious once it existed, and it was resisted before it did, because the industry's instinct was that the company's site was enough. It was not enough. People do not trust companies. They trust a person they have seen.

I learnt something else from that work that I did not expect to need again. Insurance is full of forms, and every form loses people. We measured it. Every field you ask for, before you have given anything, sends a share of people away, and the people it sends away are not the time-wasters. They are the cautious ones, the private ones, the ones who wanted to look before they committed, which is to say the best future customers you have. Take the form away, give them the thing first, and they come back. It seems too simple to be true, and it was true every time we tried it. So when I saw a whole industry putting a phone-number form in front of the single most-wanted piece of information it had, I did not have to guess what that was doing to it. I had already seen the numbers, in another industry, on my own screen.

Insurance is also heavily regulated, far more than estate agency, and that turned out to be useful training. If you can build something a regulator will accept, building for an industry that mostly polices itself feels like taking off a heavy coat. The fundamentals did not change. The rules got lighter.

So when I moved house in Britain, and used the portal for ten years, and watched the videos, and tapped the dead link, and made the second email address, I was not seeing it as a customer only. I was seeing the same shape I had already built for once before. An agent, a person, who had earned trust in one place and had nowhere of their own to keep it.

From my side of the desk

I want to be honest about why it was me and not somebody from inside the industry, because I do not think it was cleverness.

Insiders walk past the gate because they built it. If you have spent twenty years asking for a phone number before you give a valuation, the phone number does not look like a gate. It looks like the job. You do not notice the people who withdraw, because they never appear in your figures. You do not notice the made-up names, because you ring them once and move on. The forms come in, some of them turn into instructions, and the system is working, more or less, the way it has always worked.

Outsiders trip over the gate. I tripped over it as a customer, repeatedly, and then I had the bad luck, or good luck, of recognising the shape of what I had tripped over from somewhere else.

I also watched the other newcomers. Almost all of them, when they looked at property, saw the portal and decided to build a better one. A cheaper one, a fairer one, one with a clever twist. I understood the temptation. It is the biggest, most visible thing in the market, and it is very profitable. But it is also a hundred and twenty out of a hundred, and competing with a hundred and twenty is a way to spend a great deal of money proving that the incumbent is very good.

There is a version of this story where I am the clever outsider who saw what the insiders could not. I do not believe that version. The agents saw the video working before I did, and they built the habit in their customers with nothing but a phone and their own nerve. What they did not have was anyone building the ground under their feet. Everyone who came to help them wanted to sell them a better way to get their stock in front of buyers, which is the one thing they already had, in abundance, at a hundred and twenty out of a hundred. Nobody came to help them with the part of the job that had not changed since 1990, which is being found, and being remembered, by the people who are not ready yet.

I did not want to compete with it. I wanted the bit before it. The looking. The curiosity. The year of ninety-second videos before anyone is ready. The number, given freely, four times a year, to a person who is not selling yet. That space was empty, not because nobody could see it, but because it did not look like a business to anyone who was already in one.

So, homvo

I will keep this short, because the whole point of this book is that the product is the consequence, not the argument.

homvo is a place to look at homes on video, the way people already look at them on Instagram, except the videos sit on the agent's own page, under the agent's own name, next to the agent's own houses. The page belongs to the agent. It is reachable from a sticker in the branch window, from the link in the bio, and from a search for the name of the town. It is where the looking starts.

On that page there is a valuation. You type a postcode. That is all. No form, no email, no phone number, no one will be in touch. You get a range, not a single number, because a single number would be a lie and the curious person deserves better than a lie. If, one day, that person decides to sell, the enquiry goes to that one agent, whose page it is, and to nobody else. It is not shared, and it is not sold on.

And there is the app, which is simply the looking, on a phone, with no account required. Swipe through videos filmed by local agents. Save the ones you like. Follow the agents you like. Property on video. Just look.

I have kept the product out of this book until now because I did not want to write a brochure, and I do not want to start one here. So I will say only what I believe about it. I think the two things on that page, the videos and the number, are the two oldest forms of trust in this industry, being seen and being straight with people, moved to the place where people now are. I think the independent agent on one high street needs that more than anyone, and has been offered it least. And I think the girl in the bedroom, who is the buyer and the seller of the next thirty years, will not use anything that fails her standard, and her standard is: let me look first.

That is it. It does not replace the portal, and it is not trying to. When the looking becomes a move, the portal is right there, doing what it does better than anyone. homvo is the room before that room.

I think of my friend's daughter, upstairs, phone in hand. One day soon she will wonder what her parents' house is worth. She will type the postcode, and she will get the number, and nobody will ring her. And when she starts looking at flats near her first job, she will watch a local agent walk through a hallway on a wet Tuesday, and she will watch him again the next week, and by the time she is ready, she will already know who to message.

She will never fill in the form. She will not have to. That, in the end, is the whole reason homvo was born.

Notes and sources

Chapter 2. Rightmove's founding by four corporate agencies in 2000, and the milestones to 2025, are from the company's own history page (plc.rightmove.co.uk/our-history). The 16.8 billion minutes for 2025 and the 89 percent share of time on property websites are from Rightmove's full-year results announcement of 27 February 2026.

Chapter 4. Time spent online (four hours thirty minutes for adults, six hours twenty minutes for eighteen to twenty-four year olds), YouTube at fifty-one minutes a day, TikTok at forty-nine minutes for eighteen to thirty-four year olds, and the share of time on smartphones are from Ofcom's Online Nation 2025 report, published 10 December 2025.

Chapter 5. The phone-call figures are from a Uswitch survey of two thousand UK adults conducted by Opinium on 9 to 12 April 2024: twenty-three percent of eighteen to thirty-four year olds never answer calls, sixty-one percent prefer messages, sixty-eight percent prefer calls to be arranged in advance, fifty-six percent assume an unexpected call is bad news.

Chapter 7. The rise in listings with video from two percent in January 2020 to thirty-four percent in February 2021 is from Rightmove's press release of 25 February 2021.

Chapter 9. Seventy-eight percent of homeowners unsure of their home's value, sixty-four percent undervaluing, thirty-five percent by more than one hundred thousand pounds, and long-term owners checking about four times a year, are from Zoopla's survey of 1,005 homeowners published in March 2025.

Chapter 10. The browsing figures (sixty-one percent as a hobby, more than half weekly, one in five with more than two property apps) are from a survey of two thousand people by Strata Homes, reported by Property Industry Eye on 9 January 2018. Annual UK residential transactions are from HM Revenue and Customs monthly property transaction statistics.

Chapter 15. Product description is from homvo.co.uk, homvo.co.uk/patch, and the homvo listing on the App Store.

The dinner-table story in the opening is real. The names have been left out on purpose.

Just Look: the birth of homvo. Written by Eddie Chang, founder of homvo, London, September 2026. homvo is operated by XLanding Limited. homvo is not an estate agent.