

Realtors try to prod market with full-page ads

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Tired of the drumbeat of negative news about the housing market, the nation's real estate brokers are trying to change the tune.

This weekend and next, the National Assn. of Realtors is spending \$40 million on full-page ads in the nation's biggest newspapers, including The Times, to convince people that the market is A-OK.

"Right now may actually be one of the best times to buy a home," the ad says, pointing to stabilizing prices, still-low interest rates, a record inventory of homes and recent comments by former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan suggesting the housing market may have bottomed.

"Don't delay," the ad says, urging readers to call Realtors. The association represents 1.3 million brokers and agents.

But at least one marketer isn't buying it.

"It's preaching to the choir and goes in the face of objective reality," said Peter Sealey, a former Coca-Cola Co. marketing director who runs consulting firm Sausalito Group Inc. "I predict it will have zero effect on the marketplace."

Even before the housing boom ended last year, the leaders of the Realtors and other real estate groups took flak for generating expectations among consumers that the market would never stop rising.

A year ago, the Realtors' chief economist, David Lereah, chastised "the Chicken Littles" who warned of a pending bust in housing — about the same time he was promoting his book "Are You Missing the Real Estate Boom?" It claimed that property values would continue to climb through the end of the decade.

In this month's Realtor magazine, Lereah wrote he now favored "price softening."

"The housing sector and the U.S. economy need home-sale transactions more than home-price appreciation," he said.

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