

REAL ESTATE

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Realty agents who specialize in horse properties, music studios and fixer-uppers can help buyers and sellers cut to the chase.

Hitched to a niche

By GAYLE POLLARD-TERRY
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REAL estate agent Christine Lloyd-Maddocks doesn't sing or play an instrument. But she is fluent in a lingo that's foreign to most people outside the music industry: She represents sellers of houses with music studios — or the potential for one — and the buyers who want them.

Agents often specialize in niche markets, whether they are musicians or, in the case of Donna Tritten, equestrians. A horse person herself, she knows what a property needs to stable a horse.

Eva Rosenberg also is a member of her niche target group. Seventy-five percent of the Realtor's clients are baby boomers who may have empty nests and/or aging parents, and many find her through her website, www.babyboomersbroker.com.

Bargain hunters can find agent Paul Argueta through his website, www.fixerupperheaven.com. So can desperate sellers who own houses that need TLC.

Although most agents still base their market on a geographic area, an increasing number are deciding to add a little something extra. Members of the National Assn. of Realtors specialize in "housing types, historic properties, luxury homes or condos," said NAR spokeswoman Stephanie Singer, pointing out a few niches. The trade group also provides training for agents who focus on selling to first-time buyers or working with seniors. Whether the niche



GOT HIS GROOVE: Musician Daniel Fabiano with agent Christine Lloyd-Maddocks, who found him a home suitable for a recording studio.

LOUIE BEEPLER/Los Angeles Times

trade publications such as Music Connection magazine.

Her own connection comes through her husband, Bruce Maddocks, a veteran sound engineer who owns a professional studio in Santa Monica. She began targeting houses with music studios after she learned through her husband's work that many large professional studios were closing while home recording equipment was becoming more compact, less expensive and of higher quality.

When evaluating existing home studios, she knows, for example, to ask about the soundproofing of the booth, ceiling height, acoustics and other features.

When considering space to build a home studio, she is not stumped by terms like "clear power," a source of electricity free [See Niche, Page K11]

is immigrants, the hearing impaired, minorities, single women or people looking to buy or sell fixers, the Realtors association's website offers guidance on how agents can cater to one audience without violating fair housing laws.

"The key," Singer said, "is not to exclude people that fall outside of the niche."

The Internet has made it easier to find those agents who work in a niche market — whatever their specialty. Computer-savvy consumers can quickly identify agents who meet very specific needs through their multiple websites, embedded links that lead to related Web pages, blogs and eponymous Web addresses.

Agent Lloyd-Maddocks set up several, including www.homeswithstudios.com. She also advertises in

[Niche, from Page K1] from interruptions that, she said, is a higher grade than the typical residential power.

Although Lloyd-Maddocks works out of the Woodland Hills office of the Paramount Properties Division of Rodeo Realty Inc., which was not an area that interested her client Daniel Fabiano, he found her through word of mouth when he wanted a house with a recording studio for his band, Fabiano & the Army of Love.

"I wanted the convenience of living at home and working at any time at all — recording drums or live instruments with no problem about neighbors knowing," Fabiano said.

After they saw 16 homes, he bought a Silver Lake duplex with an attached area suitable for his studio, which has a control room, a "live room" big enough to accommodate a band, a large group with strings or even a choir; a piano area and a place for his drums.

It also has a separate entrance, so musicians "don't have to go through the house, disrupting your personal life, your family life," he said.

Working with Fabiano a decade ago spurred Lloyd-Maddocks to develop a website and advertise in publications catering to the music industry.