



Appraisal Army Clicking Across America

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Appraiser Ron Simmons photographs as many as 1,200 homes per day

All appraisers and their photographers use the same model digital camera for consistency

Canadian company Zaio has begun an ambitious project to offer instant drive-by appraisals of virtually every home in America using a network of local appraisers.

The United States is being divided into zones of up to 20,000 homes each. Licensed appraisers can buy zone franchise rights for about \$10,000.

Ron Simmons bought 10 zones in Contra Costa County, and has worn out three pairs of shoes since February photographing as many as 1,200 homes per day.

Simmons said Zaio's online appraisals will remove pressure appraisers often receive from lenders and buyers to hit a target value.

The only pressure Simmons feels now is from fellow appraisers he runs into while walking his zones.

"(They) ask the pointed question, is this going to put appraisers out of work? And my answer from the start has been the same. It could," Simmons said.

Longtime Cameron Park appraiser Harvey Hartman believes Zaio is the wave of the future and bought five zones in the Sacramento area.

Hartman is hiring photographers and plans to begin shooting Sacramento-area houses next week.

Zaio said its online appraisals are more accurate than Automated Valuation Model, or AVM, appraisals offered by services such as Zillow.

Local appraisers in each zone will establish home values not only by using sales of comparable homes, but will also consider neighborhood influences. Data will be updated regularly, according to the company.

"This will help the real estate industry become more efficient," said Zaio spokesman Rodric Bradford.

Lenders may use drive-by appraisals for refinancing, but will likely continue requiring a full appraisal for new purchase money loans.

Zaio will offer those for an additional fee.

Although Zaio appraisals are currently available in a few selected markets, nationwide data should be online by 2010, according to Bradford.