



# Rod Johnston's Real Estate Reader



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As the summer concert season kicks off, we take a look at the most widely anticipated musical tours of the summer.

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With audiobooks, Kindles, iPads, and open source content, reading may never be the same again. Explore the future of reading.

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Outsourcing your most basic tasks to an online assistant may be easier and cheaper than you think. We show you how it's done.

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## Understanding Your Options in a Growing Market

With the housing recovery in full force, the game is changing for those looking to enter the market. Here's what you need to know to get the most out of the market as it heats up.

**What has changed** While foreclosures will continue to be a part of the market going forward, they have reduced in number and impact. At the same time, continued speculation about a steady and sustained rise in interest rates is starting to influence potential buyers. Finally, the federal home buyer tax credit just expired. This happened at the same time the new California credit went into effect. So, now we have entered an environment where homes in California are partially subsidized by the state government, which is an advantage that does not exist for most other regional housing markets.

**Buyers should** If you have been thinking about buying, now is the time to make your move. The California credit is likely to expire much quicker than most people think, since it will hit its cap well before it hits the expiration date. To take advantage of up to \$10,000 in tax credits, buyers should start the process now. Additionally, the housing affordability index (the index that measures how many people can afford to own a home under current market conditions) is at its highest point in years. If jobs begin to come back into the economy, the market could be flooded with new buyers, sending prices upward.

**Sellers should** If you have been thinking about selling, there is a small window of opportunity that promises to be very lucrative for savvy sellers. Putting your home on the market now could put you in a perfect position to take advantage of the market right as it begins to heat up. As stated above, buyers are beginning to come back to the market, and the state homebuyer credit promises to accelerate that trend. Most importantly, waiting too long could prove a costly move. Once the homebuyer credit expires and interest rates spike, all bets are off.



## The Newest Vacation Craze: "Glamping"

Glamping is a term used to describe glamorous camping. It refers to a whole new breed of campsites that are designed for wealthy travelers who like to experience the outdoors without having to rough it.

### Whatever you desire

So, how glamorous can glamping be? You might be surprised. Luxury tents are often adorned with expensive furniture, gorgeous rugs, and electric lighting. Sites vary widely in their appeal. You can book a glamping site in France that specializes in gourmet foods and wines, one in Montana that offers world-class spa treatments, and one in Tanzania that allows visitors to witness the seasonal migration patterns of wild animals.

### Pay more to get more

Glamping may take away the biggest drawback to camping--lack of comfort--but it also eliminates the central advantage of camping--low price. Glampsites usually cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars a night. Usually, the cost includes meals and activities, but it's still a hefty sum to pay for a room without a toilet.

### Plan your glamping trip

To join the craze, visit [www.goglamping.net](http://www.goglamping.net). There, you will find a nice directory of the most luxurious and popular glampsites in the world.

### Trickle-down glamping

As glamping becomes more mainstream, traditional campsites are following suit. If you haven't visited your favorite campsite in a few years, you may be surprised by what you find on your next visit. Today's campsites often come equipped with enticing features like free Wi-Fi internet, optional log cabins, and 24/7 firewood delivery.

# Top Musical Tours of the Summer

Summer is the season for hot musical tours. Here are five musical tours you won't want to miss this summer.



## U2

U2's unique 360 tour--a tour featuring a circular stage--actually started in 2009. The tour is still going strong this summer. U2 has a well-deserved reputation as the best big-concert band in the world. The unique 360-degree stage configuration provides every seat in a 100,000-seat arena with a clear view of Bono's legendary exaltations.



## Lady Gaga

Perhaps the most costly tour this year will be Lady Gaga. Most of her tickets are already sold out, and going for as much as \$10,000 on popular ticket brokerage sites like StubHub. If you can score a ticket, you are in for a treat. Lady Gaga's shows are high energy, high fashion, and in high demand.



## Simon & Garfunkel

If you like your summer concerts with a side of nostalgia, Simon and Garfunkel have you covered. The '60s sensation has reunited for what was initially supposed to be a spring tour. Unexpected "vocal strain" in Art has forced the duo to postpone the tour until this summer.



## Taylor Swift

When Taylor Swift burst onto the scene just a few years back, it would have been hard to anticipate just how rapidly and thoroughly she would come to dominate the country-pop world. Now, she is clearly the biggest draw in country music and will be touring the country this year with American Idol sensation Kellie Pickler.



## Rush

Legendary progressive rock trio Rush has reunited for a summer tour that promises to be widely attended by its cult following. Known for complex musical arrangements and mindbending live shows, Rush is the kind of band that gets even better with age.

## Hot New Product



## iPhone 4.0

Shortly after Apple revealed the next iPhone operating system--which will include multitasking, application folders, and enhanced email--industry analysts began speculating on what Apple's next iPhone would look like. Now, speculation has turned to anticipation, as an Apple employee mistakenly left an advance prototype of the next iPhone at a bar. Technology blog [Gizmodo](#) dissected it and found that the prototype had some exciting new features, most notably a front-facing camera (presumably for video chats), a camera flash, and a more powerful battery. Look for Apple's new iPhone (and the new operating system) sometime this summer.

## Reinventing Reading



Recently a whole new crop of devices, technologies, and business models have completely redefined the

process of reading. Here, we explore several exciting new trends in reading.

### E-Books

The most visible trend in reading right now is the recent interest in tablet computing devices, such as Apple's iPad and Amazon's Kindle, as a way to read books and maintain digital libraries. There are several advantages to reading books in a digital environment. First, a digital device can hold dozens or even hundreds of books, so you can keep your entire library with you at all times. Second, it can link to the internet, so you can look up words in an online dictionary, purchase new books from online stores, or even share reviews and suggestions with friends over social networks. Finally, e-books are generally less than \$10, since they eliminate any paper or printing costs.

### Open source books

As authors contemplate their place in a digital world, many have decided to give their content away for free. Much like the band who gives albums away to sell concert tickets, authors are looking to make money off merchandising, public appearances, and even advertising. At the same time, Google is currently cataloguing all of the world's written content, and is planning to make public domain classics available to everyone for free online.

### Multimedia Integration

As e-books mature, we are beginning to see some very creative uses of the technology. For instance, some of the most compelling apps on the iPad are magazines that have been completely re-imagined for a digital environment, featuring embedded videos, photo slideshows, and audio files to enhance the written word. In the future, you may be able to see real-time video feeds of the Mississippi River alongside the text to Huck Finn or watch a documentary about whales in the foreword to Moby-Dick.

### Audiobooks

Audiobooks are an old idea that has been given new life by the recent popularity of digital music players. Now that everyone seems

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to have an mp3 player in their pocket, more and more people are gravitating toward audiobooks as a convenient way to catch up on reading while driving, cleaning, or working out. [Audible.com](http://Audible.com) is the most popular online provider of audiobooks and can connect seamlessly to most devices and software.

## Tech Tip: Better Profile Pictures with MyPictr



over twenty different social networks, including all of the most popular ones (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, MySpace, Skype, LinkedIn, etc).

Social networks like Facebook and Twitter ask users to upload profile pictures of themselves. Generally speaking, it's a good idea to have consistency between your profile pictures on different sites. If you have a picture of you skiing on your Twitter page and a picture of you in a suit on your Facebook page, it may be a little disorienting for people who find you on one platform and want to connect on another. Unfortunately, every site has a slightly different standard for pictures. Pixel sizes, aspect ratios, and format preferences can all differ between platforms. With MyPictr, you can upload a picture and see how it would look on

# Online Outsourcing Made Easy



Many big companies have outsourced basic tasks to freelancers for years. Recently, a new online ecosystem for outsourcing has made it easier than ever for individuals and small businesses to realize the benefits of outsourcing. Follow these basic steps to take advantage of this emerging trend.

### Identify opportunities

Some jobs lend themselves to online outsourcing while others do not. Generally speaking, any repetitive task (such as scripted phone calls or data entry) is primed for online outsourcing. It is also easy to outsource just about any task that is commonly done by most businesses (e.g., answering customer calls, sending invoices), since you will find a lot of candidates with previous experience. Finally, it is easy and convenient to outsource basic lifestyle tasks--one of the fastest-growing segments of the outsourcing industry. For instance, you can have a virtual assistant comparison shop for your next TV, book you a reservation at a busy restaurant, or find the perfect anniversary gift for your husband. On the other hand, you may find it more difficult to fill jobs that require a huge amount of hands-on training or specialized knowledge.

### Select the right work environment

The two most popular freelancing websites are [oDesk](http://oDesk) and [Elance](http://Elance). They have many crossover features, and a few features that are unique to each. Both platforms are eBay-type interfaces that allow you to post a job and let other people "bid" on that job. When people bid on your job, they will attach resumes, portfolios, cover letters, or anything else you ask for. They will also state how much they are willing to do the job for. Oftentimes, you will find bids as low as \$3 an hour. Once you receive the bids, you can set up online chats within the sites to interview candidates or arrange more tradi-

tional interviews offline. Both sites have robust review systems that allow you to see how past employers have regarded a provider's work, as well as a qualification system for testing providers on key skills (e.g., phone skills, creative writing) and making the results of those tests available to potential employers. The difference between oDesk and Elance can be found in the sites' respective signature features. ODesk offers a "work diary" that allows you to see screenshots of your employee's computer as he or she is working, so you can verify that the person is doing exactly what you ask, when you ask. Elance provides an escrow feature, which allows you to decide if and when the funds are released to the provider--ensuring you never have to pay for work that isn't done within the specified criteria. Basically, oDesk gives you a way to ensure that the work is being done in real time, while Elance gives you a way to protect your investment on the back end.

### Communicate clearly

The biggest challenge of working with freelancers (who are often on the other side of the world) is clearly communicating priorities, budgets, and deadlines. Before you begin work on any important projects, nail down the best times and mediums to communicate with your provider. Some love to Skype in the morning while others prefer email at night. As you develop your own communication preferences, you can state them in your initial job postings and reinforce those preferences when you hire your provider. Once you have found a consistent way to communicate with your provider, make sure you are specific. If you ask a provider to find you an inexpensive TV that can be delivered soon, you may not get what you want. You are better off saying you need a Panasonic TV under \$500 that can be shipped to Los Angeles by next Friday.

### Be patient

As you begin to outsource tasks, you will find there can be a huge disparity between providers, and sometimes you can't anticipate how good someone will be by the reviews. Expect to go through some disappointing providers en route to the reliable, talented ones.