

BROKER MARKETING, WITH A NEWSLETTER

BY TOM ACITELLI • OCTOBER 16, 2007

More than a year ago, Sarah Gee, a broker with Citi Habitats, started the "Tenant Tattler," a newsletter to keep family and friends informed about how she was navigating the currents of the New York real estate market.

She then added her own clients to the monthly newsletter's e-mail recipient list, found new topics for articles and created a means of circulating her name in a competitive field.

Newsletters provide a regular report to a broker's existing clients and have been an effective means of attracting new ones. In the New York market, these do-it-yourself newsletters are not a new phenomenon, but one that keeps spreading as apartment prices rise and competition for prime space spirals upward. There are no reliable figures on how many newsletters are out there, but dozens of agents have seen how they boost business.

In her newsletter, Gee answers questions, educating clients and sometimes herself in a breezy style light on jargon, but heavy on information.

"It obviously started out with friends and family," Gee said, "and then I started adding my clients as I add on. The questions I get from people I try to turn into topics. A lot of it is things I think I should learn more about."

John Venekamp, a director at Brown Harris Stevens, has published the "Venekamp Report" with a partner, Leslie Singer, for about two years. Mailed on glossy paper at least three times a year, the newsletter includes analysis of market trends, some current listings, and news about new developments.

"It's a marketing piece for us," said Venekamp, a veteran of more than a decade in New York real estate. "It's a branding piece for us, and a chance for us to communicate on a regular basis."

One of the first New York brokers to produce a newsletter, Roger Erickson, started his so long ago he says he can no longer remember the title.

"I started a newsletter in 1987, having discovered that keeping in touch with customers and prospective customers was an important ingredient for them to remember I was in the real estate business," said Erickson, now of Sotheby's International Real Estate.

(continued on back)



Leslie J.W. Singer

NYRS, Licensed Associate Real Estate Broker
lsinger@bhsusa.com
212-588-5675



John Venekamp

Licensed Associate Real Estate Broker
jvenekamp@bhsusa.com
212-588-5619

Brokers follow simple guidelines to lay down enticing, readable newsletters, making them accessible and informative, so they don't read too much like the marketing tools that, in fact, they are.

Successful newsletters use a conversational tone that packs in information tailored to a specific audience, according to broker-publishers. They tell of properties for sale, trends in the market, neighborhood demographics, and places to buy groceries near that dream Classic Seven.

"Keep in mind that the more general the content that is, non-targeted the less impact it will have," wrote Internet marketing consultant Michael Russer in *Realtor Magazine*. "Articles should be short and punchy."

Gee's August newsletter, for instance, dissected the differences between co-ops and condos: "As you set out on the hunt for the perfect pad, you'll be confronted with the two varieties of real estate ownership in our fair city: Co-ops and Condos. What on earth is the difference, and which one is right for you?"

In the summer edition of the "Venekamp Report," the regular column "Singer Says" included an invitation for parents to a September seminar hosted by Brown Harris Stevens, "The Nursery School and Kindergarten Application Process."

Contact information is also a must for newsletters, brokers say, because, while they do not often lead directly to new clients, newsletters can spark a buzz that may draw fresh clients. Plus, if they're easy to forward, particularly by e-mail, they can provide a tidy introduction to a broker for someone in the real estate hunt.

Newsletters, too, can serve as reminders. Gee talked to a prospective client in the autumn of 2003 who wanted to buy but not right away. Nearly a year passed, and she used "Tenant Tattler" to remind the client she was still available.

With success stories like these to stoke the creative fires of their broker-authors, newsletters are likely to be a permanent feature of the New York market. Erickson says he stopped producing the newsletter he started in the late 1980s because of a glut in his market, as individual brokers and firms launched their own.

"I decided to move on, and many years ago began sending out announcements about my closings to my contacts and prospective sellers," Erickson said. "After a while, this, too, became commonplace."

Still, brokers say, the newsletter can provide a leg up in a competitive business that draws more and more new agents.

"It's helped me keep customers," Gee said.