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Reality TV kicks things up a notch for star brokers

By Sarah Trefethen



Ryan Serhant, Fredrick Eklund and Michael Lorber, the stars of Million Dollar Listing.

Building relationships with clients is a part of every broker's life.

But reality television allows those brave enough to step in front of the camera a chance to take that personal touch a step further, as television audiences around the world get to feel like they know the stars personally.

"Potential clients recognize us, we're familiar to them," said Tom Postilo of CORE, who appeared in the first season of HGTV's Selling New York. "We show up in their living room and we've already been in their living room because of the TV show."

What's more, adds fellow CORE broker Mickey Conlon, the show allows potential clients to see them in action.

"In your average listing presentation, someone will spend maybe 15 minutes or half an hour with a broker, and maybe they think they have a nice personality, but the show really shows us out on the street, making plans — they get to know how we sell," he said. "It's amazing the number of people who watch the show who don't necessarily want to be on it but who use it as a part of your resume."

Some brokers who appear regularly on television report an almost overwhelming spike in business.

Ryan Serhant of Nestseekers, one of the trio of brokers featured in the New York edition of Bravo's Million Dollar Listing, said his business has quadrupled since the show hit the air, and he's working as much as 18 hours a day.



Tom Postilo

"I went from being a broker with an assistant working with different brokers to having a team of seven agents and two full-time assistants and my own storefront office in Tribeca where I manage 17 agents," he said.

Both shows are syndicated around the world, and Serhant can sense a new season airing from thousands of miles away. When the first season of Million Dollar Listing recently aired in Australia, he said, "phone calls and email from brokers in Australia went through the roof."

Serhant's Million Dollar Listing co-star Fredrik Eklund of Prudential Douglas

Elliman declined to quantify the boost his business has taken as a result of the show, but he said he is contacted two of three times a week about serious potential listings or purchases from people who have seen him on the show.

And then there's the less-than-serious queries, and calls from fans.

"I don't answer my own phone anymore," Eklund said. "I can't."

At the start, of course, there was no way for these brokers-turned-TV-personalities to know that allowing a camera crew into their dealmaking and — particularly in the case of Million Dollar Listing — their lives were going to be worth the exposure.

"It was very nerve-wracking for me to sign on for something like that," admitted Eklund, who had already spent 10 years establishing his business as a broker in the city and in his native Sweden when Million Dollar Listing started filming.

"I had no control over how I was going to be portrayed ... I was hoping, or thought it would help, but it was scary. Bravo as a network has only one goal, which is to make good, fun, dramatic TV, and that's my goal, too, but I also have to keep my integrity as a good, responsible professional in the real estate business."

Those early fears have been allayed, however, by the response to the show.

While online comments on certain real estate blogs may come down hard on the reality stars, the brokers say, they're comfortable with the way they and their deals come across on screen.

"There are people that stop me on the street all the time, every day, and say, 'Can I take a picture? I really love you.' It's a lot of love," he said.

CORE's offices get regular drop-ins from fans looking for autographed photos of their favorite brokers, Postilo said. And it's not just brokers who appreciate the exposure these shows offer.



Mickey Conlon

"The producers are out there to make people feel good about pretty properties," Conlon said. "And as the word has gotten out we've been very successful with getting celebrity clients" who can see the show as a way to connect with their own fans.

Postilo and Conlon are currently marketing the actress Joan Collins' \$2.35 million, three-bedroom, three-bath apartment in the Dorchester on East 57th Street.

Apparently, even stars in other industries enjoy watching star brokers at work.

"We've had 'celebrity sightings' where celebrities recognize us from the show," Postilo said.