

Brokers big for *Selling New York* and *Million Dollar Listing*

NYC brokers become unlikely reality-TV stars with *Selling New York*. Up next is *Million Dollar Listing*.



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Selling a full-floor loft in TriBeCa was hardly a cakewalk for Deborah Lupard of Warburg Realty. The private rooftop space was sorely in need of an update and had a vent that blasted cooking fumes from an adjacent restaurant. The owners, a former soap star and her husband, were in a hurry to unload the 2,000-square-foot unit but refused to take Ms. Lupard's advice to invest in sprucing it up to help speed up a sale.

After six months of effort, Ms. Lupard looked directly at her clients through her horn-rimmed, tortoise-shell glasses and demanded that they drop their price by \$150,000, to \$2.3 million. They reluctantly agreed. Someone bought the loft shortly afterward for \$2.125 million. Not what the couple had hoped for, but it had at least sold, and the broker earned a \$127,500 commission.

The entire saga played out on a recent episode of *Selling New York*, the reality show that chronicles the exploits of Big Apple brokers as they attempt to move the city's luxury properties. Unlike other reality programs, which depict people at their worst and reinforce ugly stereotypes—for example, some say MTV's *Jersey Shore* trashes the image of young Italian-Americans—*Selling New York* presents brokers positively: as savvy, honest specialists who deal effectively with picky buyers, overwrought sellers and dubious developers.

The series has been a boon for the featured three firms and their top brokers. And it is so popular that Bravo has reportedly decided to expand its Los Angeles-based *Million Dollar Listing* franchise into New York later this year, a move that may serve to similarly enrich the four Manhattan brokers it will follow. Bravo's program concentrates more on personalities and drama.

NOT THE LEAST BIT SLEAZY

At the very least, real estate professionals are glad not to be portrayed as sleazy and overbearing in *Selling New York*.

"We are an inspiration for people, who now feel like real estate is something they might want to do," said Michele Kleier, president of boutique brokerage Gumley Haft Kleier, who regularly appears on *Selling New York* with her husband and two adult daughters. Ms. Kleier said she recently received a letter from an 8-year-old gushing that he wants to intern for her as soon as he's old enough.

Selling New York, which airs on Thursdays at 9 p.m., has become one of HGTV's top-rated shows since it debuted last March and attracts roughly 2 million viewers a week. Producers recently began taping a Los Angeles version, according to Executive Producer Courtney Campbell.

Things didn't begin auspiciously for *Selling New York*. JV Productions, a Toronto-based production company, taped the pilot in 2008—just before Lehman Brothers collapsed. HGTV picked it up, but two of the three selected brokerages were out of business by the time the network was ready to begin production in 2009.

Gumley Haft Kleier was still game. “The market was quiet in late 2008 and 2009,” Ms. Kleier said. “We thought it would be fun.”

Signing on to *Selling New York* was more difficult for Core, which was chosen to replace one of the defunct firms. Founder Shaun Osher considered such shows “risky” but saw that they could also be a powerful marketing tool.

Broker Maggie Kent is happy the boss consented. She got a call from Gary Rodich, a Los Angeles lawyer who had watched her on *Selling New York* and asked for her help in finding a Manhattan pied-à-terre. He and his wife are now in contract for a \$1.2 million, one-bedroom unit on West 66th Street.

“We didn't know anyone in New York,” Mr. Rodich said. “The show is a way to see how a person works.” Warburg Realty, which was added to *Selling New York*'s roster last month, said that traffic on Warburgrealty.com soared almost immediately. Traffic hit a nine-month high in January, with more than 10.3 million page views.

“I am having a ball,” said Warburg broker Richard Steinberg, who has appeared in two episodes. “It is wonderful that I am catching my 15 minutes of fame, but I ultimately want business and to build a brand.”

Passed over for *Selling New York*, Nest Seekers International is getting another chance on Bravo. Ryan Serhant, a Nest Seekers agent and former soap opera star, has been tapped for *Million Dollar Listing* in New York, according to CEO Eddie Shapiro. (The California-centric edition is currently following three young agents selling posh residences in Hollywood, Malibu and Beverly Hills.)

EX-PORN STAR IN WINGS

Prudential Douglas Elliman, one of New York's largest firms, is also in on the act. It has confirmed that three of its brokers will be on *Million Dollar Listing*: Michael Lorber, the son of its chairman; Frederik Ecklund, a former model and Swedish porn star; and Brooklyn native Jessica Cohen.

Neither Bravo nor the agents would comment, but other brokers said the network began scouting and accepting video submissions about a year ago. Some report that they have even spotted cameras in properties for sale.

HGTV isn't concerned about the competition. “There are enough viewers to go around,” said Freddy James, senior vice president of program development and production. “The audience craves beautiful, high-priced Manhattan real estate.”

The brokerages on *Selling New York* are confident. “The show is an enhancement to the industry,” said Warburg CEO Frederick Peters. “It is professional and focuses on business.”

If *Selling New York* had wanted to emphasize the personal lives of his 130-plus agents, his firm would not have participated, Mr. Peters said. “That would be too Kardashianish [referring to E!'s *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*].”