

# **BROKERS WEEKLY**

Sept. 3, 2008

## **Back to the drawing board**



**By Maggie Hawryluk**

We all know that time is money, especially in the eyes of a developer who's looking to get a hefty return on that pricey new development. But what happens when time has passed and it's up to you to breathe life into a not-so-new listing?

Just ask Tom Postillio, senior vice president at CORE Group, who recently took over the exclusive at The Urban Glass House. CORE has become known for successfully being able to pick up where others have left off.

The firm has been named exclusive sales and marketing agent at Alma, and has effectively sold units at 52 E. 4th, breaking price records in the neighborhood, 77 Hudson and William Beaver House, among others.

The secret to their success as pick-up artists: working as a team and immediately addressing their challenges.

"There can be a perception within the community of, 'What's wrong with this listing?'" noted Postillio, of selling units at the development at 330 Spring Street, which originally launched sales in the middle of October 2005.

Postillio said that whenever CORE Group takes on any new listing, the entire team – which includes about 50 agents – will create a strategy for the developers.

"We look at the pros and cons and gather all the information from a different perspective," he said, adding that the team noted simple improvements, like revamping the show sheets and overhauling the units with the help of a stager, that make a world of a difference.

One of the first things Louise Phillips Forbes, executive vice president at Halstead Property, and her team did when they took on the penthouse listings at Jade NY, at 16 W. 19th St., was bring on an experienced staging team that not only put together sophisticated homes, but also offered them exposure to their savvy clientele. Her goal in selling these nine units is to get potential buyers to appreciate that they're getting a special product in this collaborative project – Jade Jagger, John Hitchcox and Philippe Starck are behind the concept and design – rather than worrying about tightening their belts. Therefore, rather than taking the easy route and lowering the price, Forbes is attracting buyers a different way.

"The developers will prepay the real estate tax for five years," she said, adding that they're also concentrating on getting the brokerage community on their side. "We'll have a short run of offering 5% to the selling broker."

Attracting fellow brokers is vital with any listing, but can be more difficult when they feel they've already seen everything at a development that has been launched. Luckily for Forbes and her team, the penthouses haven't been released yet, so she was able to launch the units with a Moroccan tea and fig party geared for brokers.

For Corcoran's Julie Pham and Joseph Bongiovanni, the newly appointed co-lead brokers at 650 Sixth Avenue, the focus was on pulling the buyers into the 40 units they're marketing.

"Before, this was marketed as a gallery space, now our focus is as a living space," Pham said of the 67-unit building that was about 35% sold using a tactic of marketing to art-lovers. "The thing we took into account is that buyers really look into value. They want a good building with good floorplans."

Rather than looking to put a new spin on the project, Pham and Bongiovanni concentrated on bringing out what the previous marketing team had missed.

In addition to focusing on the building's convenient Chelsea location and the fact that every unit includes an office space and free storage on the first floor – "That was something that wasn't focused on before," Pham said. "Basically, if you buy a studio, you get a walk-in with it." – the pair capitalized on the fact that the project is more or less completed, allowing buyers to really see what they're getting for their money.

Bongiovanni said the amenity package also can't be beat with a one-year membership to the David Barton gym and Quintessentially concierge service, a furnished rooftop terrace and a wine cellar.

"This is a quiet gem. It's got all of the bells and whistles without being \$3,000 psf," Pham said. "It doesn't take any gimmicks to establish this – real estate is real estate."

That's the sentiment that Paul Newman, the co-founder of the branding firm CO-OP, echoes when discussing the secrets to creating a lasting brand for a new development.

"It's not just a logo or a look. The first thing is finding a position, it becomes an anchor point," he said. "Condos come out with an ad concept and it's really short term. We get involved a year to 18 months before a building is launched. And two years after the launch, we have not only a strategic, but a creative platform."

CO-OP is the go-to firm for creating a lasting impression for Brooklyn developments. The company has created the campaign around the 240-unit Toren and the 198-unit One Hanson Place. Both branding campaigns focused on the buildings' neighborhood and their future positions in the community.

"You can't tell a story that's not likely to happen and you can't take a story into the future and stretch it," Newman said. "We always look for that nugget. People are exposed to so many different avenues of advertising and they are bombarded with branding. You have to see that it's actually memorable and cuts through."

For Toren, Newman focused on three pillars: the building's design, the green living aspect and the people and neighborhood of Brooklyn. One Hanson had a similar strategy in that the CO-OP team focused on the historic building's past and its new prominent position in Brooklyn's future.

"Branding a building is actually great because it's a living thing. It doesn't stop," Newman added. "You have to make sure the brand and story remain correct." Although One Hanson Place's branding was vital in the project's plan, Kristin Neil of The Dermot Company, the developers for the project, was more concerned about keeping the building fresh in the eyes of buyers and brokers. "The strategy was to look carefully at the phasing of the release of the building," she said, all while being flexible with market changes.

The project is about 80% sold, and the team – Stribling is the exclusive sales and marketing agent – recently launched the premiere eight Clocktower Residences that range in price from \$3.995 million to \$5.875 million.

In addition to strategically phasing unit releases, Neil also made a point to have various model units on hand to show at the same time – a useful tactic since the building offers 46 different types of floor plans.

"We've moved the model to three or four different locations. We now have two open," she said. "Brokers may have been to the initial building, but they're always seeing something new."

