

# Newsday

CLASSIFIEDS / REAL ESTATE

## Using smarts in a slow market

By **LAURA KOSS-FEDER. SPECIAL TO NEWSDAY**

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Elisabeth Mills, senior vice president in The Corcoran Group's office, is not sitting back and waiting for buyers in this slow market.

Last summer, as the market continued to chill, she took advantage of the potential buyers that flooded the s during July and August by featuring four of her East End listings in television ads that ran on local cable TV – a bold (and expensive) move most agents don't make.

The ads, in which Mills appeared, promoted homes ranging from nearly \$2 million to almost \$3 million. For her \$10,000 to \$12,000 investment, Mills was able to sell three of the four in about four weeks - versus the four months she says it normally would have taken in this sluggish selling climate.

"You really have to put more time and effort into marketing homes, as well as promoting yourself these days, Mills says. "These ads were a great way to increase visibility."

She is not alone in taking that extra step to reach out to buyers and sellers. The combination of a soft market and the winter doldrums is pushing some agents to adopt clever new marketing tactics in hopes of bringing in business and helping them stand out in their communities.

Pat Vredevoogd-Combs, president of the National Association of Realtors, says that these days especially, agents need to be as involved in their communities as they can be, and as clever as possible, in reaching out to buyers and sellers.

"Utilize the Internet to promote your homes, stage your homes, host a charity event or party," says Vredevoogd-Combs, of , Mich.

"Whatever you do, think about what will bring the public to your door and get you noticed."

For some sellers, such promotional efforts appear to be working. Walter Priestley's house in East Hampton was featured in Mills' ads, and a buyer was found within a month.

Priestley, 44, a Farmingdale chiropractor, sold his home for \$1.75 million. (The asking price was \$1.995 million.) The 30-second spots ran about 400 times during the summer on , News 12 and HGTV, he says.

"The ads brought a tremendous number of people to our open houses and helped move the house in this market," Priestley says. "Agents can't just sit back these days; they need to be proactive."

### Soft sell

RE/MAX Millennium broker-owner Judy Markowitz is using the universal love of ice cream to endear herself to local buyers and sellers and to distinguish herself from competitors in her Flushing neighborhood.

On the last day of the school year in June, she holds an ice cream party.

She has held the parties since 1998, but the scope has gotten bigger, with many more people attending. And, she is promoting the event more because of the soft market. She mails and hands out fliers to local residents in the communities she sells in.

Last year, the party was at a local Carvel store, and 2,000 ice cream cones were given out during a five-hour period. T-shirts were handed out as well. The party cost Markowitz close to \$10,000. But she says it helped result in eight closings - with each commission averaging \$15,000 - as well as numerous referrals.

Markowitz promotes the party by mailing fliers.

"Giving back to the community helps enhance your image and also allows you to bond with both potential buyers and sellers," she says.

Seller Chris Capeleris, 55, a homemaker, got to know Markowitz through her annual ice cream party and ended up listing with her. Capeleris sold her Bayside home in August and now lives in Flushing.

"I think the ice cream party is a great way to bring in business," Capeleris says.

Another agent, **Ed Gitlin**, chief executive of Woodbury-based Benjamin Fine Homes and Estates and -based Solace, is trying a different tactic. He is going to auction homes.

Solace, a traditional real estate firm and auction house formed in September, handles homes on and in selling for between \$400,000 and \$4 million. These non-distressed homes will be auctioned if they don't sell after being on the market for 45 to 50 days. Gitlin plans to hold one auction a month, with the first one the week of Feb. 26, for eight homes in Brookville, Dix Hills, Flushing, Hempstead, Hicksville and Massapequa.

"Having an auction helps generate demand in a soft market, puts all potential buyers together at one time, and creates a sense of urgency for these homes," says Gitlin, who will offer the houses at auction for a market-rate minimum bid. "So far, we're getting a huge response from potential buyers from the mailers that we have sent to the public."

#### Facts (and free food)

Offering detailed information to the buying and selling public is another way to stand out in the crowd.

Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty's Port Washington office held a free two-hour seminar in November at a local restaurant explaining the state of the housing market to potential home buyers and sellers, says Emma McMahon, branch manager. The realty office partnered with Wells Fargo Home Mortgage, which discussed new kinds of financing available to buyers, and free food was served. (The Cold Spring Harbor office of Daniel Gale recently held a similar event at the local library.)

A total of 50 people attended the Port Washington seminar, and 10 from Daniel Gale were there. Another seminar is planned for spring, McMahon adds.

"Our goal was to educate and inform our community," she says. "When the market is more robust, buyers don't have as many questions; these days, they have more questions and concerns."

The Corcoran Group's East Hampton office plans a seminar in March geared toward first-time buyers. The two-hour luncheon event will be either in an agent's home or a restaurant. The goal is to attract up to 30 people who want a crash course in home buying, says Susan Ryan, sales associate.

The firm expects to have other experts - who could include attorneys, mortgage company representatives and appraisers - on hand also.

"We're looking to reach out to the public, and offering information is a very effective way to do so," Ryan says.

#### Try some 'superstar' sales ideas

Former real estate agent Jim Pugliese spoke last year in Woodbury before the Long Island Board of Realtors on the "Best 100 Ideas of Superstar Agents." Some ideas from Pugliese, now a Clifton Park, N.Y.-based speaker, trainer and instructor:

Put reflectorized names on "For Sale" signs, so that buyers can see them when they're driving by at night.

Offer free special reports on your Web site.

Avoid glamour photos on business cards.

Sponsor an annual event to thank clients, customers and those who send referrals.

Connect with former clients of agents who left the business.

Create 15 leads every week.

Come up with a memorable slogan.

Give clients a smoke detector or carbon monoxide detector as a gift - and then send a 9-volt battery every year.