

B^{to}BUSINESS

February 2008

Marketing in a soft economy



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It takes brains, savvy and creative solutions to market today's real estate. Here's how.

By David Tufts

It's hard to ignore the doom-and-gloom headlines surrounding the nationwide real estate market. Yet the Atlanta in-town condo market remains among the strongest in the nation. Our economy is healthy and homes continue to appreciate in value, making the market attractive for real estate investors. This is evident through investments by power players such as Donald Trump (Trump Towers Atlanta) and Jorge Perez (CityPlace Buckhead).

But because buyers are hesitant, developers must find creative solutions to allay homebuyers' fears.

When the market is strong, it's easier to sell condos. Traditional advertising and signage make buyers walk through the door. In

ing our buyers exclusive access to the opening exhibition. It conveys you're part of something big and that membership has its privileges.

From Web sites to blogs, buyers have a wealth of information at their fingertips. They shop what's out there and will compare products. They may wait for the best deal or simply stay nervous and unmotivated. As a seller you not only must know your business, but your competition's as well.

Marketing to buyers spooked by news that we're in a downward trend is challenging. That said, savvy marketers know a soft market is traditionally a great time to buy.

Historically, if you track the ups and downs of the real estate market, it's time to buy when the media warns against doing so. Consider this *San Francisco Examiner* quote from 1996 that states "a home is where the bad investment is." At that time, the average price of a home in San Francisco was \$250,000. Ten years later, it was \$750,000. Moreover, interest rates remain at historic all time lows.

Yet conveying your success story and instilling trust in your buyers is hard. You must be able to deliver unique solutions. For example, we've had great success with buyer sphere-of-influence events. We host a party to celebrate a homebuyer's purchase and he invites his friends. The rationale is that like-minded people will make like-minded purchasing decisions. It's proven to be a great way to get referrals and provides an exclusive experience for the buyer.

We've also found success in sponsoring events such as Annie Leibovitz at the High Museum. It aligns our product with a luxury brand, providing us access to the museum's audience while provid-

ing our buyers exclusive access to the opening exhibition. It conveys you're part of something big and that membership has its privileges.

So after you've positioned your product, instilled trust in your buyer and made the sale, your next challenge may be helping your buyer secure financing. We encourage our developers to provide an array of credible lenders. Buyers also may have to sell their homes. Developers must be able to provide solutions. This means being realistic about values and knowing comparables.

It takes brains, savvy and creative solutions to market real estate in a soft economy. Here's how:

The nation is smiling on Atlanta.

The city remains a skyline of cranes, as developers continue to build in our growing economy.

Knowledge is power.

Be strategic in your marketing efforts. This means knowing your product, buyer and market inside and out.

Now is the time to buy.

Real estate values continue to rise regardless of the economy and interest rates remain at historic all time lows.

Instill trust.

Find solutions for challenges facing today's buyers.

Be creative.

You can no longer just place an ad. In a soft economy, you must be very strategic with marketing, public relations, advertising and events to ensure you capture your buyers. **B**

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a softer market you must be strategic. This means knowing your product, buyer and market inside and out. Research is key to marketing condos in a soft mar-