

# Real estate marketers leveraging tech to drive sales

**MARKETING** | Tools to engage homebuyers now include video, social media and artificial intelligence

BY JAMI MAKAN  
JAMAKAN@BIV.COM

Real estate marketing is evolving to adapt to a changing marketplace in which creative online content can be used to connect with purchasers and help curate and close property deals.

Long before a project breaks ground, real estate marketers are retained by developers to optimize the project to appeal to prospective buyers, who can then be engaged through things like podcasts, social media, testimonials, immersive digital content and experiential offerings.

Gone are the days when a sponsored spread in a newspaper would be enough to help a project achieve lift-off. Now, realtors are becoming influencers, using technology to drive public interest and target the right audiences.

The goal is to achieve careful product design and set a project apart, luring buyers with compelling content that tells a story, offers transparency and enables people to explore a new home years before it's built.

"Whether it's on their phones or tablets or a touchscreen at a sales centre, they're able to really walk through it," said **Dan Hashemi**, CEO of **LNG Studios**, which specializes in 3D renderings, animations and virtual experiences in real estate.

"Whether it's an amenity space or the unit they want to purchase, they can walk through and really see the space in full realism to understand what are the finishes, what are the layouts, what is everything going to feel like and look like."

It's only the beginning, said Hashemi, since the true potential of virtual and augmented reality is only just getting underway. Artificial intelligence already enhances renderings, engages with potential buyers via chatbots, gathers market data and improves workflow.

## Marketing and development go together

Real estate marketing is the process of promoting properties to potential buyers. The goal is to generate interest in buying properties, and to connect potential purchasers with properties that meet their needs. It's done extensively for pre-sale properties, since they do not exist yet and require significant product elucidation.

Industry experts said it's common for marketing professionals to be engaged by homebuilders very early on, around the same time as architects or interior designers, or even when development land is purchased. Marketing teams can help design floor plans and amenities and formulate price points.

"In reality, these are strata lots in the sky," said **Cam Good**, owner of **KEY Marketing**, the current volume leader in B.C. for condo pre-sales. "They're quite similar to a similar project in the same neighborhood, and it's up to us to differentiate it."

He continued: "When you don't do the work to differentiate your product to understand what's unique about it or to make it unique, then it becomes commoditized and it just sells for whatever the market will bear. It's just often a war of incentives. There's nothing special enough about the offering to get people to pay attention to it. Our goal with the offering on each of our projects is to make it such that it can't be ignored."

Good, who has a podcast named **Good Talks**, said **KEY Marketing** helped select amenities and smart-home technologies for a major project, **Innovation District Penticton**. He said his firm's design choices—for example, a rooftop deck and a smart-building "ecosystem" named **IVALET**—are carefully reviewed by the builder.

"Developers do it so they can hold us accountable for the marketing and sales results at the end of the day, and we like to do it

because it just makes our job easier," he said. "Everything added to the product is usually an extra cost, so it is very carefully scrutinized by the developer in a cost-benefit-type analysis."

## Targeting buyers and realtors on many fronts

After the design of a development is optimized, the next step is to reach potential buyers and their realtors. A vast majority of pre-sale buyers are now represented, much more so than in the past.

Historically, buzz was generated through newspaper advertising and telephone calls, for example. Now, buyers' agents, some of whom have tens of thousands of followers, may be invited to sales centres to film promotional videos and commentary with display suites, scale models and smart-home demonstrations.

It's common for marketing teams to invite realtors to special events and other programming, to educate them on project details and hopefully turn them into "ambassadors" for a given project. Some marketing firms also have affiliated brokerages, while others shirk this business model to avoid possible conflicts of interest.

To reach potential buyers in the social media era, it's easier than ever to zero-in on desired demographics through advertising on **YouTube**, **Meta**, **TikTok**, **WeChat** and **Reddit**. "Homebuyers want to know who they are buying from, and the first place they go to is online," said **Sunny Hahm**, principal of **Tandem Real Estate Strategy**.

Hahm has found that short video clips are especially appealing to the public. "Dynamic" ads can include animated content and homebuyer testimonials, and are more engaging than "static" ads that are easily scrolled through and bypassed. For one campaign, click impressions were almost ten times better from a short video clip than from

some of his static ads.

"If it's not in motion-picture, I think there is a quick tendency for someone just to swipe right through," Hahm said. "You have almost like two to three seconds of immediate impact to get someone's attention."

According to **Karim Virani**, founder of **Virani Real Estate**, the goal of online content is to help the public educate themselves about a project, formulate the right questions and be enticed to a beautifully-designed presentation centre, where a human touch can help seal the deal. Delivering an "experience," such as through VIP events, is becoming increasingly important.

"The technology will drive interest," said Virani. "Without bothering people, things are sent quite automatically through technology so that they can make informed decisions. This is not a hard sell anymore. People are very smart and astute in the way that they do their research these days. Then we invite them to the presentation gallery, they see what the offering is like, and if it's a right fit for them, we curate a deal."

He continued: "A large percentage of people who come here will [already] have an expression of interest to buy. They've come here not just to look around, but they come here because they're curious and tempted by the digital media they've received."

## It's all about location, location, location

Homeseekers aren't just buying a detached home, townhouse or condo; they are buying into an entire neighborhood, and want to know about local history and character as well as grocery stores, parks, cafes, eateries and other local establishments.

**RealTours** is an online video series where host **Stephen Tadgh** explores different B.C. neighborhoods and interviews realtors about what makes each one attractive. Now in its second

season, the show has garnered over three million views. It's produced by **Real Estate Works (REW)**, an enhanced MLS listings platform owned by **Glacier Media**, the publisher of **BIV**.

"That transaction journey, where an individual will start considering the transaction and use video-exploration and video-discovery as a way to inform themselves and educate themselves about a particular product or transaction before they do it—that's the inspiration for **RealTours**," said REW president **Simon Bray**.

In order to create the ultimate guide to a particular neighborhood and bring it to life, the show features interviews with realtor-partners, who subsidize production costs to help the series grow and improve production quality.

REW is the largest real estate marketplace website in B.C. measured by traffic, with about five million sessions per month. "Most of those sessions are coming from people in B.C., so that's a more engaged and bigger audience than any other platform in our core market," Bray said.

As virtual reality and AI take root, the success of **RealTours** shows that video is still perhaps the most compelling medium. In the re-sale market, for example, one can easily spend hours watching short tours of luxury properties on Instagram and TikTok.

But regardless of medium, storytelling remains the overall objective. "We really need to make sure that every developer is really telling their story just as much as the story of the development that they are building," said Hashemi of **LNG Studios**.

"Buyers need to trust that they are going to see through a project, that everything is going to go smooth, and that they are going to get the return on investment as well as the home that they are purchasing at the end of the day." ■