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## Companies, agents break into real estate video

### Part 3: Real estate technology buzz

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*Editor's note: In an increasingly competitive marketplace, brokers and agents are trying new things to gain an edge. In this four-part series, Inman News offers a look at new tools available for Realtors, including online communication plug-ins, online video and single-property Web site marketing. (Read [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).)*

Make them yourself or find somebody to shoot, edit and host 'em -- but don't miss out, believers say: video is an easy way to set yourself apart from the competition in real estate.

You don't have to hire a professional or go to film school to make use of video. The ability to shoot video in digital format and edit it on a computer has turned the process into child's play -- literally.

But there's more to it than walking through a listing capturing some footage and posting it on YouTube (no-no's in this [video](#): "blown out" sunlit windows and rooms cloaked in darkness; occupants and their possessions at every turn, and a heavy-breathing cameraman who gives the whole thing the atmosphere of a slasher flick).

With a little bit of effort, it's possible to get good results shooting your own video. And there are a growing number of videographers who will do the work for you at surprisingly affordable rates. At the upper end of the scale, there are professional production companies capable of producing broadcast video that's good enough for TV.

For the most part, agents and brokers are using video in two ways: to promote themselves, which brings them clients and listings, and to sell individual properties with videos that accompany listings.

Ellen Wasserstrom, a Realtor with Coldwell Banker in Bernardsville, N.J., had her husband shoot a video for prospective clients, plugging her experience and marketing skills.

The [video](#) -- accessed by clicking the "meet Ellen" button on Wasserstrom's [home page](#), is not slick. She and her boss are filmed against window blinds and a blank wall, and a distant microphone picks up the sound of their voices reverberating around the room.

But the video gets its point across, and Wasserstrom says clients have taken note.

"I can't say if that's how I get any business, but (clients) do tell me they saw it, and liked my video," Wasserstrom said.

Wasserstrom said she's not ready to start cranking out videos for her listings, though.

"I'm a really big fan of the (photo-based) visual tours because people can click on the room they want to see, and go at their own pace," Wasserstrom said. "If I found more people were interested in video I would probably do that. If there was a property where the setting was so spectacular you could capture it best that way, I would use video. Here in New Jersey, we don't have the panoramic views that some resort properties do, but we have some very nice vistas."

Broker Douglas Heddings of The Heddings Property Group LLC in New York City recently began producing

videos for each of his listings. He's amazed that he seems to be alone among the 27,000 registered agents in his market to have plunged headlong into video.

"I think I'm the only one on the island of Manhattan who's doing it, which I find mind-boggling," Heddings said.

Heddings, a senior vice president at [Prudential Douglas Elliman](#), hires a professional videographer, Ted Stoecklein, to shoot his videos, and pays for the premium level of services available from the video hosting service [WellcomeMat.com](#).

Making a professional-quality video for each listing is more than twice as expensive as a virtual tour, Heddings said, but that doesn't mean it's cost prohibitive. Although Heddings handles high-dollar properties in Manhattan, he thinks video makes economic sense for marketing less-expensive homes, too.

"When you're talking about charging the seller 6 percent to market their home, I don't care if it's a \$150,000 home or a \$1 million home, the cost to you to provide such an incredible service is insignificant," Heddings said.

Videos don't sell listings all by themselves, but they do help attract serious buyers, he said.

On a recent listing on the Upper West Side, Heddings had planned a two-week marketing campaign to build interest before showing the property. When the seller signed a lease on another property, the timetable was accelerated.

Heddings set up six appointments to show the property on a Friday night. Each prospective buyer had already seen the video accompanying the listing, and three made bids.

"Do I think that happened because of the video? No," Heddings said. "But the six people who came were all very real and interested parties because they had seen the video. A couple made comments, like 'I feel like I've already been here.' "

Heddings gets double duty out of his videos for listings by appearing in them when he can attend the shoot.

He makes it about half the time, and has his videographer follow him on a tour of the property. They've even ventured out for a look at nearby attractions like a park or playground.

"A lot of people aren't going to be comfortable on camera," Heddings acknowledged. "But you don't have to do a video tour with you walking through the property for it to be effective."

The no-branding prohibitions many MLS providers place on listings mean that some agents can't inject themselves -- or even their Web URLs -- into their listings videos. But that's not a problem for Heddings, whose [listings](#) appear on the Prudential Douglas Elliman Web site because there's no MLS provider for Manhattan.

Heddings is already comfortable being in the public eye, thanks in part to his blog, [True Gotham](#), which offers real estate professionals and consumers an insider's perspective into the industry.

Heddings said he's planning to launch a Web TV show on the blog, which will feature guests ranging from mortgage lenders to real estate agents and brokers discussing topics of interest to consumers. The program, which will run five to seven minutes, is in pre-production, Heddings said.

### **Neighborhood videos and TurnHere**

Shooting a video for each and every listing can be a time-consuming and expensive process for a product that can only be used once. But builders, brokers and agents are also making videos about entire communities that can be used to promote many listings.

[Real Living](#) commissioned TurnHere to make nearly 50 videos that show off the best features of communities in Ohio where the company has many listings. The community videos are displayed with each of the more than 6,600 listings available through Real Living's company-owned offices, said Kaira Rouda, Real Living Inc.'s chief operating officer.

A video of [Upper Arlington](#), a suburb near Real Living's Columbus, Ohio, headquarters, shows residents enjoying the community's mature trees, restaurants, churches and schools.

"It's all about providing as big a picture as possible, and I think technology helps you do that," Rouda said. Video helps house hunters explore on their own without time pressures. "It shortens the time and research involved in looking for a home. Consumers are informed before even working with an agent."

Real Living was so pleased with the community videos that it commissioned TurnHere to produce 40 videos profiling individual agents. The agent videos will soon make their debut on Web sites Real Living provides its agents, and will also be linked to the agents' listings.

Rouda said the initial batch of agent videos will help other Real Living agents decide whether to make room for video in their marketing budgets.

"It's another marketing tool they choose whether or not to do, like direct mail or search-engine optimization," Rouda said. "What I tell agents right now is it's still pretty new, and it's a proven fact that consumers are drawn to video online. If you want to be on the leading edge, it can get quite a lot of attention for yourselves and your listings. Someday it's going to be the status quo."

[TurnHere](#), a startup owned by *Inman News* founder Bradley Inman, can tap a network of more than 2,000 professional filmmakers who create broadcast-quality online videos.

One advantage of hiring a company that employs high production standards is that the end result can be used as part of a TV ad campaign. Although television is a medium many small companies once considered cost prohibitive, companies like [Spotrunner](#) and [Spotzer](#) help advertisers book commercials in tightly targeted cable markets.

Rouda said Real Living has repurposed parts of spots shot for TV for the Web, but that it's less likely that the company would pay to put video commissioned for the Web on TV. Real Living was pleasantly surprised, however, when Time Warner offered to run the TurnHere shorts in the local cable television market for free.

"It was odd for them to come to a traditional advertiser asking for content," Rouda said, but Real Living was happy to oblige. The spots -- which feature the Real Living logo -- will soon be showing up on televisions in communities around Ohio, at no cost to the company.

### **Coldwell Banker builds video library**

Community shorts produced by TurnHere are also featured at ColdwellBanker.com, where 43 videos on a "feedroom" [page](#) are organized in "channels." The channels -- "Ready to Buy," "Ready to Sell," "Local Beat," "Lifestyles" and "Side Door" -- help users sort through content, and all of the videos are accompanied by links which lead to pages that match viewers to Coldwell Banker agents and listings.

The company's video library "has a sophisticated tracking tool behind it to allow us to get an idea of how consumers are interacting with our video content," said Charlie Young, senior vice president for marketing, Coldwell Banker Real Estate Corp. "We're able to tell what videos are most popular, what's the average time spent watching videos, what videos have the most click-throughs and more."

Coldwell Banker uses video from a number of sources to provide visitors with information about the company, the communities it does business in, and the home-buying process. Videos on the site include productions by HGTV, Forbes.com and Fine Living.

Watch any of the eight TurnHere neighborhood videos in the "Local Beat" channel, and links are provided that take viewers to pages where they can search for homes or find Coldwell Banker sales associates in those communities.

In the Lifestyles channel, clicking on the Fine Living video "Comparing Markets: What 800K Buys," provides a link to Coldwell Banker's [Home Value Estimator](#) page, which offers "Live Market Watch" and "Comparable Market Analysis" tools.

Forbes.com videos on luxury, retirement and international real estate have links to Coldwell Banker's

[property search](#) page.

Young said Coldwell Banker has found that the videos backed by its national advertising are "very popular. Last year and this year one of our national TV spots drives consumers to ColdwellBanker.com, (which has) a subsequent 'commercial extension' with the same look and feel of the commercial."

*(See Part 4 for more information on additional production companies and video on Realtor.com.)*

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