

# SOCIAL LIFE

magazine

FEATURES



THE POWER TEAM. RAVI GULIVINDALA, REGIS ROUMILA, EDDIE SHAPIRO, RYAN SERHANT, BRUCE MICHELL

## MILLION DOLLAR LISTINGS: BEHIND THE FIRM AND IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA

BY THERESA FISHER

Of course Eddie Shapiro, founder and CEO of Nest Seekers International, was joking when he described the next phase of the real estate brokerage firm's expansion as interplanetary. "We're looking at good real estate on Mars, now that the new explorer vehicle landed there just a few weeks ago," he laughed.

Ok, so the idea of brokers negotiating numbers and showing properties on the Red Planet is patently ridiculous. But if anyone could believably make such an out-of-this-world pitch, it's Shapiro, who founded Nest Seekers in 2002. Since then, the young firm has established its presence on six continents and gained dominance in and around its NYC home base, particularly in the Hamptons. Even outside its four offices (East Hampton, South-

ampton, Bridgehampton, and Water Mill), it's hard to ignore Nest Seekers' omnipresence, especially in the past year. From 2011 to 2012, Nest Seekers saw a 47 percent increase in size (to 308 brokers) and an over 90 percent jump in its listings' dollar volume.

The recipe for Nest Seekers' success is anything but secret. Shapiro values high visibility, online and off, as vital to thriving in a changing real estate climate. In the 20 years since Shapiro got his license, at 19, the number of brokers in the Hamptons has increased fivefold and the year-round community has grown enormously.

More generally, Shapiro thinks that buyers and sellers know more about the real estate market, and pay closer attention to it, due in large part to digital resources overtak-

ing print. An increasingly market-savvy clientele translates to higher industry standards for knowledge and service, and Shapiro has made sure that Nest Seekers rises to the occasion. Its website, which gets over 150,000 unique visitors each month, is an encyclopedic real estate database, and the firm's brokers aren't far off — walking, talking, besuited databases ready with a business card and a property estimate before you can say “ocean view.”

Case in point: Nest Seekers' Senior VP, Ryan Serhant, ranked as NYC's No.16 broker by *Real Deal Magazine*. The young, camera-ready broker represented Nest Seekers on Bravo's *Million Dollar Listing: New York* in fine form. His participation on the docu-reality show was (and will continue to be) a boon for the firm, easily demonstrated by soaring sales, fanfare, and more than a little media attention. The second season of *MDLNY* is underway, and Shapiro, delighted with the publicity, foresees even more TV in the future: “Nest Seekers is working on a number of new shows and television vehicles to further the brand

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and gain exposure,” he explained. “We have been offered some great opportunities and are working on making them happen. I cannot discuss details just yet, but wonderful things are on the way,” he added.

Despite his famous-person status — internet memes, gossip column mentions, and many a party picture are sure proof — Serhant resists being called the face of Nest Seekers. “We're over 300 agents and everyone carries his or her own weight,” he said, before adding, “I happen to have a public eye watching me, but I'm not the best, or the biggest, agent here.”

Even if bigger and better exist, no broker is more ideal for Nest Seekers' branding than Serhant, who seems to embody Shapiro's vision for his star firm: polished but personable, ruthlessly committed, and almost too quick (but not quite) for comfort.

Before working in real estate, Serhant had a recurring

role on *As the World Turns*, as Evan Walsh IV. He also performed on stage in college, worked as a hand model, and appeared in AT&T commercials. In September 2008, unable to pay his rent, Ryan accepted an offer to join his college friend's real estate venture. He simultaneously worked passing out flyers at a UES Equinox, even after getting his first deal, two months in. “A \$700 a month rental in Korea Town. It wasn't much, but I was just so excited to have some money at the time,” Serhant recalled about his inaugural transaction. Though he's graduated to considerably bigger deals, Serhant's pre-power-broker days have stayed with him, as he noted, “It's hard for some people to understand what living like that is like in New York. I still remember showing up to work my first day in khaki pants, an old Polo shirt, and cowboy boots. They were my nicest clothes.”

Aside from personal anecdotes, Serhant's soap and stage experiences taught him to improvise and adapt to different characters and situations, skills that have proved instrumental to his success as a broker.

Like Shapiro, Serhant, who describes himself as a “Sag guy by nature,” knows and loves the Hamptons. “I lived for a short while in Oyster Bay when I was younger, and we would come to Sag on the weekends. I still love it,” he enthused, expressing a personal fondness that he seems to apply professionally. When it comes to Hamptons real estate, Serhant proposes a simple, sensible idea: people prefer to be near their friends and family. He wouldn't show a client homes in East Hampton if they'll be meeting people in Sag or Southampton constantly. As Serhant sees it, “the Hamptons is all about community and building friendships — and you do that through homes in a much more genuine way than you see in the city.”

Does it follow, then, that a short drive, maybe even more than famous neighbors or beach access, increases value? Maybe, but Nest Seekers forgoes rules, preferring a client-specific approach to anything formulaic. And — without generalizing — it might be the key to all those million dollar listings.

PRODUCED BY DEVORAH ROSE

STYLED BY MARY DYANN KEES

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT: CARLY PAIGE WITZBURG

PHOTOGRAPHERS:

TIFFANY WALLING MCGARITY AND JOHN MCGARITY

WALLINGMCGARITY.COM

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