

# LUXURY

## Locating Luxury

### Upper-bracket agents

**Bold lead in: Experience, networking, and tax knowledge are key when selecting an agent to help you buy and sell upscale real estate.**

Regardless of price point, there are some things that everybody wants in a real estate agent: honesty, loyalty, good negotiating skills and specific geographic knowledge, just to name a few. But once you reach the pinnacle and are buying and selling well into the seven- or even eight-figures, those traits are just the starting point. What else should you look for in a real estate agent?

The precise answer is as individual as you are, of course, but it's possible to generalize. Upper-bracket clients need an agent who has high-end experience, an extensive professional network, knowledge of the tax and financial implications of owning luxury property and creative marketing ideas, executed in an upscale manner.



Janet Owen, Sudler Hancock Center

#### High-end experience

Clearly, luxury real estate is an area in which experience counts. "I would want to know that an agent has sold multiple upper-bracket properties before and knows how to establish value in the mind of both buyers and sellers," says Janet Owen of Sudler John Hancock Center in Chicago. "Just like when selecting a doctor, you would be a little hesitant to be his first operation."

Some agents, particularly in the upper bracket, decide to specialize as either listing agents or buyers' agents. Owen prefers to be a listing agent. "I've decided I just can't do it all equally well, particularly because listing high-end properties is especially time-consuming," she says. "I attend every showing of all my listings, giving tours and establishing value in potential buyers' minds, and I can't do that if I'm constantly off showing properties to my own buyers."

Also, as in any price bracket, correct pricing is a must, and how an agent arrives at a price is largely a product of his or her knowledge and experience. "It's very important to be able to talk about every other home in the neighborhood, what it sold for and-most importantly-why," says Dede Banks of Renaissance Realty Partners in Lake Forest. "Pricing in the upper bracket can be very difficult because many of our homes don't have truly comparable properties for us to use as comparisons. That's where our inside knowledge comes into play."

An extensive professional network That inside knowledge, of course, is a reflection of the breadth and depth of a luxury agent's professional network. "Especially with high-end properties, if you know the right people, you can hear about them before they're even added to the Multiple Listing System, so you can be the first to see it," says Owen. "An agent who isn't plugged in to the network might miss a terrific opportunity for her clients."



The agents at Renaissance Realty Partners in Lake Forest are ready to assist you.

But no matter how well-connected an agent is, discretion is crucial. "Even though an agent should have a large professional network, it's also important that they be able to keep their clients' confidences," says Banks.

#### Tax, financial implications

Before settling on an agent, make sure he or she is conversant with the possible



Kim Hoey, ERA Jensen & Feinstein, Hinsdale

expect a luxury specialist to have marketing ideas up his or her sleeve far beyond just adding a property to the Multiple Listing Service, particularly since the customer pool for multimillion-dollar real estate is relatively small. As Kim Hoey of ERA Jensen & Feinstein Hinsdale explains, "It's a limited audience, so we have to approach it in a more creative way than a mid-market home that has a huge pool of potential buyers."

For a creative agent, that might mean looking beyond the immediate geographical area. "Many potential luxury buyers are not local-about half my clients are relocating from other cities, while the rest mostly come from a 50-mile radius," says Hoey, who relies heavily on advertising in the Wall Street Journal because of its national readership. She also likes to advertise in the leave-behind magazines of high-end hotel chains, believing that such upscale publications will be kept by readers longer than more down-market ones.

The finer points of marketing count, too. "I make sure my marketing materials all present an upscale impression, down to using heavyweight paper and avoiding abbreviations," says Owen. "People may