

# NASHVILLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

## Blockbuster Listing

Real estate agent, filmmaker make mini-movies to sell luxury homes

**Selling a million dollar home? Forget the sign in the yard. How about a film crew?**

Keith Merrill, a real estate agent with Worth Properties, and Curt Hahn, CEO of Nashville-based production company Film House, have partnered on what they believe is the next big thing in marketing luxury homes: short films.

These aren't the no-frills video tours you may have seen. These mini-movies are professionally produced, complete with story lines, five-figure budgets and actors showing off what life could be like in a home.

"Simple video tours don't show you the essence of the house," Merrill said. "This puts you in the house, shows you the features and gives you a feel for how you live in the house."

The unlikely partnership shows how harnessing social media and technology can offer innovative ways to reach consumers and open doors to new business ventures. Hahn said the concept has the potential to develop into a "multimillion-dollar business" for the company.

Each video, which gets posted on YouTube to accompany a listing, is targeted at a specific type of buyer. A city townhouse features a cosmopolitan bachelor prepping for a cocktail party. A film for a home in Green Hills shows a child riding a scooter and a dog running up the stairs.

"These films strike an emotional chord with people," Hahn said. "They immediately picture themselves living there." Merrill and Hahn believe the video marketing can create buzz around a home, sell it faster and for a higher price. It also can give an agent an advantage when competing for a listing

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**– Curt Hahn, CEO of Nashville-based production company Film House**

and lead to a higher commission, Merrill said.

Merrill and his client liaison Anne Nilsson got the idea after seeing similar videos for homes in larger markets with robust film industries, such as Los Angeles and Toronto, where real estate agents are experimenting with the concept.

Hahn is convinced the films will grow into a lucrative niche for Film



*Nathan Morgan | Nashville Business Journal*

Real estate agents Keith Merrill and Anne Nilsson, from left, of Worth Properties LLC, and Curt Hahn, CEO of Film House, teamed up to create a three-minute film to enhance the listing for this home in Green Hills. They also used a movie for another area home, which recently sold to a buyer from England who made an offer after seeing the film.

House. He likens it to 20 years ago, when the company began producing TV commercials for Nashville radio stations. Eventually, Film House was cranking out commercials for radio broadcasters across the country.

"We became the experts in promoting radio stations on TV," Hahn said. "I believe we have the same potential here. I think this is something that will catch on across the country. It's an open, fertile field. There are only a handful of agents who have done anything like this, and frankly some of the ones we've seen are atrocious."

### Proving the concept

The team has produced three videos and is impressed with the results.

They posted their first short film for a 6,000-square-foot home in Green Hills to YouTube in September. Ten

days later, a couple from England saw it, fell in love with the home and made an offer, without ever setting foot inside. The couple eventually bought the house for \$1.435 million.

Merrill and Hahn's second film for a \$1.4 million townhouse with an open-air rooftop overlooking Centennial Park also paid off quickly, Merrill said. The buyer, a young executive who has the property under contract, was looking for a home in the \$700,000 range. After watching the video, he had to see the house.

"This is the dream for every real estate agent," Hahn said. "Put a house on the market. Launch a video. And in a few weeks get an offer from a buyer and you're off to the races on the next one."

### Opening nationwide

With a handful of films under its belt, Film House's next step is to expand the idea to other areas in Middle Tennessee. Hahn said he plans to court real estate agents who specialize in Williamson County, which isn't a focus area for Merrill and Nilsson.

"There is a huge market for this in Brentwood and Franklin," Hahn said. "A year or two from now I'd be really surprised if you see a multimillion-dollar house and there's not a mini-movie for it." After Tennessee, Hahn wants to produce films for homes across the country. Because Film House owns the copyright to the scripts, they can be used again, when applicable, for homes in other cities.

"The more we do, the more we learn about how to make them effective and make them cost effectively," Hahn said.

### Blockbuster budget

The films don't come cheap. Merrill said the costs vary depending on how many actors are used and how long the shoot is, but some can cost \$20,000 to \$30,000, similar to a TV commercial. For comparison, a typical video home tour costs about \$300.

Due to the cost, the films only make sense for high-end homes with price tags above \$1 million. Merrill believes it's a worthwhile investment because it helps the home draw a higher price, adding that a seller might have to drop an asking price by \$100,000 to spawn the same amount of interest a video could generate.

"The more eyes you get on a listing that shows the feel of the listing increases the likelihood of finding a qualified buyer," Merrill said.

The more expensive the home, the more you can spend on a film. Last year, a \$35 million Malibu mansion was marketed with an action movie that for three minutes rivaled a Hollywood blockbuster and "must have cost a fortune to make," Hahn said.

Covering the cost of the video can be structured in a number of ways in a listing agreement between the seller and the agent. It could be tied to an agent's commission.

However, not everyone in real estate believes the videos will catch on.

Jack Miller, a broker with Bob Parks Realty who deals in luxury homes, applauds the films as a "very novel and creative technique" that might cause potential buyers to "linger longer on a listing."

However, Miller said short films are "potentially cost prohibitive" to become the norm for selling luxury homes. He doubts whether a film could cause a house to sell quicker or for a higher price.

"A short independent mini-film is terrific, but I think what buyers most want to see on a listing is to easily get all the information on a home and find that it's easy to get a personal tour," Miller said.



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Film House has made short films of area houses for sale to give potential buyers a look at what life in the homes could be like. The Nashville filmmaker says the real estate videos could be a booming business in coming years.