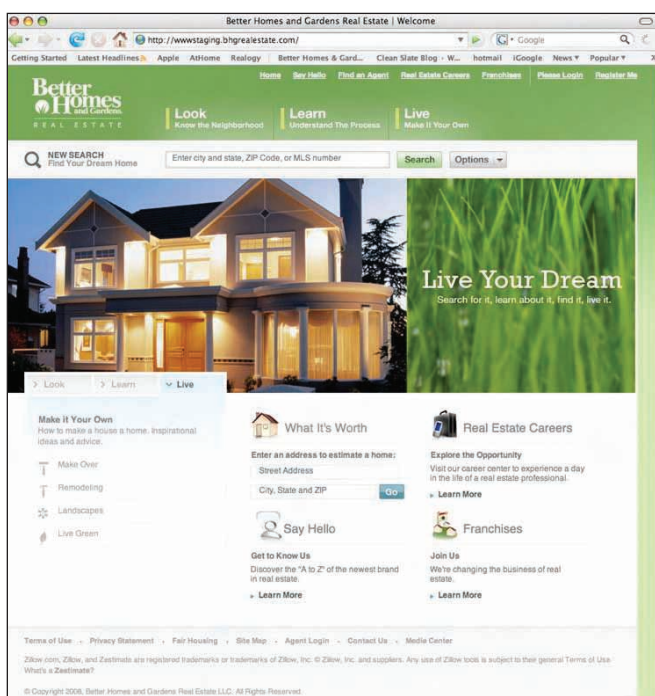


BY ELISABETH A. SULLIVAN//STAFF WRITER

BETTER HOMES, BETTER BRANDING

BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS REAL ESTATE TAKES AN ICONIC MAGAZINE BRAND TO A NEW LEVEL

WHO: Parsippany, N.J.-based Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate LLC is an international real estate firm owned by Realty Corp., the global parent company to brands such as Century 21, Coldwell Banker and Sotheby's International Realty. In October 2007, Realty signed a 50-year agreement with Des Moines, Iowa-based magazine publisher Meredith Corp. to license the Better Homes and Gardens name.



WHAT: With just five months to complete the project, Better Homes and Gardens (BHG) Real Estate's executive team developed an innovative brand that builds off of the 80-year-old heritage of one of the most popular shelter magazines in the country. The brand targets new homebuyers and agents with a Web-heavy strategy, a fresh visual identity, and an innovative approach to real estate—all cohesively wrapped to ensure that the brand message remains intact as it travels from the corporate level, to the broker, to the homebuyer.

The brand launched in July 2008, and was recognized with a Gold MarCom Award in the corporate branding category from the Association of Marketing and Communications Professionals.

HOW: This isn't the first go-round for BHG Real Estate: The brand extension first surfaced in the 1970s. The team behind this

latest iteration kept that history in mind when re-launching the brand. "Many of our potential clients are brokers who used to carry the old Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate trademark," says Sherry Chris, CEO of BHG Real Estate. "We wanted to acknowledge and respect the old BHG but really bring it into the new world."

BHG Real Estate saw the Web as an integral part of its brand positioning. Rather than building a traditional real estate brand, Chris and her team wanted to create a lifestyle brand that would connect with consumers well before they make a purchase and be a resource for them well after the transaction transpires. Therefore, BHGRealEstate.com offers everything from housing market research tools to interior design tips. "You've got to live in your home, not just buy and sell it," says Camilla Sullivan, the company's SVP of marketing.

Taking a page from the shelter magazine's strategy, BHG Real Estate's brand personality is practical, passionate about the home, innovative and sophisticated. It expresses a clear and consistent message with "every image, every word," Sullivan says. "We had to make sure that with the brand extension, we didn't pull it so far [that] it snapped." Representatives from Meredith and *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine are on hand to make sure that no snapping occurs, she says, and she appreciates their sense of ownership. "I understand how precious this is, to take this brand and take it in another direction."

"There's no way that you cannot factor in the power of the Better Homes and Gardens brand. It really is an American icon," adds Mike Nethercott, president and chief operating officer of Infinia Canada, the Toronto-based marketing and branding firm that produced BHG Real Estate's brand identity, visual systems, advertising and marketing collateral. But BHG leadership allowed Nethercott and his team a very

long tether so that they could take a fresh approach to the brand's design.

"The last thing we wanted was to look like everybody else," Sullivan says, and Infinia heeded that request. "For a start, we're green. You don't see a lot of green real estate brands," Sullivan says. From the logo to the Web site, marketing collateral, magazine ads and "For Sale" signs, vibrant shades of green and images of verdant lawns—meant to connote comfort, growth and prosperity—appear alongside crisp white lettering. The visual identity aims to be fresh, modern and accessible.

To ensure that the brand's identity and message remain cohesive as they travel down the chute from the corporate level, to the broker, and on to the consumer, BHG Real Estate takes a "360-degree cradle-to-grave approach," Sullivan says. "We spend a lot of time training new brokers on the image, on the vision [and] on the message," making sure that their signs, business cards, phone greetings, and even their launch-day speeches reinforce the brand. Sullivan and her team provide franchisees with a comprehensive brand guide and ad templates, and maintain an ongoing dialogue with brokers through social media. "The value of the brand is to uphold the brand. To dilute the brand is to dilute what you signed up for," she says.

The current real estate market is undoubtedly tough, the BHG Real Estate team acknowledges. "The entire industry is challenged," Chris says. "Being the biggest, [Realty is] a bigger target and therefore gets more press." But the BHG brand's weight and heritage already have prompted more than 1,200 agents to sign on. "If we launched the brand three years ago, it would have been more challenging" because independent real estate agents wouldn't have needed BHG Real Estate's help, Chris says. "In a unique way, it's a blessing in disguise." **m**

COMPANY	BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS REAL ESTATE LLC
HEADQUARTERS	Parsippany, N.J.
MARKETING STAFF SIZE	Five in-house staff members
2007 SALES AND MARKETING BUDGET*	\$1.5-\$3 million
MARKETING AGENCY	Infinia Group

*Source: BHG Real Estate