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Video stars: Real estate and style

Agent Stephanie Somers and videographer Kris Johnson sell a story, not just a property.

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Stephanie Somers and Kris Johnson discuss their real estate video work in Northern Liberties. Left, a screen shot from "Milo's House."



Alan J. Heavens, Inquirer Real Estate Writer

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It's a video about a dog named Milo and his thirtysomething, urban-dweller

female owner. Or is it?

Milo and his mom stop at Chic Petique for treats, then walk to a newish townhouse in the style of hundreds built in Center City's ring neighborhoods during the housing boom. We see interior views of the townhouse, along with shots of dog and owner as she makes dinner.

As the video closes, we glimpse through a window the Piazza at Schmidts, so we know we're in Northern Liberties. Only through the credits do we come to realize that the video is being brought to us by the Somers Team of Re/Max Access, which handled the home's listing.

This video, and five more so far, are not your typical real estate fare. Which is just what agent Stephanie Somers, who has a background in art, had in mind.

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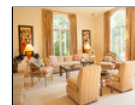
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"We are presenting a vibe, a lifestyle," as well as a place to live, said Somers, who wanted to show the "young and vibrant people" who are buying homes in Fishtown, Northern Liberties, Old City, and Passyunk Square.

In "Milo's House," Somers has the human role - at the last minute, she stepped in for a model with two dogs who didn't make the shoot.

"I had to think on my feet," said Somers, who with husband Christopher owns Re/Max Access in Northern Liberties. "Kris [Johnson], the video guy, contractually will charge me if he shows up and can't film on schedule."

Of her videos, Somers said, "I didn't want them to be just real estate." She considers most property videos online these days to be pretty bland.

Among the exceptions, as the New York Times recently noted, may be the \$1 million four-minute movie being produced by filmmaker Harry B. Macklowe for 432 Park Avenue, a luxury condo high-rise in Manhattan. A Wall Street Journal article reported that the budgets for such cinematic marketing efforts are often a percentage of a home's listing price, ranging from a few thousand dollars to \$1 million-plus for epic residential ventures.

Stephanie Somers said she had spent thousands of dollars of her own money on her videos, calling the results "mind-blowing" presentations that depict what people do in Philadelphia's new hot neighborhoods - go to birthday parties, have romantic evenings, compose music.

But do the videos sell real estate?

So far, all but one of the properties featured - an Old City condo - have sold, though not because of the videos.

The one featuring Milo came out after the Northern Liberties townhouse was sold, said the seller, Susan Ludwick, adding that she "loved the video and the dog," and sent it along to the buyer.

The birthday-party video features a resale at Ice House Condominiums, at Columbia Avenue and Thompson Street in Fishtown. The sellers, Larry and Judith Snyder, loved the video, even though there was an agreement of sale before it appeared.

"It was fabulous, as were the photos of the condo taken before the sale," said Judith Snyder. The video "told the story," emphasizing the "lifestyle that [Ice House] was built to offer."

James Maransky, president of EnVision Group of Philadelphia, developer of the LEED platinum-certified Ice House, said he was unaware of the video until it was pointed out, but found it "pretty interesting."

What's more, said Maransky, who broke ground in June for Ice House's nine-unit second phase, the resale unit "had 30 showings, "a huge turnout, more than average."

"The out-of-the-box thinking and marketing tactic the Somers team employed with the production of the video" impressed him, said Maransky, who has retained the agents to represent Ice House's second phase.

The videos are a collaboration between Somers and Johnson, who started his company, KrispFilms, in 2010.



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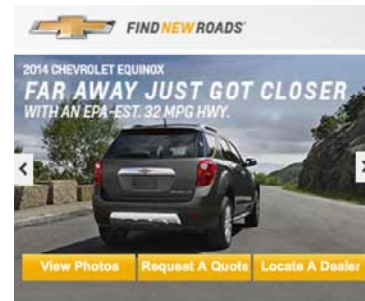


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"What we are showing people is that this house can be yours, using everyday situations like a birthday party, and how the space can be used," Johnson said. "People are visual creatures."

The videos also give local businesses a starring role.

Brenna Crowther, manager of Bloom, a boutique in the Piazza at Schmidts that provided clothing and models for the Ice House video, called it a "fun and unique concept, while showcasing the condo and our merchandise."

Somers is pleased enough that she and Johnson are brainstorming the next video series.

"The plots are getting more interesting," she said.

>Inquirer.com

Agent Stephanie Somers and collaborator KrispFilms create a sort of real estate video verite. www.inquirer.com/somers.

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