

THE REAL DEAL

NEW YORK REAL ESTATE NEWS

Top brokers denounce StreetEasy agent program

Corcoran, Citi Habitats and Town Residential won't support feature, they say

March 06, 2017 05:15PM

By [Katherine Clarke](#)

Some of the city's most prominent real estate brokers are taking to social media to berate StreetEasy's controversial new premier agent feature, which farms out listing leads to agents who pay to advertise on the platform.

Ryan Serhant, a broker at Nest Seekers International and star of "Million Dollar Listing New York," posted two videos on Instagram Sunday, showing what happens when a consumer attempts to reach the broker for a listing they're eyeing on the platform. After calling the number listed on StreetEasy for one of his listings at 56 Leonard Street, Serhant was redirected to a third-party agent named Nathan who paid the listings platform to be the primary contact on the property, rather than to him — the exclusive listing agent.

Serhant called the process "shocking" and "illegal," saying he believes it violates state laws governing advertising. He also said the feature was harmful to consumers, who will be directed to agents who may know nothing about the listing.

"There is no vetting process for agents who pay to get into the premier agent program other than a credit card number," he said. "This is about the seller whose single largest investment — their home — is being mishandled, mistreated, and misrepresented. This is about the consumer who is nervous about the home-buying process already, and who will now be lead to contact an agent that knows nothing about the property they are interested in, for no other purpose than for StreetEasy to make money."

The feature has been introduced at the expense of the listing agents, Serhant said. "StreetEasy, you're my jam, but I wish you had asked us — the agents who give you all of your content and who pay for your advertising — before making this change," he said. "What do they say about biting the hand that feeds you?"

A spokesperson for StreetEasy, which is a subsidiary of Zillow, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Serhant wasn't the only one blasting the feature, which StreetEasy hopes will be a major revenue driver for the website. Some even called for an all-out boycott of the website.

The screenshot shows the StreetEasy app interface. At the top, there is a user profile for 'franceskatzen' with a circular profile picture and a three-dot menu icon. Below this is a blue header bar with a white hamburger menu icon on the left and the 'StreetEasy' logo in the center. Underneath the header are two buttons: 'SALES' (highlighted in grey) and 'RENTALS'. The search filters section includes: a 'Location' field with a placeholder 'Neighborhood / Address / Building / Keyword'; a 'Type' dropdown menu set to 'Any Types'; a 'Price' section with two dropdown menus both set to 'Any' separated by the word 'to'; and two input fields for 'Bedrooms' and 'Bathrooms'.

“We the brokers provide the content to this 3rd party vendor!,” said Frances Katzen of Douglas Elliman, who added the hashtag #blockstreeteasy and #enoughisenough to her Instagram post.

New York City brokerage chiefs have been strategizing about how to deal with the feature, since StreetEasy shows little indication of rolling it back. The program generated more than \$600 million in revenue for Zillow last year.

The Corcoran Group and Citi Habitats have said they will not reimburse agents who wish to participate in program.

Town Residential followed suit on Monday.

“Operating under the guise of being pro-consumer, aggregators as middlemen are potentially more harmful than they are helpful to our industry,” Town CEO Andrew Heiberger said.