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GROWTH STRATEGIES



MARK BOWEN/COURIER

Cindy Brouillette, owner of Cindy B! Realtors in Fort Wright, takes a different approach to home sales, including offering a menu of services at different prices.

Sold! by Cindy B!

Realtor's no-nonsense approach includes a staff divided into listing and buyers agents.

By Lucy May

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Mike Kinney was in a panic.

He had just dumped his real estate agent after three months of arguments and no results. He had 15 days to sell his house in Independence before he had to start making payments on the new home he and his

wife had bought in Taylor Mill. That would have meant two mortgage payments and thousands of dollars Kinney and his wife did not want to spend.

So Kinney called Cindy Brouillette, the aggressive, no-nonsense owner of Cindy B! Realtors in Park Hills. Eight days after the Cindy B! sign went up in

his yard, his house sold.

"I don't even know how to explain it," Kinney said. "She came in and told us to clean out the entire house."

The Kinneys took family photos off the mantel and rented a storage unit to clear their furniture out of the living room. They stored their kids' toys, except for a few favorites. The goal was to make their 9-year-old home look more spacious so it could compete for buyers' attention with brand new, empty houses.

"I thought she was completely off her rocker," he said, "She kept saying, 'Baseboards! Baseboards! I want to see baseboards!' It worked."

And the Kinneys aren't the only family it worked for.

While home sales were flat in Northern Kentucky last year as compared to 1999, Cindy B! Realtors saw sales increase by 59 percent, selling 178 homes in 2000 as compared to 112 the year before.

That amounts to \$25 million in homes last year vs. \$14 million in 1999.

Brouillette expects to increase the number of homes sold to 200 this year, no matter what the economy does.

The reason: "I describe it as service like no other in Northern Kentucky," she said. "And I really, really believe that."

While every good salesperson talks about good service, Brouillette has structured her 3-year-old real estate firm to deliver.

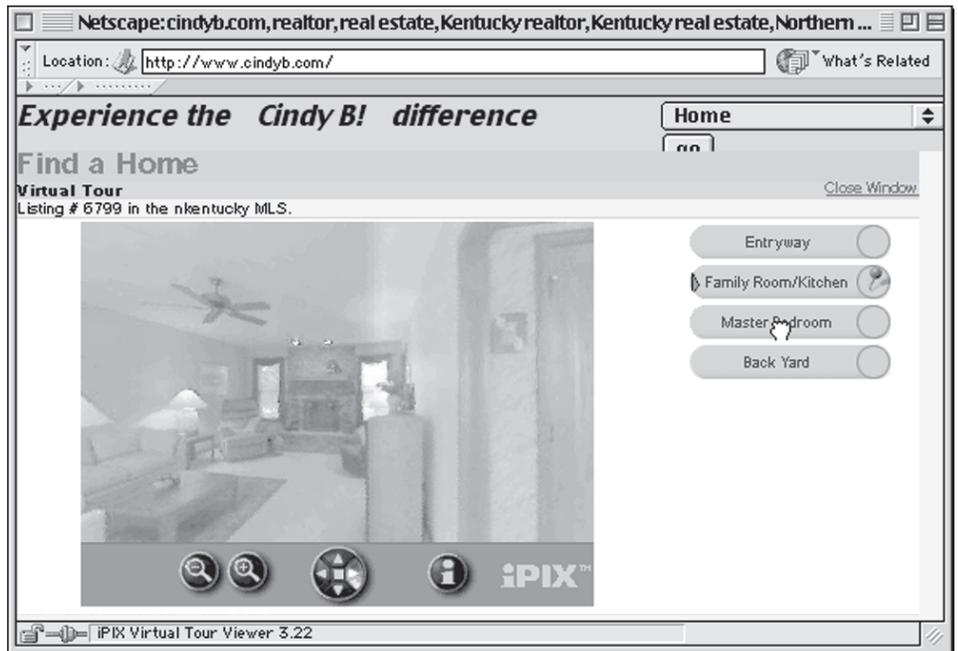
She is the only listing agent at the firm, which also employs four buyers agents. The buyers agents work only with buyers who come to the firm for help finding a new home. They concentrate on being accessible to their clients and checking MLS listings at least every 15 minutes.

She also has an administrative staff of four, including an employee who concentrates only on contracts and another who focuses only on listings, maintaining several Internet sites and making sure listings are processed promptly.

The administrative staffers, she said, free up the agents to sell, and the distinction between agents who list homes and help buyers, helps the Realtors do what they do best.

"Most agents are trying to do everything, and they're spread so thin," she said. "And a good listing agent has a totally different personality than a buyers agent. For someone listing your home, you want them to be aggressive and impatient. But for a buyers agent, you want someone who is patient and calm."

Brouillette also has tried to keep her company ahead of the game through its use of the Internet. The cindyb.com site includes 3-D home tours, something she pioneered regionally. And the company's newest Internet feature allows sellers to use a password to view comments that Realtors have gathered after showing their homes.



The Web site for Cindy B! Realtors includes 3D home tours and feedback for sellers.

That lets sellers know quickly what potential buyers are saying so they can make changes to show their homes more effectively, Brouillette said.

The company also has a special toll-free number and Web site for relocation services, which Brouillette credits for helping to dramatically increase her number of out-of-town clients.

And, in perhaps Brouillette's riskiest venture, she now offers potential clients a menu of services at different prices. For example, a couple selling their own home can simply hire Cindy B! to draw up the contract and pay only \$1,500. Or a seller can get every premiere service the firm has to offer for a 7 percent commission fee. There are in-between rates of either 5 percent or 6 percent depending on the range of services a seller wants.

"Other industries are seeing that people are more price-conscious, and I don't think we're exempt," Brouillette said. "After being asked for 12 years in a row, 'What's the least you'll work for?' I decided to take myself out of the equation and put the control in the hands of the sellers."

Mainly, Brouillette attributes her company's success to the no-nonsense approach she takes in dealing with clients and potential clients.

If she thinks someone is asking too much

CINDY B! UP CLOSE

Name: Cindy B! Realtors

Address: 1530 Amsterdam Road, Fort Wright 41011

Phone: (859) 331-6200

Web site: cindyb.com

Owner: Cindy Brouillette

Founded: 1998

Business: Residential real estate company

Employees: 9

Homes sold in 2000: 178

for their home, she tells them.

If she thinks they need to repaint a room before putting their home on the market, she tells them.

And, in the case of the Kinney family, if she wants to see baseboards, she tells them.

"I'm selective in the product I take," she said.

And if a potential client doesn't have the right product or isn't willing to make the changes she suggests, Brouillette does something that costs her a commission but, she said, preserves her reputation.

"I tell people, 'I'm just not the Realtor for you,'" she said. "I'd just be disappointing them later. And I'd rather preserve my image."

"I'M SELECTIVE IN THE PRODUCT I TAKE."

Cindy Brouillette