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Broker lets YouTube make pitch: Spurns open houses

By [Scott Van Voorhis](#)
 Boston Herald Business Reporter
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Downtown condo broker John Ford is celebrating the July 4th holiday in fitting fashion - by declaring independence from open houses.

At the same time, Ford is declaring his allegiance to YouTube, of all things.

Ford, who runs a thriving real estate shop selling high-end condos downtown and on Beacon Hill, hopes someday to say goodbye to open houses altogether. He argues they are increasingly ineffective and costly.

In a first step, Ford is cutting the number of open houses he holds each week in half - from four to two. Instead, he will post videos of the units on the popular YouTube Web site.

"I am declaring independence from open houses," Ford said.

The move comes as his disenchantment with open house has grown over the last few years.

Too often, those who show up are not serious buyers, complains Ford, who launched his brokerage business eight years ago after years on the commercial real estate side.

He even has a name for those open house window shoppers: He calls them "lookey-loo's."

"They actually go to open houses to get decorating tips," Ford said, adding he sees lots of "nosy neighbors who just want to see what it looks like inside."

Ford said his Sundays are routinely filled running from one showing to another.

Along with the time involved, there is the expense. Marketing and advertising amounts to half a point to a full percentage off his brokerage fee, which ranges from 5 percent to 6 percent, he said.

Other real estate executives said they are not ready to give up on the age-old marketing tool.

"At the end of the day, it is a high touch business, and that is not going to change," said Michael Carucci, president of the ERA Boston Real Estate Group.

But Ford is undaunted.

He cites a recent Texas study that found a dearth of serious buyers at open houses.

He also notes that luxury condo towers are increasingly barring or restricting open houses for security reasons.

And he believes his move is already starting to pay off.

On Tuesday, Ford brokered a deal to rent an \$1,800-a-month one-bedroom on Beacon Hill to a young Brighton couple who had watched video of the unit just the night before on YouTube.

"You can't really lie if you show a video," said Chris Kursel, who rented the apartment after seeing Ford's YouTube posting. "It is a little easier to bend the truth about a place when you say 'gleaming hardwood floors.'"

gfgbylineBy SCOTT VAN VOORHIS sbvanvoorhis@bostonherald.com

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Real estate broker John Ford sees YouTube as an ideal and inexpensive way to reach customers. (Staff photo by David Goldman)

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