

Retail Brokers Network Offers National Scope for Real Estate Services

There are large real estate brokerage companies throughout the U.S. which have a national platform: Offices to network, refer and move business through their own system, said **Steve Dombrovski**, a Minneapolis-based real estate broker with Suntide Realty, who specializes in retail and restaurants.

“In all markets, there are a lot of independents (brokers) who don’t have that national platform but are still movers and shakers in their own marketplace,” he explained. That was why he and the other founding members of **Retail Brokers Network** started the organization in the first place: to be able to work with clients on a national scope and have the tools to receive and refer business around the U.S.

For 15 years, the non-profit has been run solely by volunteers and now has 50 independent real estate firms across the country and Canada which are members. According to Dombrovski, they meet at the International Council of Shopping Centers’ annual conference in Las Vegas and combine resources to have an exhibit spot there. They are dependent upon the active participation of their members, and are dictated by the “KLT” philosophy: “We have to know, like and trust you before you can take part. And that has to continue throughout membership in the network.”

Brokers are broken up into four regions with monthly conference calls to discuss trends and other need-to-know information. The brokers can also join one of the five specialty councils that are divided by industry, one of them being restaurants. Restaurants and food increasingly have become more important to retail: “When you look at any retail complex now,” Dombrovski said, “35 percent of it could be food driven.”

Harold Shumacher, founder of the Shumacher Group, based in Atlanta, leads the restaurant council for Retail Brokers Network, and moderates the monthly restaurant conference calls. On one of their latest calls, the Monitor listened in as brokers went around the horn to talk about restaurant news and development in their area. The information provided helps them keep up on restaurant concepts that are breaking through or those that are closing sites, and more.

One of the biggest bonuses of being a member is being on the inside of that referral network. That’s another time when the “know, like and trust” concept is especially important to the group.

“I have to feel good about making a referral,” Shumacher said,

“and I want to be able to pick up the phone and call you and ask what’s going on. I can have that personal relationship.”

The benefit of working with a group like this, he said, is that “its very difficult to know every real estate market in the country. You can know the big highlights, but you need that local knowledge. A smart real estate director must depend on that local knowledge—it’s a plug-and-play of ready expertise.”

Franchisors should present franchisees with real estate criteria, and get them “started on the right foot with real estate,” he said. “It speeds up the process to opening.”

For restaurant real estate, Shumacher says the current economic environment has been rough, “but the worst is over. A year and a half ago, brokers and developers had to work to keep busy. Now, we have 10 to 12 things to work on so that something is always getting done. There is more legitimate activity in the marketplace.”

For more information on the Retail Brokers Network, contact Steve Dombrovski at steve@suntide.com or at 651-603-0321, or Harold Shumacher at (404) 240-0040 or by e-mail at harold@shumacher.com. Also, you can visit www.retailbrokersnetwork.com.